

# Who Really Thinks Saddam Was Personally Involved?

## Examining Changes in Misperceptions about the Iraq War

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## Who Really Thinks Saddam Was Personally Involved? Examining Changes in Misperceptions about the Iraq War

The level of misunderstanding or misperceptions on the part of the public about the rationale for the U.S. invasion of Iraq has been prominent in both the scientific and popular discussion of public opinion about the war. Critics of the war have argued that the public misunderstood basic facts about the war from the beginning and that public support for the war would have been lower had these facts been known. Often the media have been blamed for those misperceptions.

Robert Greenwald's film, "Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism," is but one example of this critique. The film blames Fox News in particular for the misperceptions about the war. The scientific evidence used by Greenwald to make this case comes from a series of surveys conducted in 2003 for the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland (Kull, Ramsay & Lewis, 2003-04).

Misperceptions about key aspects of the war in Iraq have persisted. For example, in March of 2006, PIPA reported that 23% of the population still believed Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD) before the War began and that 14% believed that Iraq was "directly involved in carrying out the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks" on the U.S. (Kull, 2006). A Gallup Poll in March of 2006 (Moore, 2006) showed that nearly four in 10 of the U.S. adult population believed that Saddam Hussein was "personally" involved in the terrorist attacks on the U.S. in September of 2001.

No evidence supports these beliefs, and considerable evidence contradicts them. President Bush and others in his administration have acknowledged that no WMDs have been found and that no evidence linking Saddam Hussein to the September 11 attacks has surfaced. Media coverage has reflected these facts, offering a challenge to the assertion that the media are responsible for the misperceptions.

Though the level of misperception as represented in the March 2006 Gallup Poll remains high (39%), it is lower than it was in August of 2002, when 53% said that Saddam was personally involved in the September 11 attacks. Other polling firms have found a similar drop in this belief about the link between Saddam and the September 11 attacks. An examination of the change in these misperceptions could help illuminate their source.

This paper tracks the decline in the belief that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S. using seven different Gallup Polls conducted between August of 2002 and March of 2006. The data show that change has been systemic, cutting across various demographic groups. It argues that specific media are unlikely to be responsible for that change and unlikely to be the primary determinant of the continuing levels of misperception.

### **PIPA Study**

Kull, Ramsey and Lewis (2003-04) document three key misperceptions about Iraq: that Iraq possessed weapons of misperception before the war, that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was involved in the September 11, 2001, attacks on the U.S., and that world public opinion was supportive of the U.S. invasion. Kull, Ramsay and Lewis show a link between these misperceptions and support of the war. They also show evidence that Fox News viewers were most likely to have these misperceptions. The link between viewership of Fox News and the misperceptions held after a series of controls.

The analysis of misperceptions by Kull, Ramsay and Lewis (2003-04) is based primarily on three polls conducted in 2003 by Knowledge Networks of Menlo Park, CA. Knowledge Networks asked random samples of its national research panel to participate in surveys on Iraq in June, July and late August and early September. In June, 1,051 panel members participated in the survey. In July, 1,066 persons participated. The number of participants in the August and September survey was 1,217. Kull, Ramsay and Lewis merged the data from these three surveys into a single data set with 3,334.

The Knowledge Networks nationwide research panel is recruited from the national population of households having telephones via stratified random digit-dialing procedures. Households that agree to participate in the panel are provided with free Internet access and an Internet appliance. In return, panel members participate in surveys three to four times a month. 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.

Kull, Ramsay and Lewis found that 48% of the combined sample said the U.S. had “found clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al Qaeda terrorist organization.” The figure varied by wave, with the July sample less likely to hold this view than either of the others. The

percentage of respondents who said that the U.S. had “found Iraqi weapons of mass destruction” since “the war with Iraq ended” was 22% across the three waves and did not vary significantly among them. The percentage of respondents who said the “majority of people” in the world “favor the U.S. having gone to war” in Iraq was 25% across the three waves of the survey and varied insignificantly by wave. All three of these assertions are incorrect.

These three questions were not asked of all respondents in each wave. In June, 529 respondents were asked all three questions, while in July 526 were asked all three questions, and in August and September, 307 respondents were asked all three questions.

Of these 1,362 respondents who received all three questions across each of the waves, only 40% had no misperceptions. Of these respondents, 8% thought evidence had been found that Saddam had links to al Qaeda, that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and that world public opinion supported the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Twenty percent had two misperceptions and 32% had one.

Support for the war was strongly linked to these misperceptions. Of those without misperceptions, only 23% said they thought the U.S. had “made the right decision” in going to war against Iraq. Of those with one misperception, 53% said the U.S. made the right decision. Of those with two misperceptions, 78% said the U.S. had made the right decision. Of those with all three measured misperceptions, 86% said the U.S. had made the right decision.

Knowledge Networks asked, in each of the three waves of the survey in 2003, two questions on media use. The first was: “Where do you tend to get most of your news?” The response categories were: “From newspapers and magazines” and “From TV and radio.” This was followed by: If ONE of the networks below is your primary sources of news please select it. If you get news from two or more networks about equally, just go on to the next question. The response options were: NBC, CBS, ABC, Fox News, CNN, NPR and PBS. In the June wave, the second question was only answered by those who selected from “TV and radio” on the first question. In the second and third waves, the second question was asked regardless of the response to the first question.

Kull, Ramsay and Lewis (2003-04) reported that only 20% of the Fox News viewers has no misperceptions, the lowest figure for any of the media categories. Of the CBS viewers, 30% had no

misperceptions, followed by ABC (39%), CNN and NBC (both 45%), Print Media (53%) and NPR/PBS (77%). The discrepancy between Fox News and the other respondents is highlighted in Robert Greenwald's film, "Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism."

A reanalysis of the PIPA data, however, shows that the discrepancies between Fox and CBS at the level of zero mistakes is quite small and insignificant (Table 1). In this table, those who answered they received the news from "newspapers and magazines" to the first question were not included in any of the "tv and radio" categories. The reanalysis shows that Fox News viewers were more likely to make all three mistakes than are users of CNN, the next closest comparison ( $Z=2.47$ ). Fox News viewers are more likely than any other group to misperceive international public opinion as supportive of U.S. policy. Fox News and PBS/NPR viewers are about equally confused about whether the U.S. actually found Weapons of Mass Destruction. Consistent with earlier research, however, the most striking difference in Table 1 is between print media users and users of the individual broadcast media. The print media users are less likely to have misperceptions than are those who use television—with the exception of the NPR/PBS viewers and those who use more than one television and radio source.

The findings, on the surface, suggest media differences and differences attributable to the characteristics of those who use the various media. Kull, Ramsey and Lewis conducted a binary logistic regression analysis in which gender, age, household income, education, party identification, intention to vote for the president in the next election, how closely the respondent followed news about the events in Iraq, and primary news source were predictors. The most powerful predictor was intention to vote for Bush in the 2004 election. The second most powerful factor was the respondent's primary source of network news. When each network was treated as an either/or variable, having Fox, CBS and NPR/PBS as the primary news source emerge as significant predictors of misperceptions. Overall, Kull, Ramsey and Lewis concluded, Fox viewing had the greatest and most consistent predictive power in the analysis. They wrote (p. 589-90):

"Fox is the most consistently significant predictor of misperceptions. Those who primarily watched Fox were 2.0 times more likely to believe that close links to al Qaeda have been found, 1.6 times more likely to believe that WMD had been found, 1.7 times more likely to believe that

world public opinion was favorable to the war, and 2.1 times more likely to have at least one misperception...

“Those who primarily watched CBS were 1.8 times more likely to believe that close links to al Qaeda have been found, 1.9 times more likely to believe that world public opinion was favorable to the war, and 2.3 times more likely to have at least one misperception. However, they were not significantly different on beliefs about the uncovering of WMD.

“On the other hand, those who primarily watched PBS or listened to NPR were 3.5 times less likely to believe that close links to al Qaeda have been found, 5.6 times less likely to believe that world public opinion was favorable to the war, and 3.8 times less likely to have at least one misperception. However, they were not significantly different on the issue of WMD.”

In the logistic regression analysis, level of attention to news was not a significant factor overall, with the exception of those who primarily got their news from Fox.

### **The Persistence of Misperception**

A variety of polls have shown that misperceptions about Iraq persist. For example, a Knowledge Network Poll in March of 2006 for PIPA (currently called WorldPublicOpinion.org) found that 18% of the public thinks that the U.S. has found Iraqi weapons of mass destruction—a figure down only 6 percentage points from September of 2003 and up from March of 2004 (Chart 1). That same poll found that 42% of the population believed the “U.S. has found clear evidence that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al Qaeda terrorist organization.” That figure was unchanged from August of 2004 but up from October of 2004 (Chart 2). The Knowledge Network Poll of March of 2006 found that 12% of the population said Iraq actually had WMD before the war began (Chart 3) and 14% said Saddam was directly involved in the September 11 attacks (Chart 4). Neither figure represented a decline from two years earlier. Knowledge Networks found that 21% of the population said that a majority of the people in the world favored the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March of 2006—up from 14% in October of 2004 (Chart 5).

The Harris Poll showed an increase by 14 points in the percentage of those thinking that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction when the U.S. invaded in a poll conducted in July of 2006 compared with February of 2005 (Chart 6). Just before the Harris Poll was fielded, two Republican Senators had leaked

an intelligence report that showed evidence of WMDs. The report was later contradicted by others. The shift suggests a receptivity on the part of the public to believe the assertion about WMDs. The Harris Poll has found that 64% of the population believe Saddam had strong links to al Qaeda in the July 2006 poll (Chart 7). The figure was unchanged from a poll in February of 2005.

The CBS New York Times Poll began tracking sentiment about the link between Saddam and the September 11 attacks a year after those attacks and has included the question in 18 surveys since (Chart 8). After two surveys in April of 2003, the percentage of those feeling Saddam was “personally involved in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon” has declined pretty steadily. In September of 2006, however, 31% of those surveyed said Saddam was personally involved in the attacks.

The Gallup Poll has asked a similar question, “Do you think Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11th terrorist attacks, or not?,” seven times during this same period (Chart 9). In the final poll in March of 2006, 39% of the population answered affirmatively. As with the CBS/NYT poll, the Gallup Poll showed a consistent decline in persons feeling Saddam was linked to the 9-11 attacks, with the exception of a poll conducted in December of 2003. That poll was fielded just days after Saddam’s capture. The CBS/NYT Poll does not show that blip. CBS/NYT did not have a poll in the field immediately after the capture, and it seems the effect of the capture was erased by the time the CBS/NYT Poll was next in the field. The move in public opinion resulting from the capture, as with the movement in the Harris Poll after the release of the intelligence report, suggests receptivity to the arguments made to support the war by the Bush administration.

The Washington Post and Time/CNN polls have shared a question that was asked four times (Chart 10), starting immediately after the September 11 attack on the U.S. The question used was: “How likely it is 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?” The Post Poll shows higher levels of support for the belief in a link between Saddam and 9-11 than either the Gallup or CBS/NYT polls showed. None of these three polls with generally similar questions shows a build up in support for the link between Saddam and 9-11 in the months leading up to the actual invasion of Iraq in March of 2003. In the

CBS/NYT Poll, the belief increased after the invasion and then began to fall again. The invasion may have encouraged people to find a justification, but it doesn't seem that the administration's efforts to sell the war with the linkage of Saddam to September 11 were particularly successful.

Throughout 2006, eight different polling organizations asked at least one question on either Saddam's link to 9-11 or to al Qaeda. These are shown in Chart 11, beginning with the Gallup Poll question of March. The specific questions asked varied and are shown in Appendix I. All samples were of the U.S. adult population. The percentage believing that Saddam was involved with the September 11 terrorist attack varied from a low of 31% in the September CBS New York Times Poll to a high of 46% in a CNN Poll of August and the Zogby Poll of September. The percentage of respondents believing that Saddam was linked to al Qaeda varied from a low of 43% in a Rasmussen poll of September to a high of 64% in a Harris Poll of July.

### **Blaming the Media**

Criticism of the media for its coverage of the run-up to the war in Iraq and beyond is widespread. Kull, Ramsay and Lewis (2003-04), argued that one explanation for the misperceptions is the way the media reported the news. The argument continues (p 591):

“The large variation in the level of misperceptions does suggest that some media sources may have been making greater efforts than others to disabuse their audiences of misperceptions they may have had so as to avoid feeling conflict about going or having gone to war...There is also evidence that in the run-up to, during, and for a period after the war, many in the media appeared to feel that it was not their role to challenge the administration or that it was even appropriate to take an active pro-war posture...In such an environment, it would not be surprising that the media would downplay the lack of evidence of links between Iraq and al Qaeda, the fact that WMD were not being found, and that world public opinion was critical of the war.”

Rendall and Broughel (2003), in a three-week study of on-camera sources appearing in stories about Iraq on the evening television newscasts of ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox, and PBS just after the Iraq war began, found that official governmental voices dominated. A follow-up study of on-camera sources in



stories on Iraq in October of 2003 by Whiten (2004) found that current government and military officers made up 72.1% of the sources.

Moeller (2004) found in an analysis of media coverage of the issue of weapons of mass destruction in 11 print and broadcast news outlets in May of 1998, October of 2002, and May of 2003 that coverage was simplistic, that the journalists largely accepted the Bush administration's position on WMDs, and that alternative point of view on the issue were lacking.

Among other recent critics is Boehlert (2006), who argued that the media have served not as a watchdog of the government but rather as a "mouthpiece" for the White House. Rich (2006) in his popular account has chronicled the selling of the Iraq War by the Bush administration and the media's ineptitude in responding. Jamieson and Waldman (2003) have noted how difficult it is for journalists to tell political stories when public officials relay confusing versions of the facts.

### **Blaming Bush**

The story the media were trying to cover was not an easy one, and, quite clearly, the White House was not making it so.

Kull, Ramsay & Lewis (2003-04) note (p 591):

"The first and most obvious reason that the public had so many of these misperceptions is that the Bush administration made numerous statements that could easily be construed as asserting these falsehoods. On numerous occasions the administration made statements strongly implying that it had intelligence substantiating that Iraq was closely involved with al Qaeda and was even directly involved in the September 11 attacks...The administration also made statements that came extremely close to asserting that WMD were found in postwar Iraq..."

The misstatements by the Bush White House about Iraq have been widely documented, by Rich (2006), Miller (2006), and others. Dickinson and Stein (2006) have provided a time line for when information was known to the Bush administration, what Bush and others were saying at that time, and when the information finally reached the public through leaks and press reports. Kaufmann (2004) has argued that the "marketplace of ideas" thought to exist in the mature democracy of the U.S. failed in the case of the war in Iraq.

## **Questions and Expectations**

A simple model of the democratic process argues that voters make a decision on an issue based on information. The war in Iraq was presented to the electorate by its leaders as necessary because of threats posed by that country to the U.S. Specifically, Saddam Hussein, the president, was linked by proponents of the war to the terrorist attack on the U.S. on September 11, 2001, and Iraq was charged with possessing weapons of mass destruction that could be used against the U.S. and its allies. Both of those arguments have proven to be false. The U.S. leaders have admitted this, and the U.S. media have transmitted this message. Yet the evidence is that many Americans continue to believe that these assertions are correct, and many continue to support the war.

Among the explanations for this continued misperception is the inadequacy of the media coverage of the topic. As noted, critics continue to fault the media for not emphasizing that President Bush and others in his administration have admitted that they were in error. Yet the media have covered the “corrections” by the president and public criticism of the administration for misstating the case for Iraq in the first place. It seems likely that segments of the population, particularly those segments that use the media, should have come to understand the facts over time. Of course, it also is possible that segments of the U.S. population are simply resistant to the message and would not change regardless of the media messages.

Precise measures of media use and attention to media messages are needed to test this expectation. Such measures are rarely included in the national surveys that have focused on misperceptions. If it can be shown that partisan position is the primary determinant of change, however, this argues that audience members either resisted the message of the media or used the media selectively so as to avoid a message that contradicted the initial point of view. If, on the other hand, locator variables, and particularly education, explained the change, the media would seem to have played a role, since use of print media and the ability to process that information are associated with educational level.

## **Methodology**

Data gathered by the Gallup Organization were used to test for the predictors of change in misperceptions over time. Specifically, data from each of the seven surveys conducted by Gallup from

August of 2002 through March of 2006 and containing the question on Saddam Hussein's link to September 11 were analyzed. This is a good item to use because very little evidence ever existed of such a linkage and what little evidence did exist was quickly shown to be false.

Each of the surveys contained approximately 1,000 interviews, except for the August 2002 survey, which was with 801 respondents. The exact field dates and Ns were: August 19-21, 2002 (N=801); March 14-15 (N=1,007); September 19-21, 2003 (N=1,003); December 15-16, 2003 (N=1,000); June 21-23, 2004 (N=1,005); October 1-3, 2004 (N=1,016); and March 10-12, 2006 (N=1,001). All surveys were conducted by telephone with national adults, aged 18 and older.

The date of two of these surveys is particularly important. The March 2003 survey was taken out of the field just before the war began on March 20, 2003. The near certainty of the war was obvious at that point. Saddam was captured in the early morning of December 14, 2003, just before the December 2003 survey was fielded. As noted above, the December 2003 survey saw an increase in the percentage of respondents who thought Saddam was involved in the September 11 attacks, making the Gallup surveys particularly valuable for the analyses undertaken here.

The specific question asked is shown in Chart 9. Except for August in 2002 and September 2003, the question on Saddam's link to September 11 was asked of probability subsets roughly half of those interviewed. The actual number of persons asked this question in each of the seven surveys also is shown in Chart 9.

In the October 2004 survey, Gallup used two versions of the question on Saddam. In the second version, respondents were asked: "Do you think Saddam Hussein was personally involved *in the planning of the September 11<sup>th</sup>* terrorist attacks, or not?" The addition of the italicized words (which did not appear in italics in the text as read by the interviewers) resulted in a strikingly different response. The original question produced a 42% affirmative response, while the modified question produced only a 32% affirmative response. Why that should be the case is difficult to understand on the surface.

In addition to these measures about misperceptions, the seven Gallup instruments contained measures of President Bush's job approval, party affiliation, ideology, voter registration, gender, age, education, race, income and region of the country. These 10 variables were used to conduct, first,

bivariate trend analyses across the seven surveys, and, second, logistic regression analysis for the seven time points of Gallup data to simultaneously examine the influences of these 10 measures.

The weights were removed for the bivariate analyses, since many of the variables also were used as part of the weighting process by Gallup.

Logistic regression is used to regress the respondents' answers to this question ("yes" = 0 or "no" = 1) on the set of demographic, social status, and political ideology variables to better understand the nature of those who believe that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. Respondents who answered "Don't Know" were dropped from the analysis. (See Chart 9.) The demographic, social status, and political ideology measures were used as independent (predictor) variables for the logistic regression analysis.

The four demographic variables used for the regression analysis were: gender (men=0, women=1); race (non-Hispanic white=0, others=1); age (in years); and region of residence (East, Midwest, South, and West). A birth cohort variable was computed for the respondents: those who were born post-1965 are referred to as "Generation X" respondents; those who were born 1945-1965 are referred to as "Baby Boom" respondents; and those who were born prior to 1945 are referred to as "WW II and 1950's" respondents, since this represents the historical period when most of these respondents were likely to come of age politically (i.e., adolescence). Each of these variables entered as a "dummy" variable (i.e., 0 and 1 coding) in the analyses reported here, with the oldest birth (WW II and 1950's) cohort and respondents residing in the western states serving as the basis of comparison for the cohort and region variables, respectively.

Two social status measures were used, income and education—and these serve as social status indicators for the analysis that follows. For the income variable, respondents were asked to report the category of their total household before income taxes. The responses for the five categories used in this analysis were: Less than \$19,999, \$20,000 - \$29,999; \$30,000 - \$49,999, \$50,000 – \$74,999, and \$75,000 and over. Respondents' education was classified in the following four categories: Less than high school, High school graduate, Some college, and College graduate. Each of these two social status variables was regarded as an interval-level, continuous measure in the analysis.

The two measures of political values used were ideology and party. To measure political ideology, respondents were asked "How would you describe your political views?" Responses are categorized as "conservative" (coded 1), "moderate" (coded 2), and "liberal" (coded 3). All respondents were also asked "In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?" Responses for this measure were coded as 1 for "Republican," 2 for "Independent," and 3 for "Democrat."

Two measures used in the bivariate analysis, job approval of President Bush and voter registration, were not used in the regression analysis. The former is distinct from the other political measures in that it most often would be considered an antecedent variable to political beliefs. Registration was not used because it combines both political and locator characteristics.

### **Findings**

Those who approve of the job George W. Bush has done as president as well as those who do not both showed a decline in the belief that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11 attacks on the United States (Chart 12). The pattern of change is largely the same across the seven surveys, with the exception of October of 2004, when those who approved showed an increase in this belief and those who disapproved showed a decrease.

The pattern is mirrored in Chart 13, which shows the relationship between party affiliation and the belief of Saddam's link to 9-11 across time, though Republicans did show less change than the other two groups. Republicans, Democrats and independents all showed drops in the belief about Saddam's culpability. The pattern was the same, again with the exception of the October 2004 surveys, when Republicans showed an increase while Democrats and Independents showed a decrease.

Ideology shows this same pattern of a decrease across all groups over the seven surveys (Chart 14). Only in October of 2004 is there any discrepancy, again with Republicans showing an increase while the other two groups—moderates and liberals, showed declines. In the case of Liberals, the drop was rather pronounced.

Whether the respondent was registered to vote or not did not make much difference in the pattern across time in responses to the Saddam and 9-11 question, with the exception of June of 2004 (Chart 15).

In that survey, unregistered respondents showed a jump in the belief about Saddam's link to the terrorists attacks, while registered voters showed a decline.

Gender of the respondent clearly made a difference in terms of believing that Saddam was linked to the September 11 attacks, with women more likely to find Saddam associated with these activities (Chart 16). But the movement across time was not affected by gender. Age of the respondent makes no consistent difference in terms of response to the question or in terms of the patterns of those responses across time (Chart 17).

Education does make a difference in terms of the belief about Saddam's link to the 9-11 attacks. In general, those with lower level of formal education are more likely to believe the link exists than are those who are better educated (Chart 18). Across time, however, all four educational groups show declines in the belief, and, for the most part, the pattern of change is consistent. The less well educated were more suspicious about the linkage in March of 2003 than in August of 2002 and again in October of 2004 in comparison with June of 2004, contrary to the dominant pattern.

Race of the respondent makes some difference in terms of the belief about Saddam's link to September 11 in several of the surveys (Chart 19). Across time, however, the gap is not great. All three groups show declines in the view in March of 2006 in comparison with August of 2002.

Income of the respondent also doesn't make much difference in terms of the overall pattern of change (Chart 20). Across all income groups, the perception of Saddam's link to September 11 declined. The same is true for region of the country (Chart 21).

Across all of these comparisons, the December 2003 survey shows a significant increase in the misperception that Saddam was involved in the September 11 attacks on the U.S. The survey was fielded immediately after the announcement of the capture. No factual base for the assertion of a linkage between Saddam and the attacks existed. The change, across all these groups, suggests something other than an informational explanation of the movement.

Since the dependent variable in this analysis—the response to the question about whether Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11 terrorist attacks—is a dichotomous outcome (i.e., “yes” or “no”), a binomial logistic regression model was used (see e.g., Agresti 2002). The

binomial logistic regression model provides best, unbiased estimates of the independent effects for each of the independent variables on respondents' beliefs regarding Saddam Hussein's involvement in 9/11. The results of the logistic regression for each of the seven surveys are reported in Table 2.

The regression results provide a remarkably consistent picture across the time frame of the seven Gallup Polls. Among the demographic variables, only gender appears to have a consistent impact on the respondents' perception that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the 9-11 terrorist attacks in the U.S.. Female respondents were consistently more likely to report believing that Saddam Hussein was involved. There appear to be no significant differences between (non-Hispanic) white respondents and those classified as "other" with respect to their beliefs regarding Hussein's involvement.

Birth cohort and region of residence exhibit an inconsistent influence across the seven surveys. In two of the surveys (September 2003 and June 2004), respondents in the South were significantly more likely than those in the West to report believing that Hussein was involved in 9-11; and in the more recent survey (March 2006), Midwesterners were more likely than those in the West to have reported believing this. In each of the other surveys, however, there appear to be no significant regional differences in the likelihood of believing that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the terrorist attacks of 9-11. Similarly, birth cohort does not exhibit a consistent impact on respondents' beliefs regarding Saddam Hussein's culpability in 9-11, although in all four instances in which the "Baby Boomers" and Gen-Xers" differ from the oldest cohort, the younger cohorts were significantly more likely than those in the oldest cohort to misattribute culpability to Saddam Hussein.

Social status appears to have a highly consistent influence on the American public's belief that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in 9-11. As the data in Table 2 indicate, those with higher education were consistently less likely than those with lower levels of education to report believing that Saddam Hussein was personally involved. Moreover, in four of the seven surveys, those with higher incomes were also more likely than those with lower incomes to respond that Saddam Hussein was not personally involved. Thus, these data clearly indicate that lower status Americans were more likely than higher status Americans to make the misattribution that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the terrorism of 9-11.

Finally, these data clearly indicate that political ideology influences Americans' perceptions regarding the culpability of Saddam Hussein in the events of 9-11. In all seven surveys, those who self-identify as conservative were more likely than either self-identified moderates or liberals to report believing that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the terrorist attacks of 9-11. Moreover, in four of the seven Gallup Polls, self-identified Republicans were more likely than either self-identified Independents or Democrats to make the misattribution of personal involvement of Saddam Hussein in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

### **Conclusions**

Convincing evidence exists that a significant segment of the American public, at least as recently as the end of the summer, continued to hold mistaken views about one key justification that was given for the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Somewhere between 30 and 45 percent of the population, depending on the question asked, held the view that Saddam had some connection to the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States. The evidence is that this figure is lower than at earlier periods, yet it remained substantial.

The evidence also is that change in this belief, as measured in the Gallup surveys, was not predicted by standard demographic characteristics of the population. Partisan and ideological views and approval rating of the president did not differentiate the amount of change. Nor did such standard locator variables as gender, age, education race, income and region of the country.

In fact, the predictive structure for the belief that Saddam was involved in the September 11 attacks remained consistent across time. Controlling for other variables, women were more likely to hold this belief than men, lower educated respondents were more likely to think Saddam was involved in the attacks on the U.S. than the better educated, and conservatives were more likely to hold the view than liberals. This was true in August of 2002, and again in March of 2006. Though the belief declined, the predictors of that belief remained relatively constant.

Kull, Ramsay and Lewis (2003–04) have labeled this view of Saddam's link to September 11 a mistaken "belief" rather than a "misperception." They differentiate between an estimation of what U.S. intelligence has been able to infer, such as the belief that Saddam Hussein was directly involved in



September 11, and “noncontroversial perceptions,” such as whether actual weapons or actual evidence have in fact been found. Certainly, back in August of 2002, many people did argue that evidence existed that Saddam was involved with the terrorist attacks on the U.S., and the incontrovertible evidence to contradict did not exist. As a consequence, labeling the belief that Saddam was involved in the September 11 attacks back at that point in time as a “misperception” is probably incorrect. Regardless of terminology, one can at least conclude that the American public in 2006 holds beliefs about Saddam’s link to September 11 that are not matched by the facts.

President Bush (Bush, 2006a) himself was explicit on this point in his Oval Office address to the public on the fifth anniversary of the September 11 attacks. He said:

“I’m often asked why we’re in Iraq when Saddam Hussein was not responsible for the 9/11 attacks. The answer is that the regime of Saddam Hussein was a clear threat. My administration, the Congress, and the United Nations saw the threat—and after 9/11, Saddam’s regime posed a risk that the world could not afford to take.”

Of course, President Bush and others in his administration have not always been so clear on this or other reasons for the invasion and war. Even since that anniversary address, the justification for the war in Iraq has shifted (Schell, 2006). At his press conference on October 25, 2006, President Bush used this justification for the war:

“If we do not defeat the terrorists or extremists in Iraq, they will gain access to vast oil reserves, and use Iraq as a base to overthrow moderate governments across the broader Middle East. They will launch new attacks on America from this new safe haven. They will pursue their goal of a radical Islamic empire that stretches from Spain to Indonesia.”

Saddam was an easy initial target for the Bush administration, as public assessments of him were very negative before the September 11 attacks took place. A CBS News Poll in November of 1998, for example, found that 88% of U.S. adults said Saddam would not “keep his promise to allow United Nations inspectors full access to look for weapons of mass destruction (Survey by CBS News, November 16-17, 1998). An Fox News Poll the following month of registered voters found that 51% thought the U.S. “Should attempt to assassinate” Saddam. A Fox News Poll in October of 2001 (Survey by Fox News and Opinion

Dynamics, October 31-November 1, 2001) showed that 61% of registered voters said it was very or somewhat likely that Saddam “was involved in the recent anthrax attacks.” Time/CNN found a month later (Survey by Time, Cable News Network and Harris Interactive, November 7-8, 2001) that 75% of the U.S. adults said it was very or somewhat likely that Saddam “was responsible for any of the recent incidents involving anthrax.”

The ability of the media to accurately portray the shifting explanations for the war and help the audience understand them is certainly open to question. The Kull, Ramsay and Lewis (2003–04) analysis has provided some evidence that the media are, in fact, a determinant of the misunderstanding of the war. Yet that analysis suffers from weak measures of media use and of exposure to specific content. The Gallup surveys analyzed above contained no measures of media use, making a replication of the Kull, Ramsay and Lewis work impossible. What the audience members bring to the news use situation also matters, and the control measures used by the PIPA team may not capture those initial individual differences. Research has shown, for example, that the “common sense theories” that people have about the news affects what they learn from it. Those who are more skeptical about news quality appear to process it more critically and thoughtfully and thereby learn more from it (McLeod, Kosicki and McLeod, 2002).

If the media were a key determinant of the decline in the belief that Saddam was involved in the 9-11 attacks, education, a key predictor of use of the newspapers and other information media, would have been related to the decline. It was not. In fact, none of the traditional locator variables is associated with change. Some evidence exists that Republicans were more resistant to change than others, but they changed as well. The evidence is certainly indirect, but the pattern of change is not what one would expect if the media were playing the dominant role in bringing about change.

A key argument is that these misperceptions or beliefs are linked to support for the war. In four of the Gallup surveys, it is possible to replicate the Kull, Ramsay and Lewis finding of such a linkage. In December of 2003, 76.5 % of those who thought Saddam was involved in the September 11 attacks said “the situation in Iraq was worth going to war over,” compared with 44.0% of those who did not think Saddam was linked to the terrorist attacks. In June of 2004, 60.2% of those who said Saddam was

involved in the 9-11 attacks said it was “worth going to war in Iraq,” compared with 32.7% of those who did not believe in the Saddam link to 9-11. In October of 2004, 71.0% of those who said Saddam was involved in the attacks said it was not “a mistake in sending troops to Iraq,” compared with 37.5% of those who did not believe such a link existed. In March of 2006, 55.8% of those who saw the link between Saddam and September 11 said the war was not a mistake, while 30.3% of those who did not see the Saddam link said the war wasn’t a mistake.

What these analyses cannot answer is which came first, the attitude about the war in Iraq or the misperception. It is quite possible that people formed their opinions about the legitimacy of the U.S. invasion and then fit the “facts” to the case. The pattern of decline in support for the war (as represented by one Gallup (2006b) question repeated 52 times from the beginning of the war to November of 2006, is similar to the pattern of decline in the belief that Saddam was associated with the 9-11 attacks on the U.S. Chart 22 shows that the percentage of people thinking the war was a mistake increased from 23% in March of 2003 when the war began to 57% in March of 2006 and has remained static since. People who continued to believe that Saddam is associated with the terrorist attacks against the United States may do so because they support the war. Needing a justification, they build the case with misperceptions or beliefs at odds with the facts. This is a major issue that needs further exploration.

That the system has failed the electorate is obvious. The large percentage of people who still believe that Saddam was linked to the 9-11 terrorist attacks is troubling. The media no doubt are part of the problem. So, it seems likely, are the people themselves. And so are the leaders.

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## **Appendix 1 Questions About Saddam Link to September 11 Attacks and al Qaeda (Chart 11)**

**Gallup:** Do you think Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11th terrorist attacks, or not? (Survey by Gallup, 2006)

**PIPA:** Please select what you think is the best description of the relationship between the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein and the terrorist group al-Qaeda. There was no connection at all/ A few al-Qaeda individuals visited Iraq or had contact with Iraqi officials but Iraq did not provide substantial support to al-Qaeda/ Iraq gave substantial support to al-Qaeda, but was not involved in the September 11th attacks/ Iraq was directly involved in carrying out the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. (Last two response categories combined in Chart.) (Survey by WorldPublicOpinion.org/Knowledge Networks Poll, March 1-6, 2006.)

**Harris Poll:** Do you believe the following statements are true or not true? Saddam Hussein had strong links to al Qaeda. (Survey by The Harris Poll, July 5-11, 2006.)

**CNN Poll:** Do you think Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11<sup>th</sup> (2001) terrorist attacks (on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon), or not? (Survey by Cable News Network and Opinion Research Corporation, August 30-September 2, 2006.)

**Time SRBI:** Do you think Saddam Hussein, the former Iraqi leader, was personally involved in the September 11<sup>th</sup> (2001) terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, or not? (Survey by Time and Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas, August 22-24, 2006.)

**CBS/NYT:** Do you think Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? (Survey by The New York Times CBS News, September 15-19, 2006.)

**Rasmussen:** Exact question wording not available. According to the report, a plurality of Americans, 43%, continue to believe that there were links between Saddam Hussein's government and Al Qaeda prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Thirty-two percent (32%) disagree while 25% are not sure. (Rasmussen Reports, 2006.)

**Zogby:** Do you agree or disagree that there was a connection between Saddam Hussein and the 9/11 (September 11, 2001) terror attacks (on the world Trade Center and the Pentagon)? (Survey by Zogby International, September 1-5, 2006.)



Table 1. Misperception Total By News Source: PIPA 2003

Misperception		Where Get News*										Total	
		NBC	CBS	ABC	Fox News	CNN	NPR/PBS	Other TV/Radio	More than 1 TV/Radio source	Print	Neither Print nor TV/Radio		
Misperception Index	0	N	57	24	43	43	64	13	10	152	134	18	558
		%	39.0%	25.3%	36.1%	22.8%	36.4%	61.9%	34.5%	47.8%	49.3%	81.8%	40.2%
	1	N	48	38	43	68	48	2	7	107	78	4	443
		%	32.9%	40.0%	36.1%	36.0%	27.3%	9.5%	24.1%	33.6%	28.7%	18.2%	31.9%
	2	N	30	28	27	44	48	5	8	40	46	0	276
		%	20.5%	29.5%	22.7%	23.3%	27.3%	23.8%	27.6%	12.6%	16.9%	0.0%	19.9%
	3	N	11	5	6	34	16	1	4	19	14	0	110
		%	7.5%	5.3%	5.0%	18.0%	9.1%	4.8%	13.8%	6.0%	5.1%	0.0%	7.9%
Total		N	146	95	119	189	176	21	29	318	272	22	1,387
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
US Found WMD		N	27	28	23	60	39	8	13	51	51	1	301
		%	18.4%	29.5%	19.5%	31.6%	22.2%	36.4%	44.8%	16.0%	18.7%	4.8%	21.7%
US Found Evidence Al Qaida Link		N	72	56	65	115	96	7	16	135	115	2	679
		%	49.3%	58.9%	54.6%	60.8%	54.5%	31.8%	55.2%	42.3%	42.1%	9.1%	48.8%
World Opinion Supports US in Iraq		N	42	24	27	83	57	1	7	58	46	1	346
		%	28.6%	25.3%	22.9%	43.9%	32.2%	4.5%	25.0%	18.2%	16.9%	4.5%	24.9%

\*weighted.

Table 2: Binomial Logistic Regression Coefficients for Model of “Saddam Hussein Personally Involved in 9/11” (Yes=0, No=1)

Variable	Aug '02	Mar '03	Sep '03	Dec '03	Jun '04	Oct '04	Mar '06
<i>Demographic characteristics</i>							
Gender (male=0)	-.342*	-.960***	-.585***	-.528*	-.893***	-1.361***	-.441*
Race (white=0)	-.149	-.424	-.111	.195	.118	-.301	.132
<u>Region†</u>							
East	.273	-.432	-.175	.374	-.283	-.135	-.430
Midwest	.178	-.459	-.381	.255	-.266	.034	-.643*
South	-.155	-.363	-.472*	-.042	-.809**	-.660	-.505
<u>Cohort‡</u>							
Gen X	-.111	.141	-.632**	-.114	-.685*	-.370	-.189
Baby Boomers	-.281	.002	-.755***	-.431	.158	-1.159***	-.252
<i>Social Status</i>							
Income	.060	-.062	.301***	.223**	.254**	.395***	.040
Education	.527***	.602***	.402***	.319***	.344**	.523***	.444***
<i>Political Values</i>							
Party ID	.155	.156	.382***	.265*	.595***	.903***	.116
Ideology	.413***	.450***	.224*	.454***	.344**	.433*	.631***
Constant	-2.353***	-0.616	-1.560***	-2.415***	-0.803	-1.635	-1.312

† West is the contrast region.

‡ “ WWII and 1950’s” is the contrast cohort.

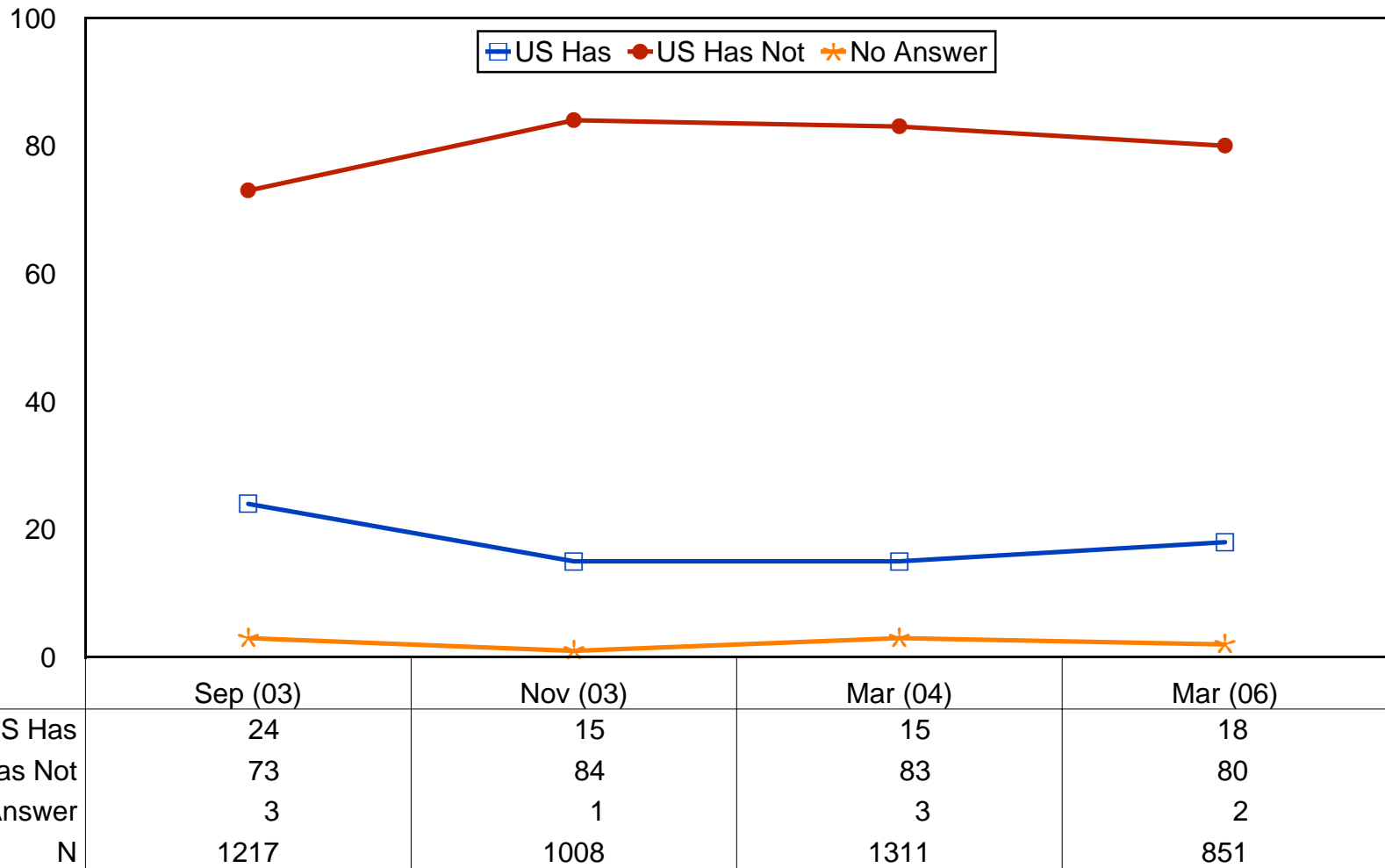
\* p<.05

\*\* p<.01

\*\*\* p<.005

# 1. World Public Opinion (PIPA) Poll

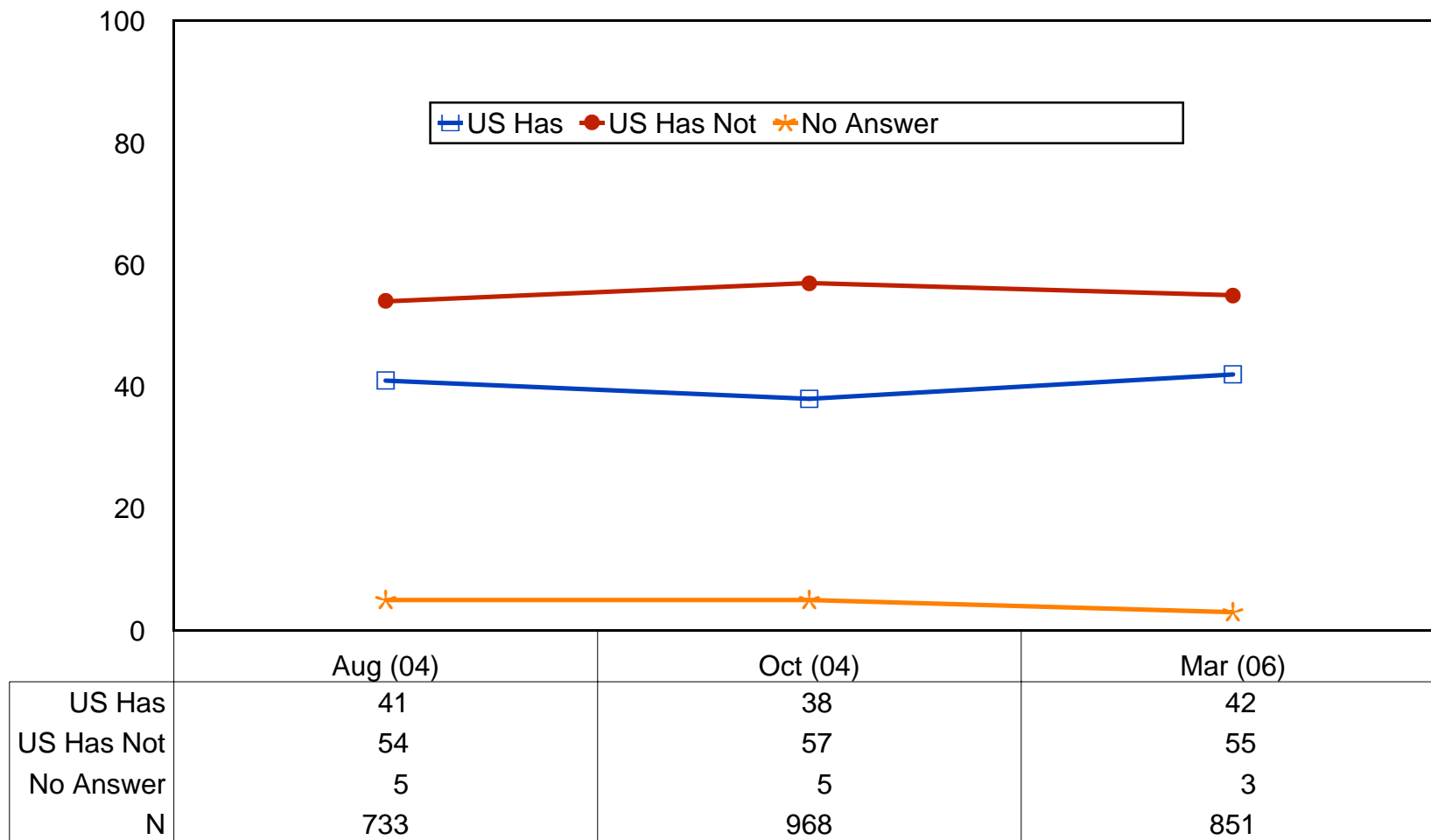
Since the war with Iraq ended, is it your impression that the U.S. has or has not found Iraqi weapons of mass destruction?



Source: Survey by WorldPublicOpinion.org/Knowledge Newtorks Poll (March 1-6, 2006)

## 2. World Public Opinion (PIPA) Poll

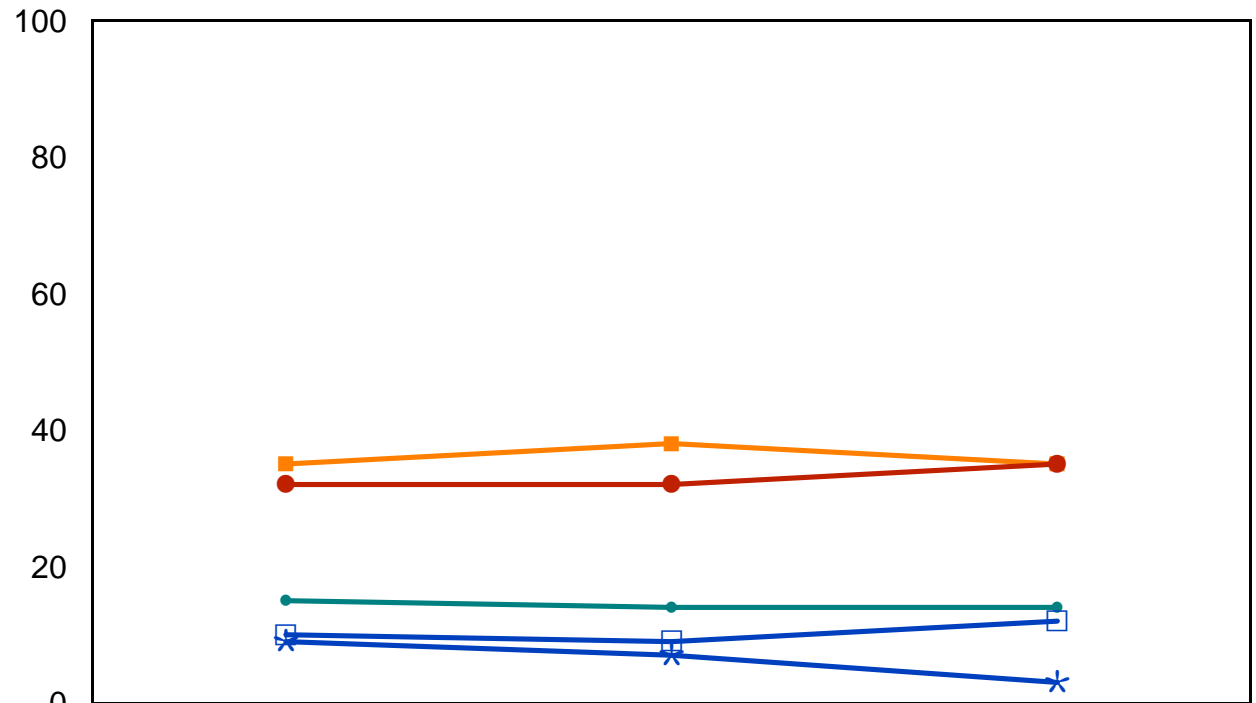
Is it your impression that the U.S. has or has not found clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al Qaeda terrorist organization?








Source: Survey by [WorldPublicOpinion.org](http://WorldPublicOpinion.org)/Knowledge Networks Poll (March 1-6, 2006)

# 3. World Public Opinion (PIPA) Poll

Is it your belief that, just before the war, Iraq had:

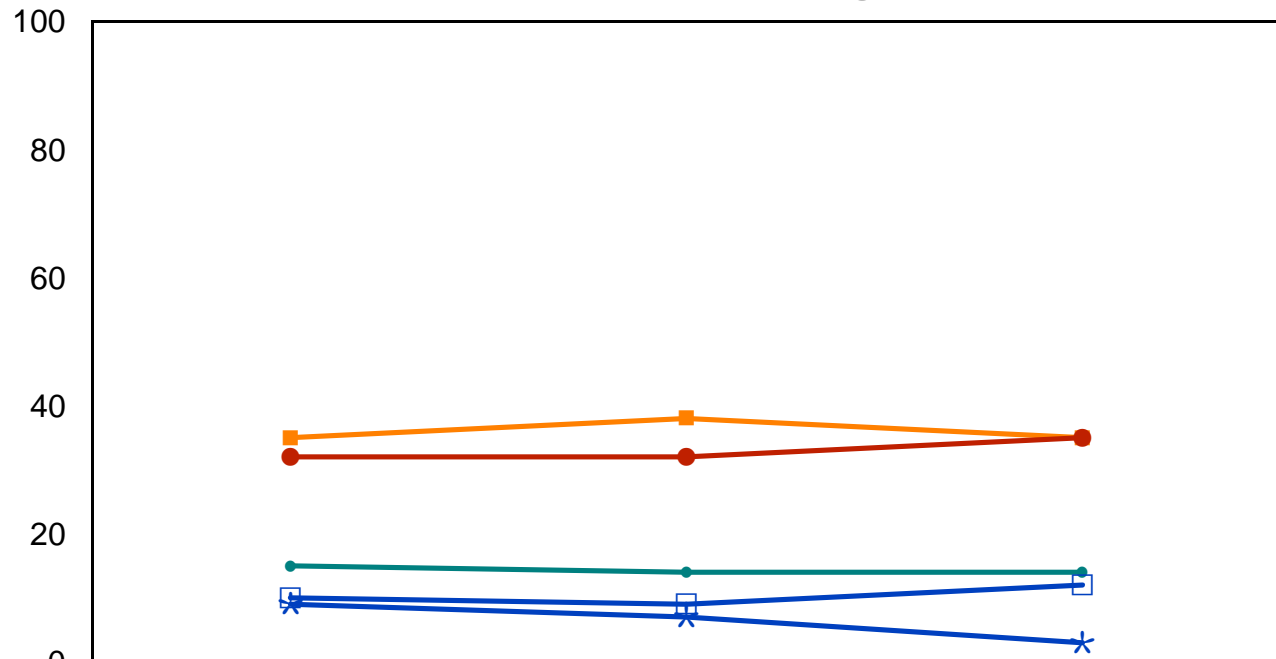







	Aug (04)	Oct (04)	Mar (06)
Actual WMD 	10	9	12
No WMD, But Major Program to Develop 	32	32	35
Limited Activities, But No Active Program 	35	38	35
No WMD Activities 	15	14	14
No Answer 	9	7	3
N	733	968	851

Source: Survey by WorldPublicOpinion.org/Knowledge Newtorks Poll (March 1-6, 2006)

# 4. World Public Opinion (PIPA) Poll

Please select what you think is the best description of the relationship between the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein and the terrorist group al Qaeda.

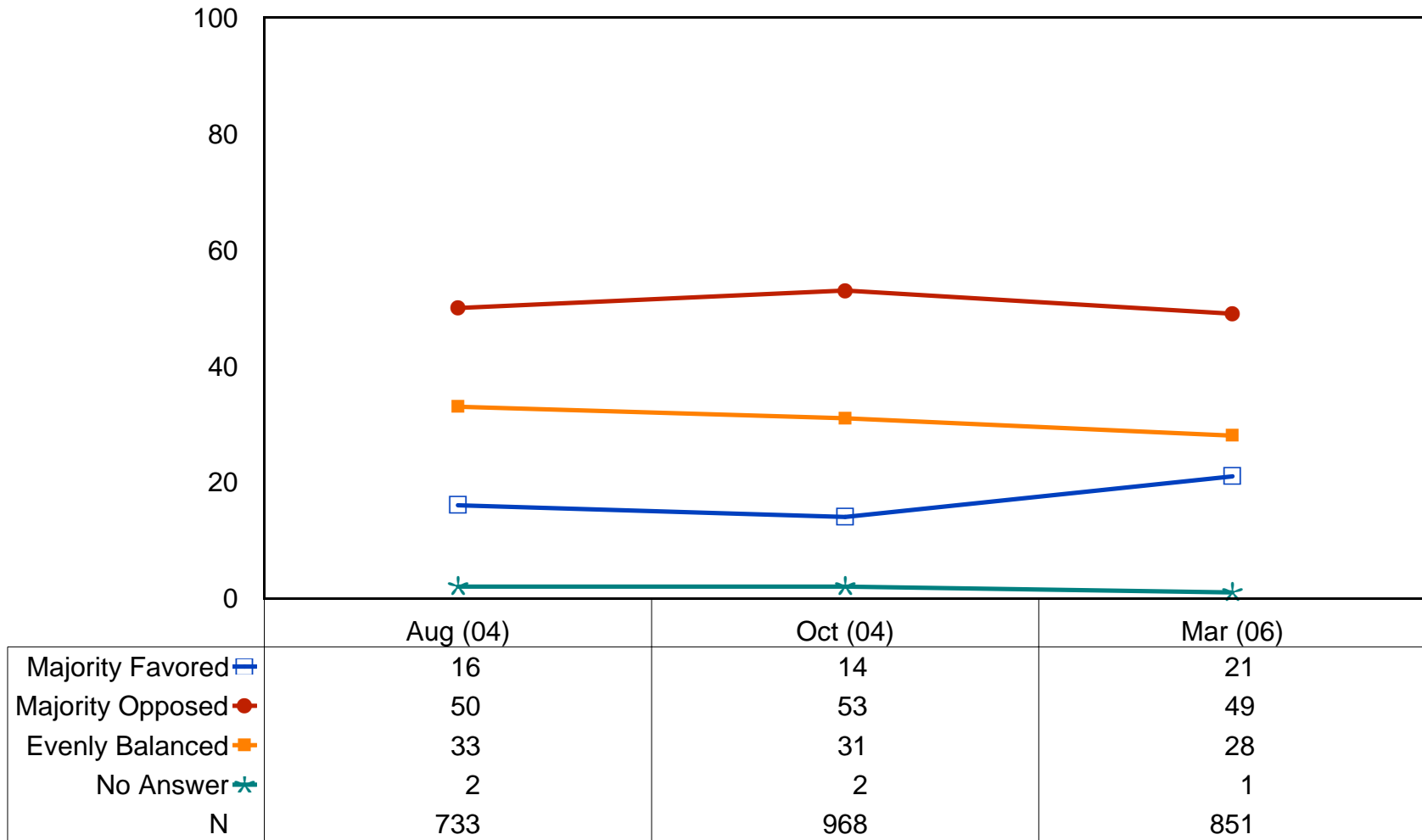


	Aug (04)	Oct (04)	Mar (06)
No Connection 	10	9	12
No Substantial Support 	32	32	35
Substantial Support, Not 9-11 	35	38	35
Directly Involved in 9-11 	15	14	14
No answer 	9	7	3
N	733	968	851

Source: Survey by WorldPublicOpinion.org/Knowledge Newtorks Poll (March 1-6, 2006)

# 5. World Public Opinion (PIPA) Poll

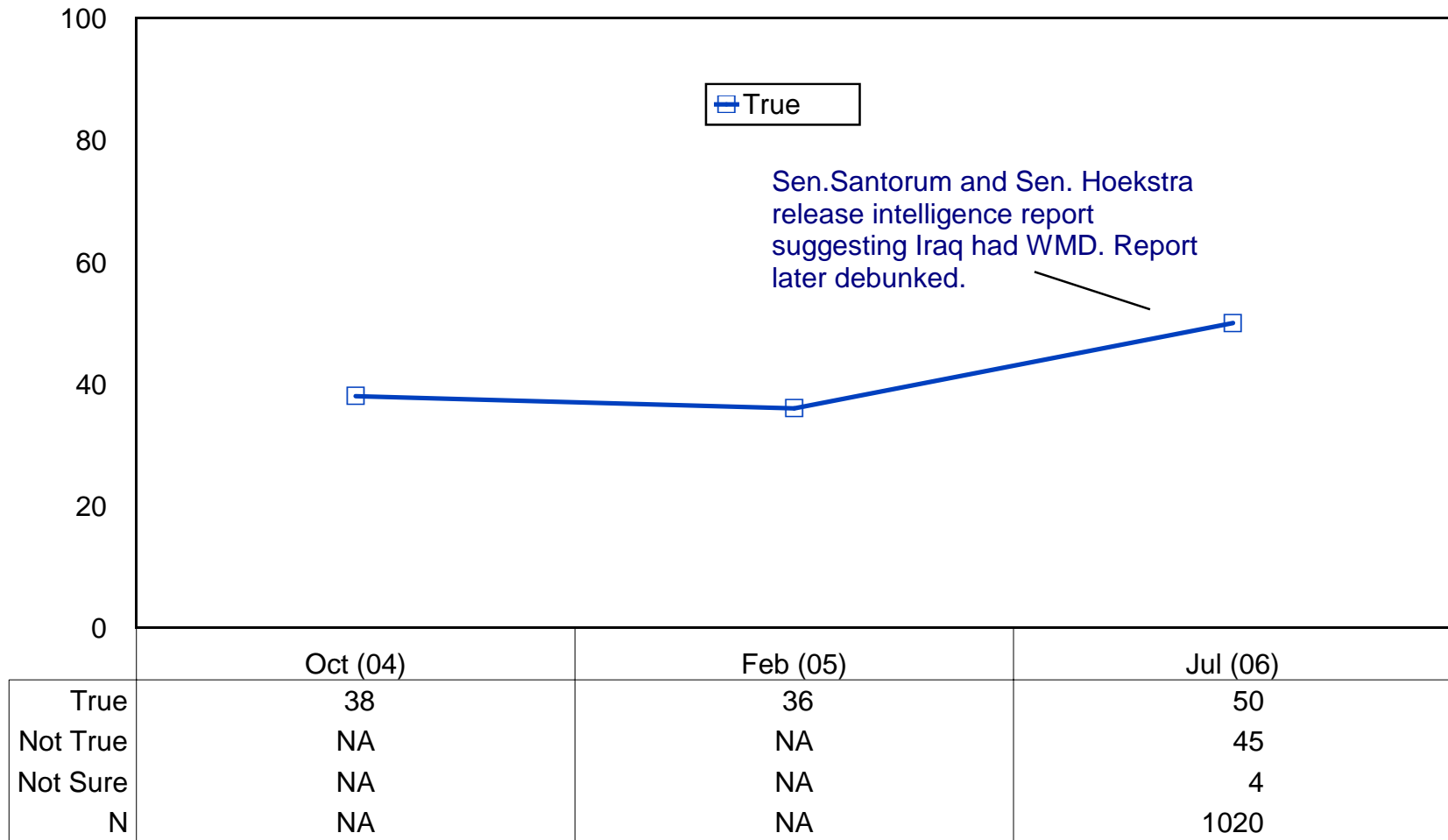
Thinking about how all the people in the world felt about the U.S. going to war with Iraq in 2003, do you think:



Source: Survey by WorldPublicOpinion.org/Knowledge Newtorks Poll (March 1-6, 2006)

# 6. The Harris Poll

Do you believe the following statements are true or not true? Iraq had weapons of mass destruction when the U.S. Invaded.

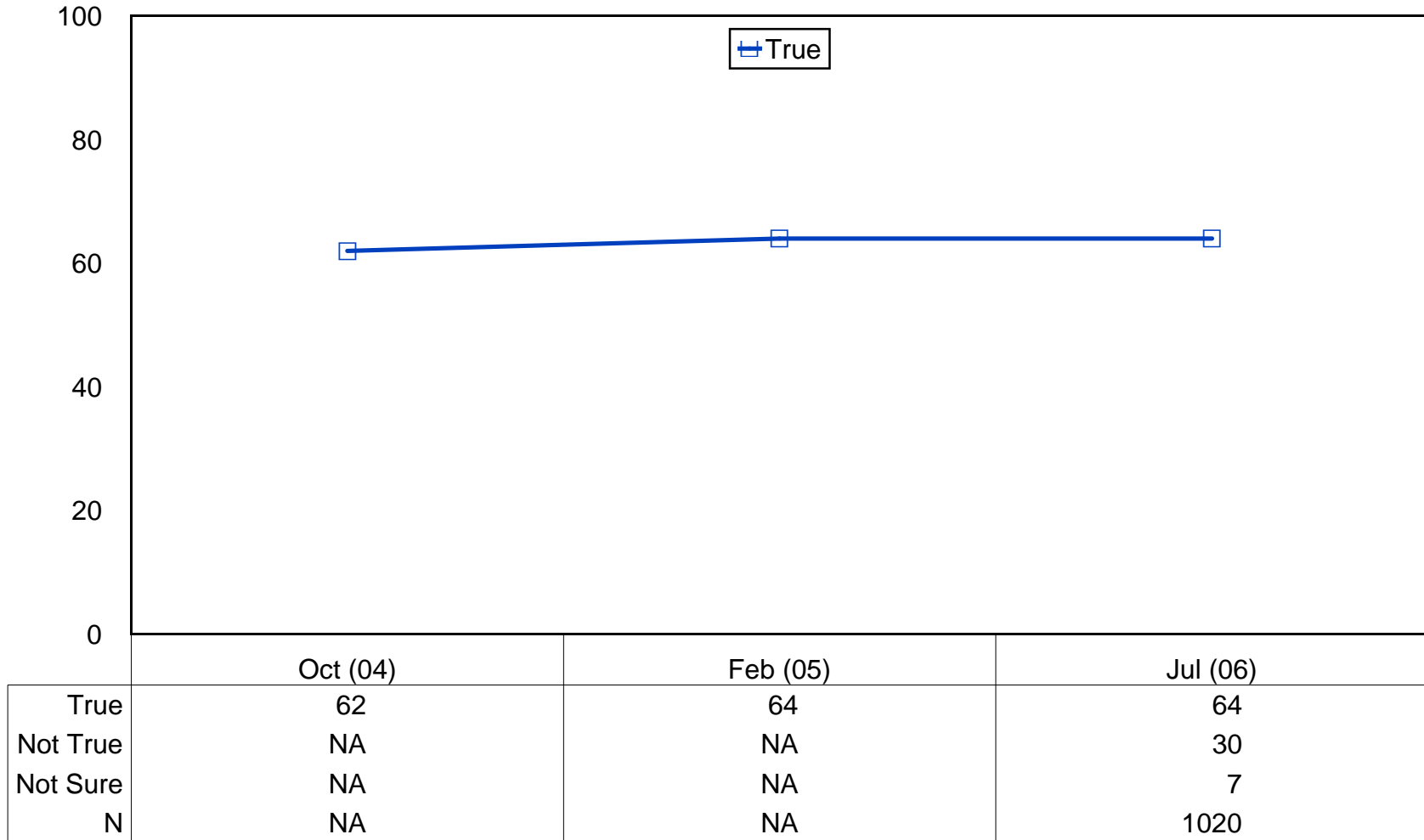


Source: Survey by The Harris Poll (July 5-11, 2006)



# 7. The Harris Poll

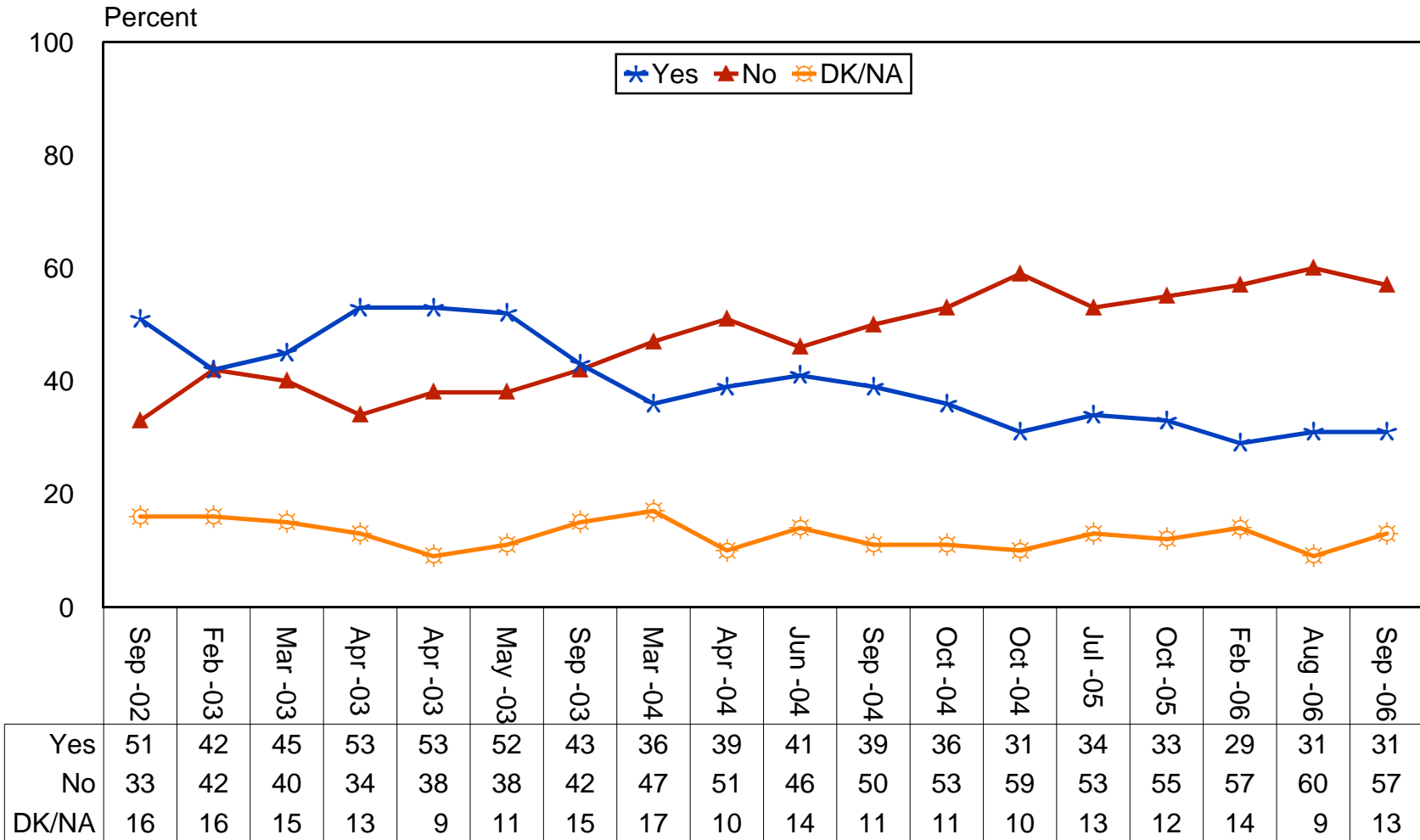
Do you believe the following statements are true or not true? Saddam Hussein had strong links to al Qaeda.



Source: Survey by The Harris Poll (July 5-11, 2006)

# 8. CBS NYT Poll

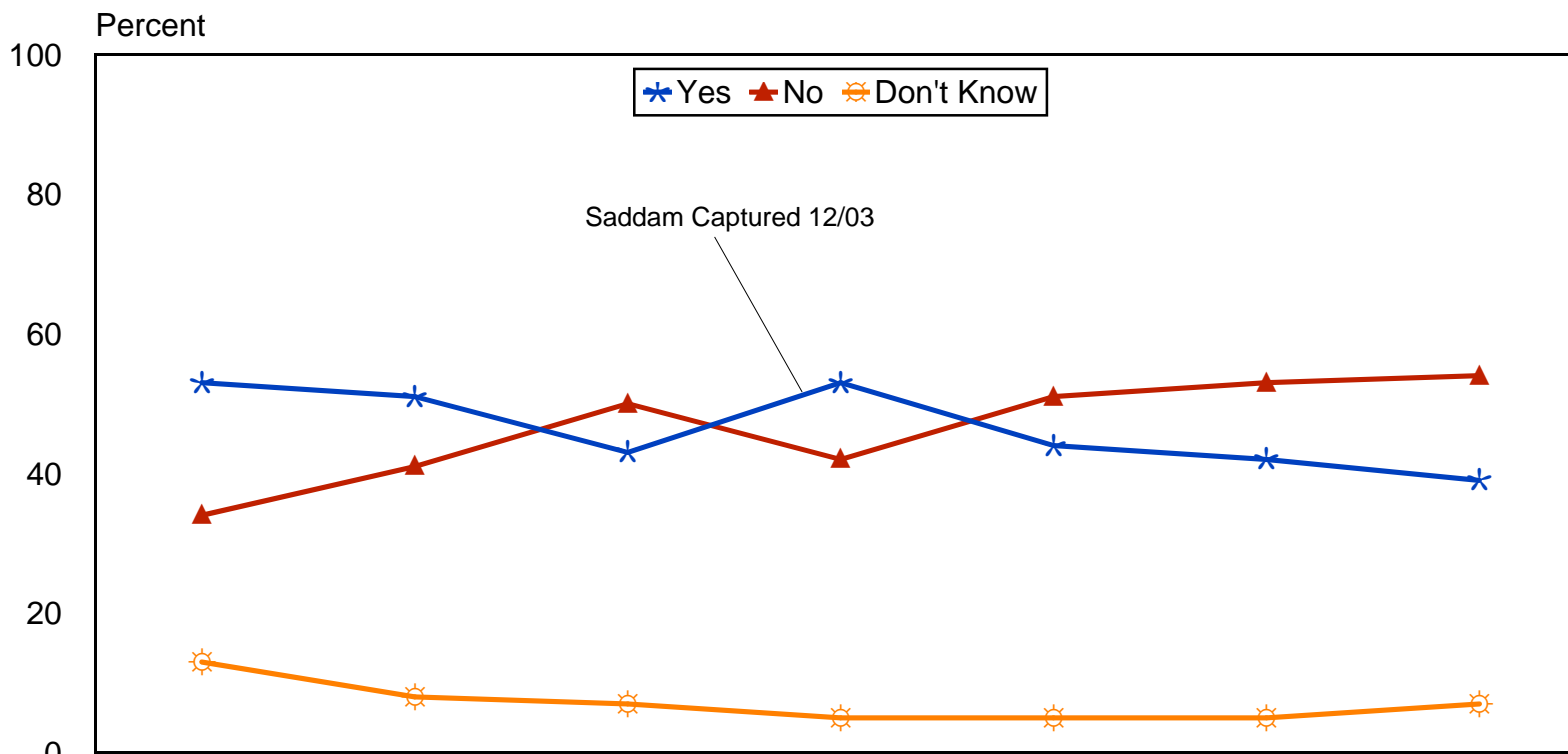
Do you think Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon?



Source: Survey by The New York Times CBS News (September 15-19, 2006)

# 9. Gallup Poll

Do you think Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11th terrorist attacks, or not?

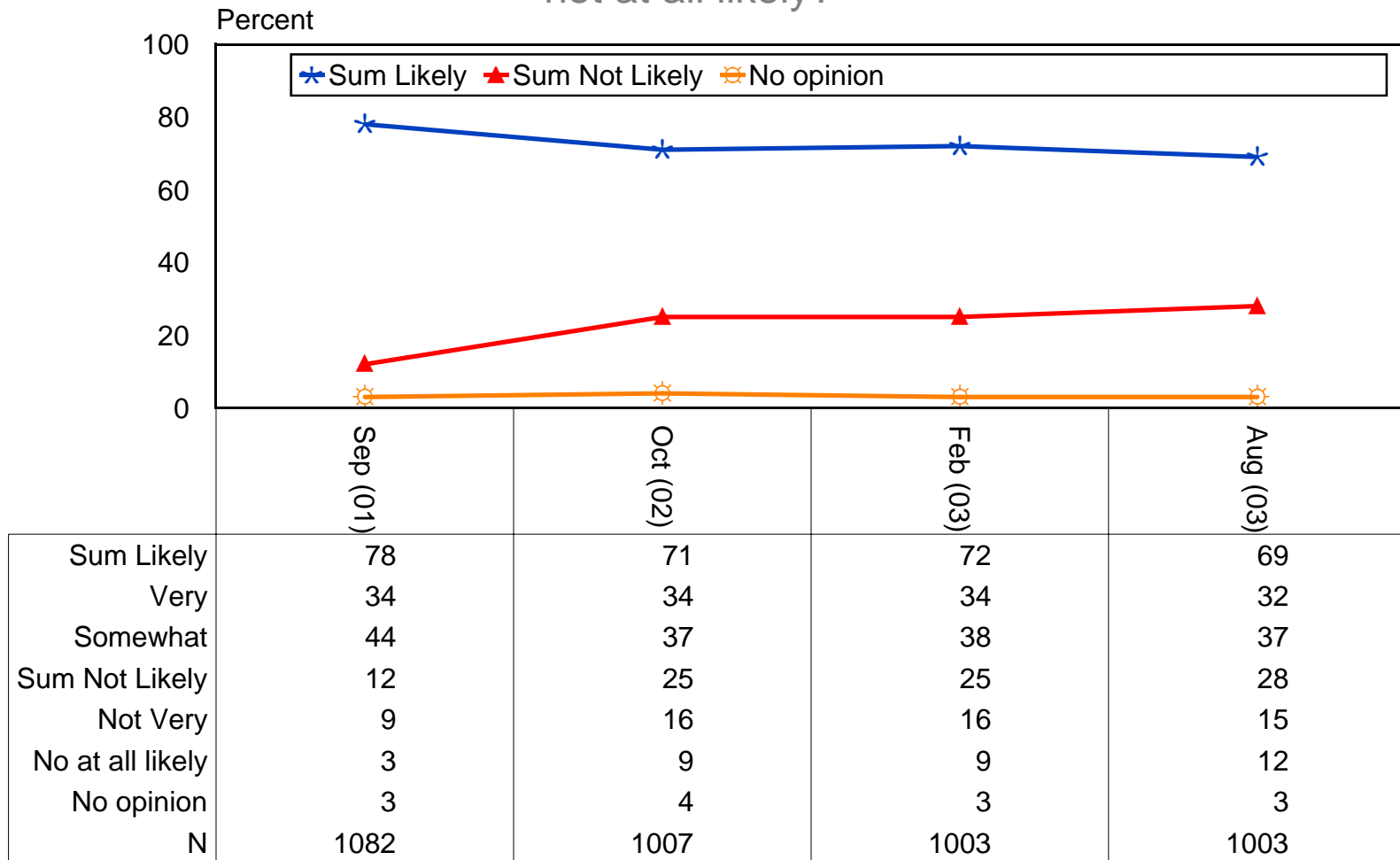


	Aug-02	Mar-03	Sep-03	Dec-03	Jun-04	Oct-04	Mar-06
Yes	53	51	43	53	44	42	39
No	34	41	50	42	51	53	54
Don't Know	13	8	7	5	5	5	7
N	801	519	1003	514	484	491	518

Source: Gallup (2006a)

# 10. Washington Post, Time/CNN

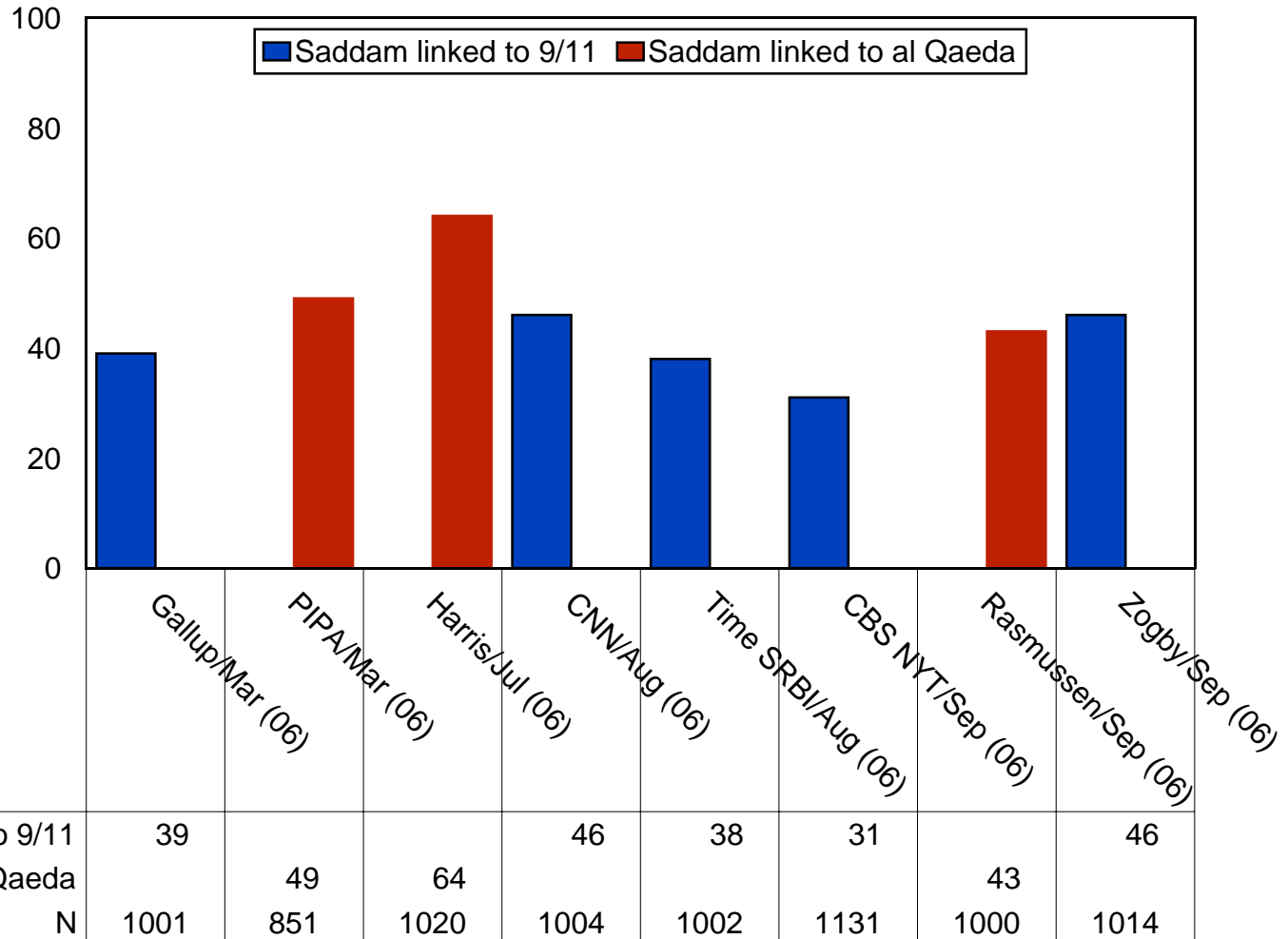
How likely is it that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11 terrorist attacks? Would you say that it is very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely?



Source: Survey by Washington Post (August 7-11, 2003)

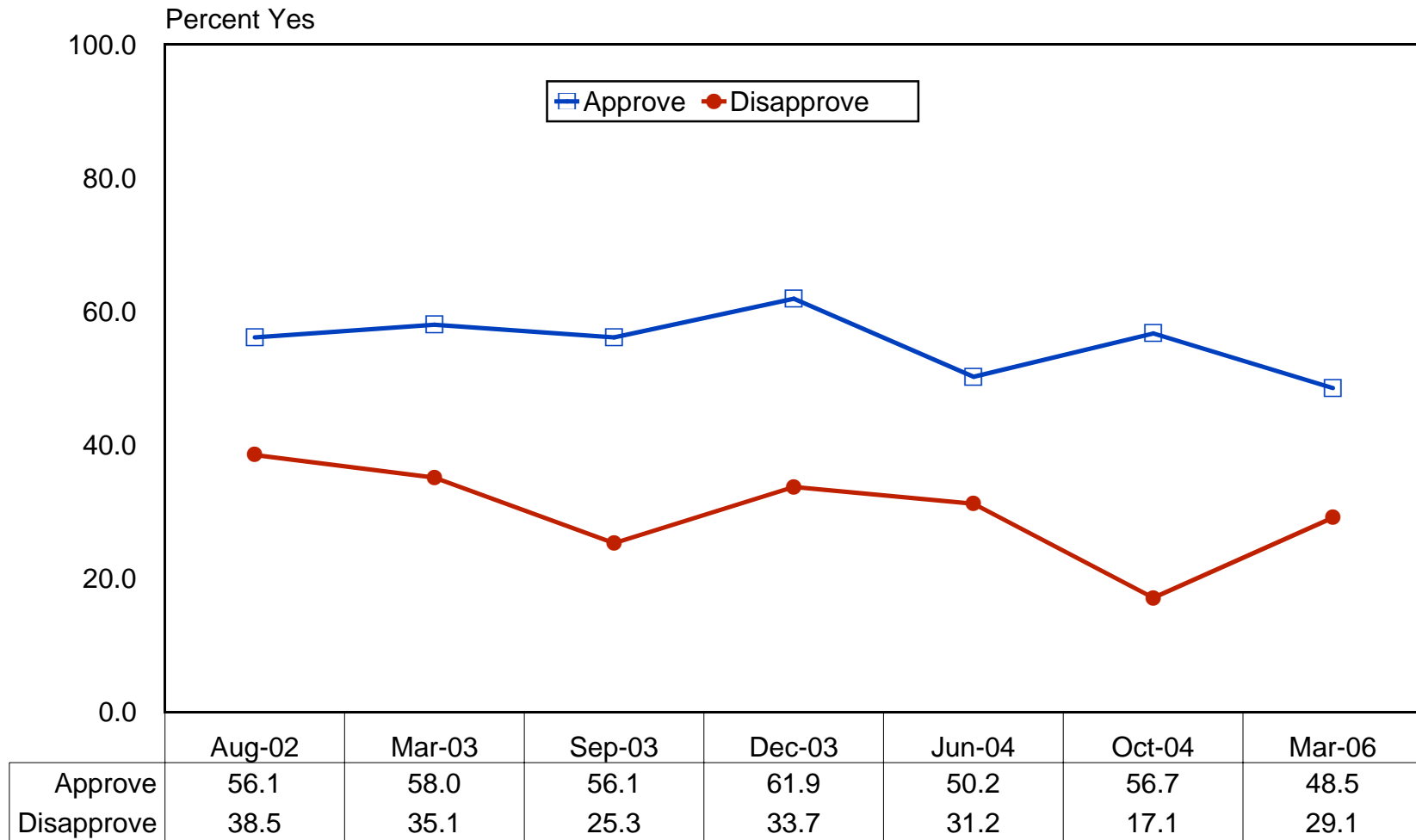
# 11. Saddam Links to Sept. 11, al Qaeda

2006 Polls



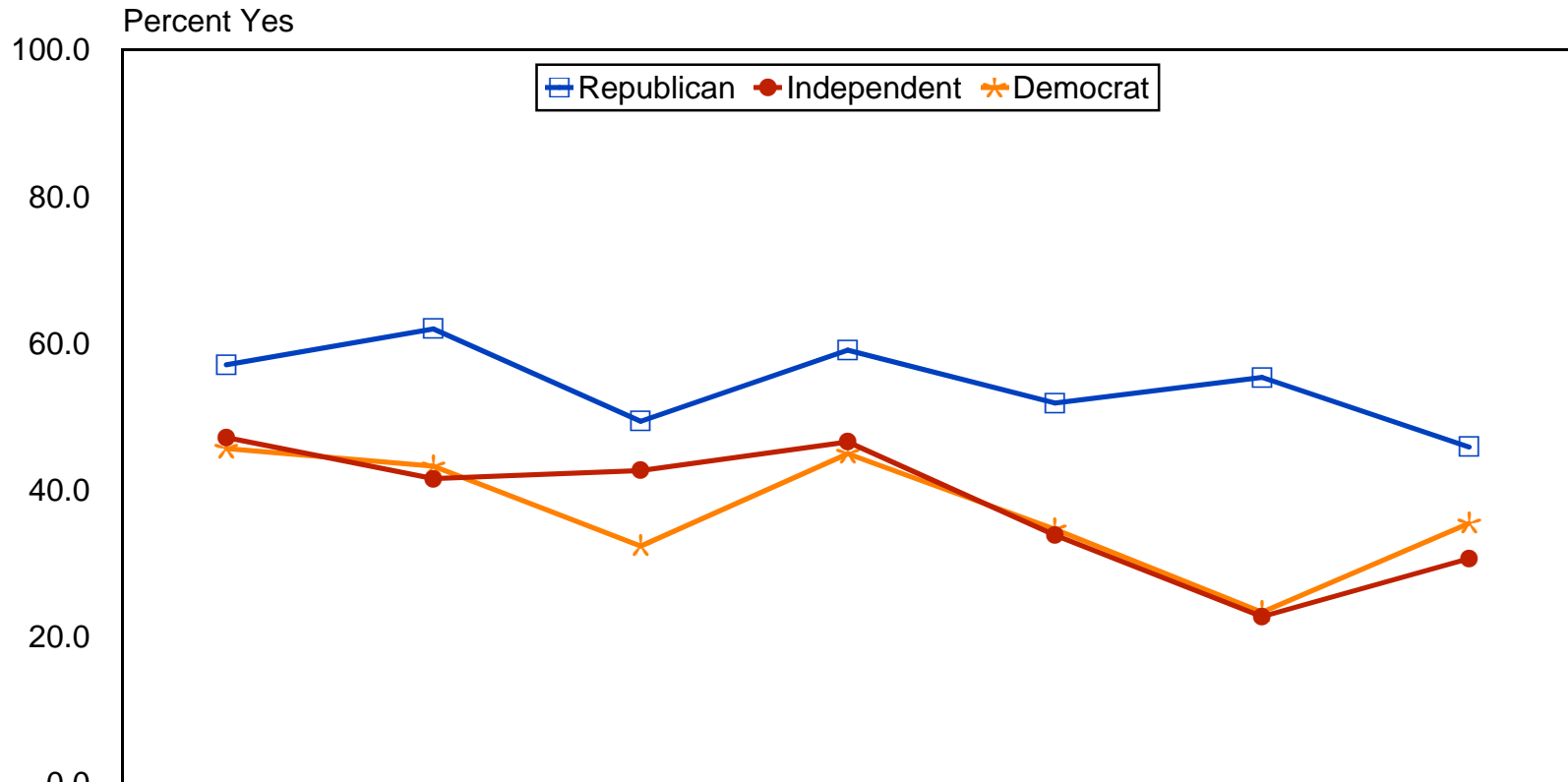
Source: See Appendix I

# 12. Saddam Involved by Bush Job Approval



Source: Gallup (2006a)

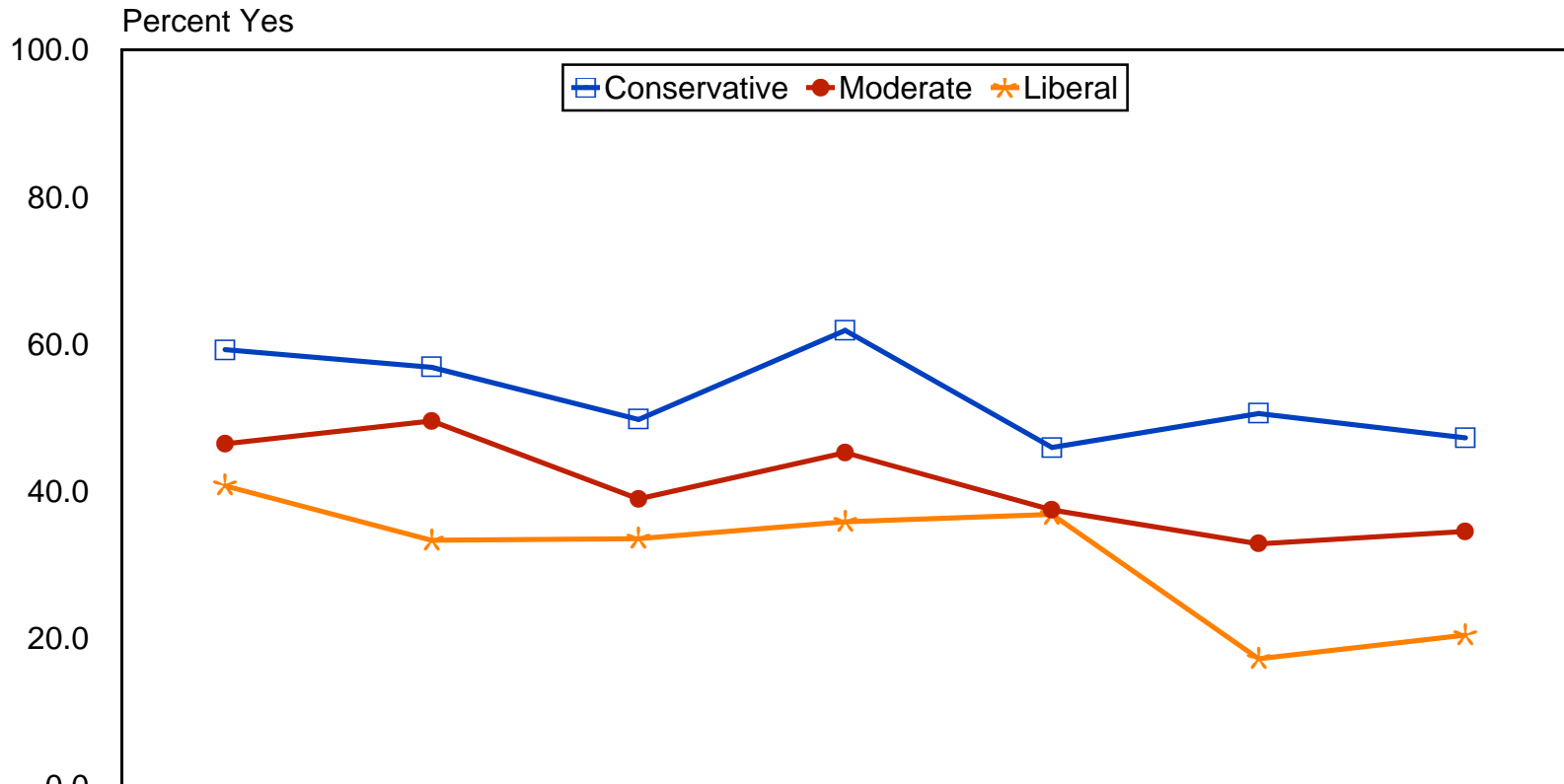
# 13. Saddam Involved by Party



	Aug-02	Mar-03	Sep-03	Dec-03	Jun-04	Oct-04	Mar-06
Republican	57.0	61.9	49.3	59.0	51.8	55.3	45.8
Independent	47.1	41.5	42.6	46.5	33.8	22.7	30.6
Democrat	45.6	43.2	32.3	44.9	34.6	23.3	35.4

Source: Gallup (2006a)

# 14. Saddam Involved by Ideology

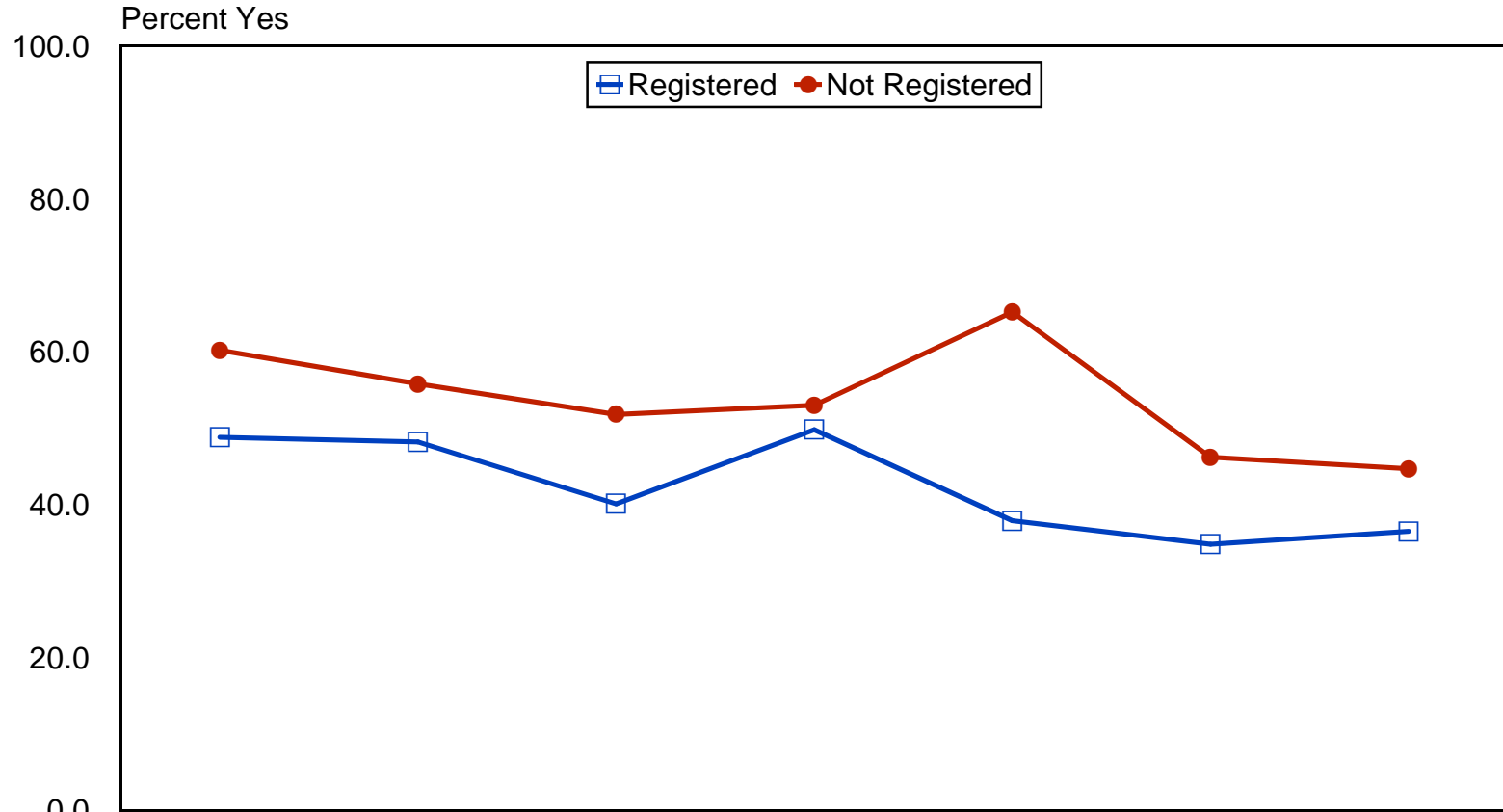


	Aug-02	Mar-03	Sep-03	Dec-03	Jun-04	Oct-04	Mar-06
Conservative	59.2	56.8	49.7	61.8	45.9	50.5	47.2
Moderate	46.4	49.5	38.9	45.2	37.4	32.8	34.5
Liberal	40.7	33.3	33.5	35.8	36.8	17.2	20.4

Source: Gallup (2006a)



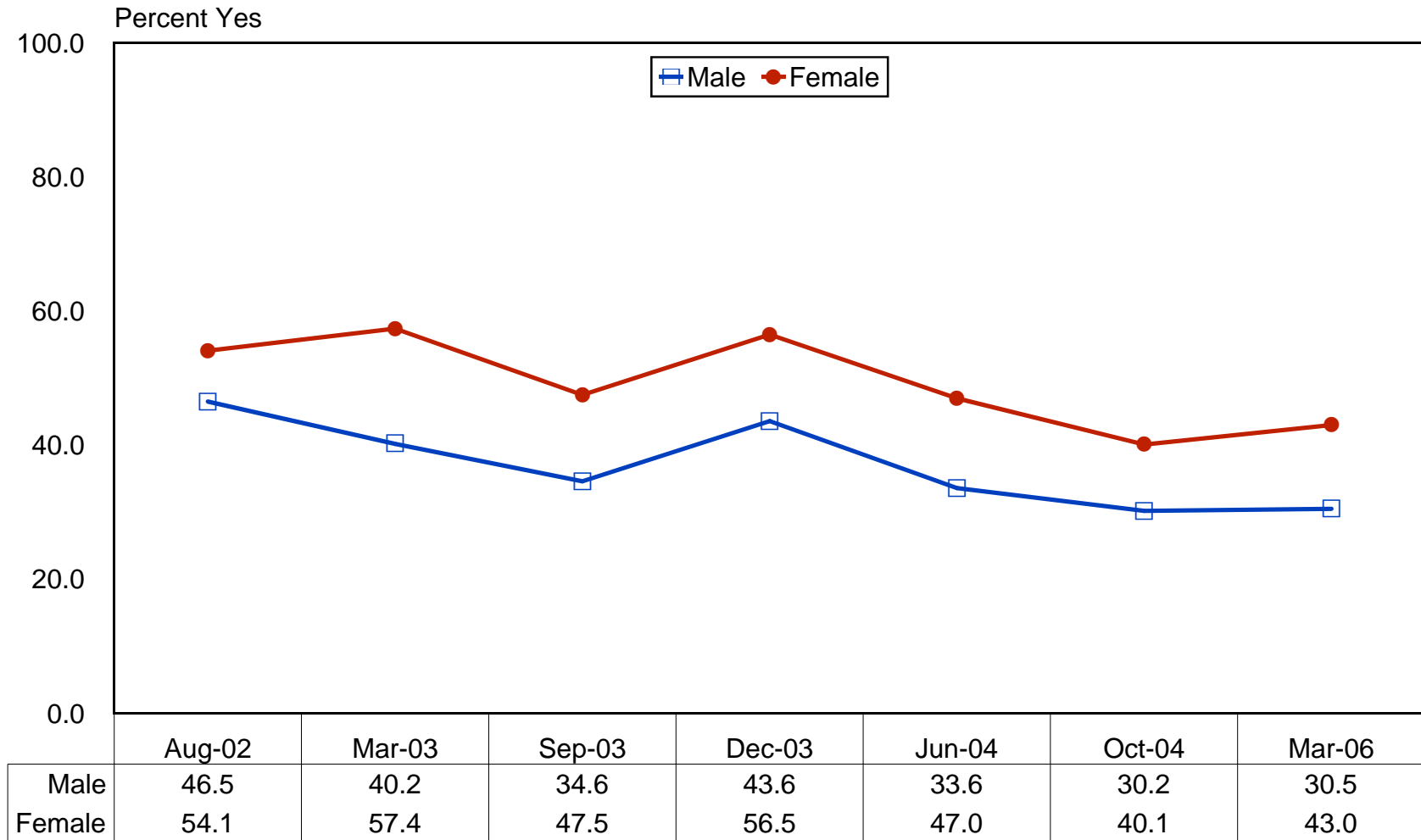
# 15. Saddam Involved by Registration



	Aug-02	Mar-03	Sep-03	Dec-03	Jun-04	Oct-04	Mar-06
Registered	48.8	48.2	40.1	49.8	37.9	34.8	36.5
Not Registered	60.2	55.8	51.8	53.0	65.2	46.2	44.7

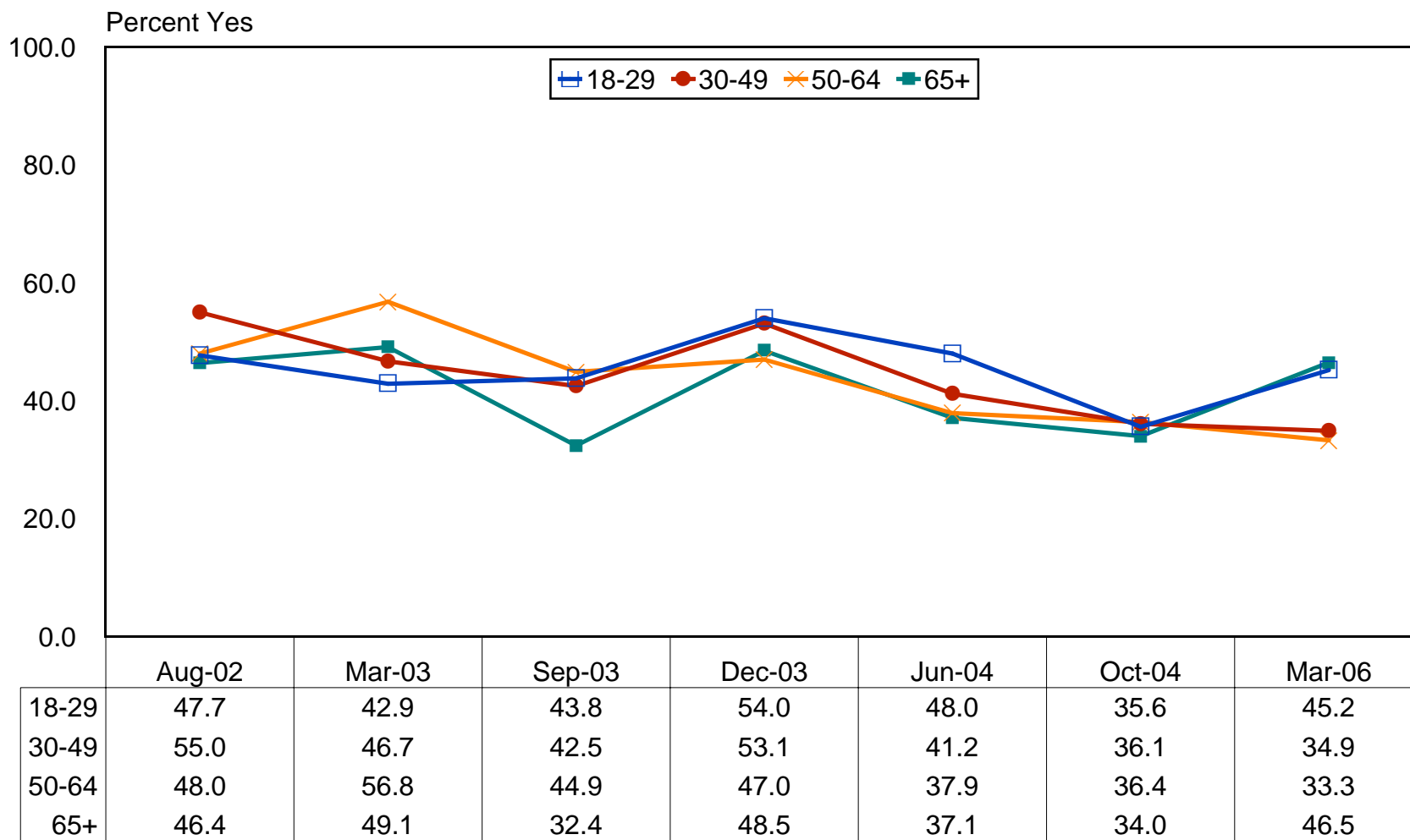
Source: Gallup (2006a)

# 16. Saddam Involved by Gender



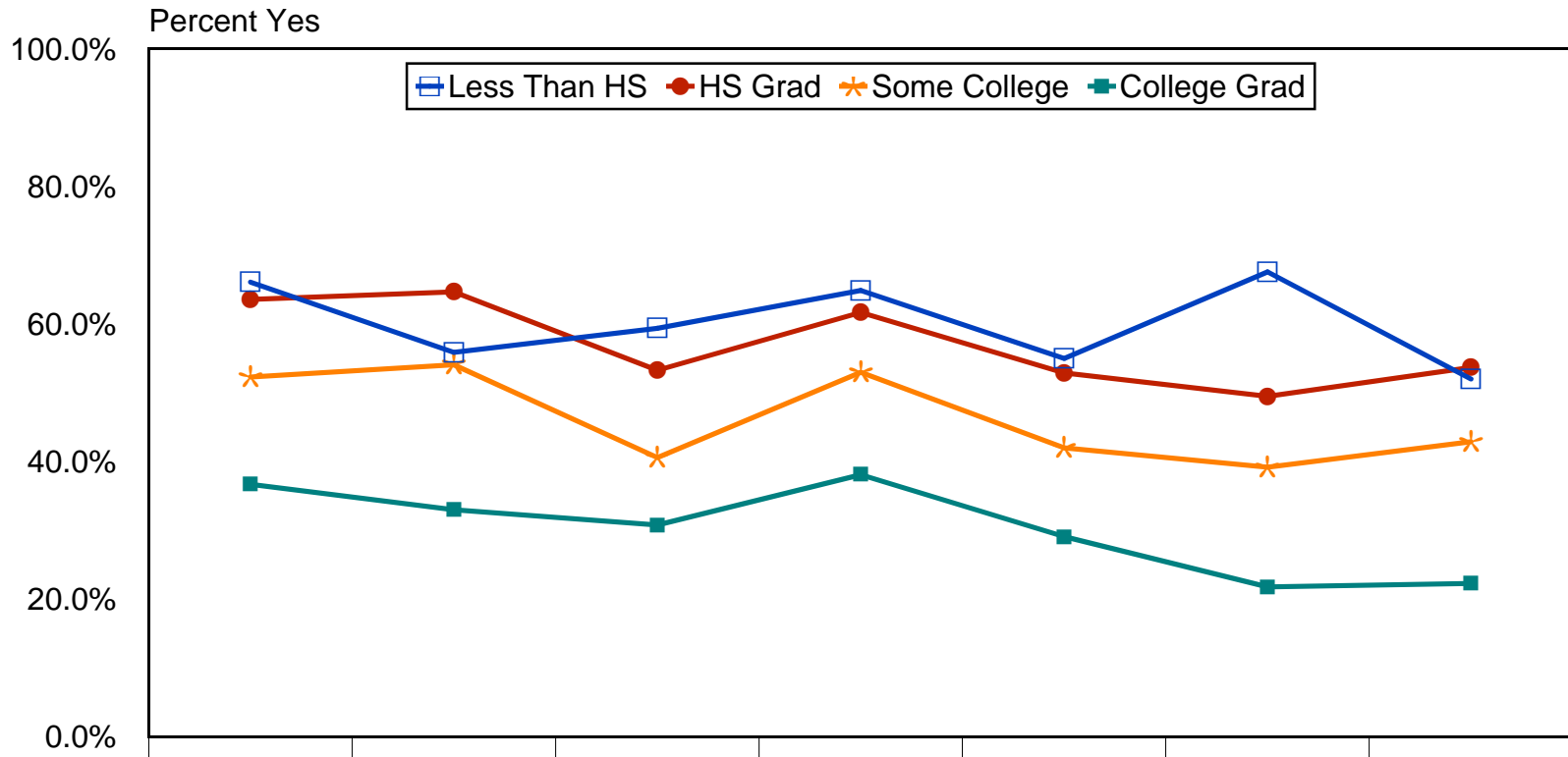
Source: Gallup (2006a)

# 17. Saddam Involved by Age



Source: Gallup (2006a)

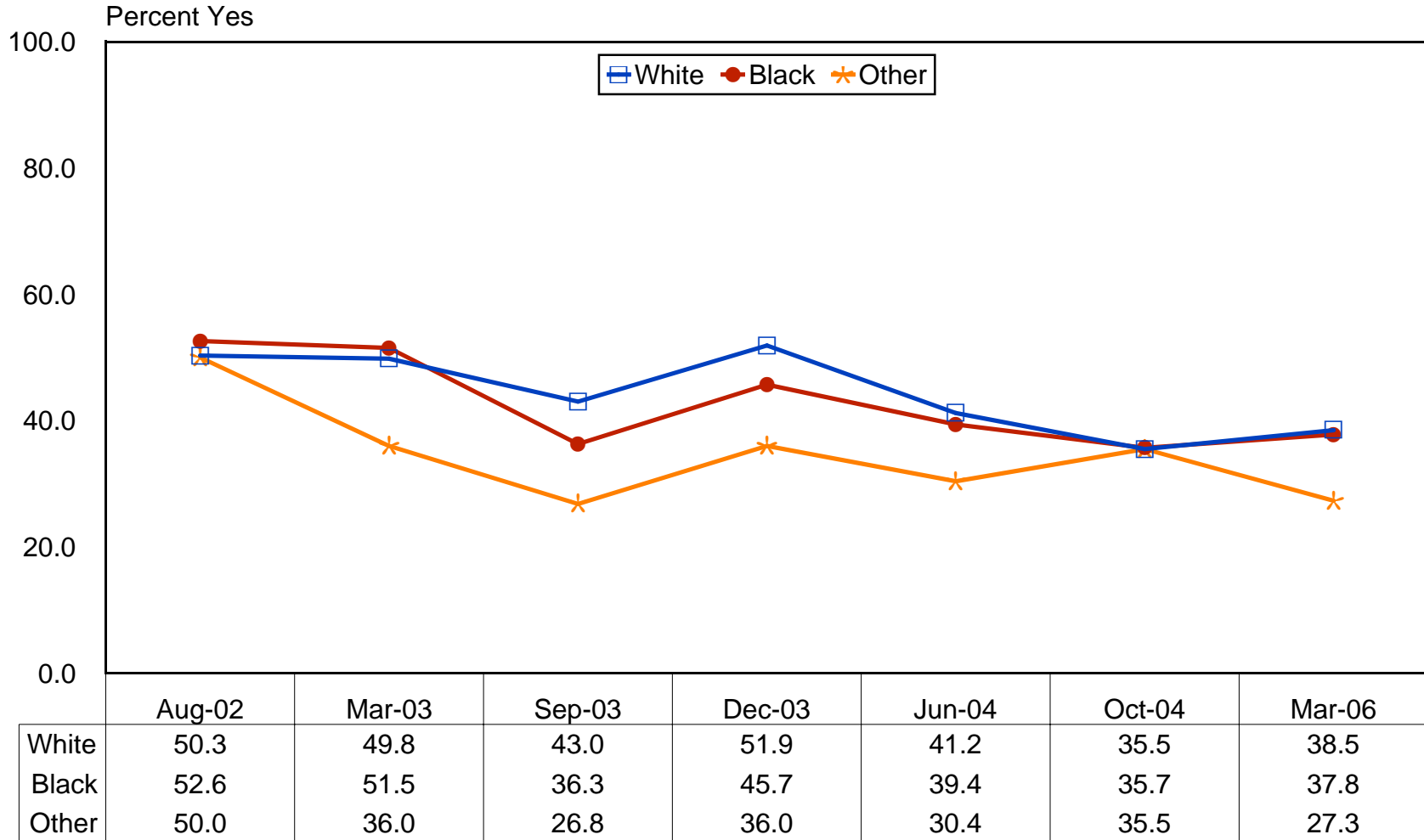
# 18. Saddam Involved by Education



	Aug-02	Mar-03	Sep-03	Dec-03	Jun-04	Oct-04	Mar-06
Less Than HS	66.1%	55.9%	59.4%	64.9%	55.0%	67.6%	52.0%
HS Grad	63.6%	64.7%	53.3%	61.7%	52.9%	49.5%	53.7%
Some College	52.3%	54.1%	40.6%	53.0%	42.0%	39.2%	42.9%
College Grad	36.7%	33.0%	30.8%	38.1%	29.1%	21.8%	22.3%

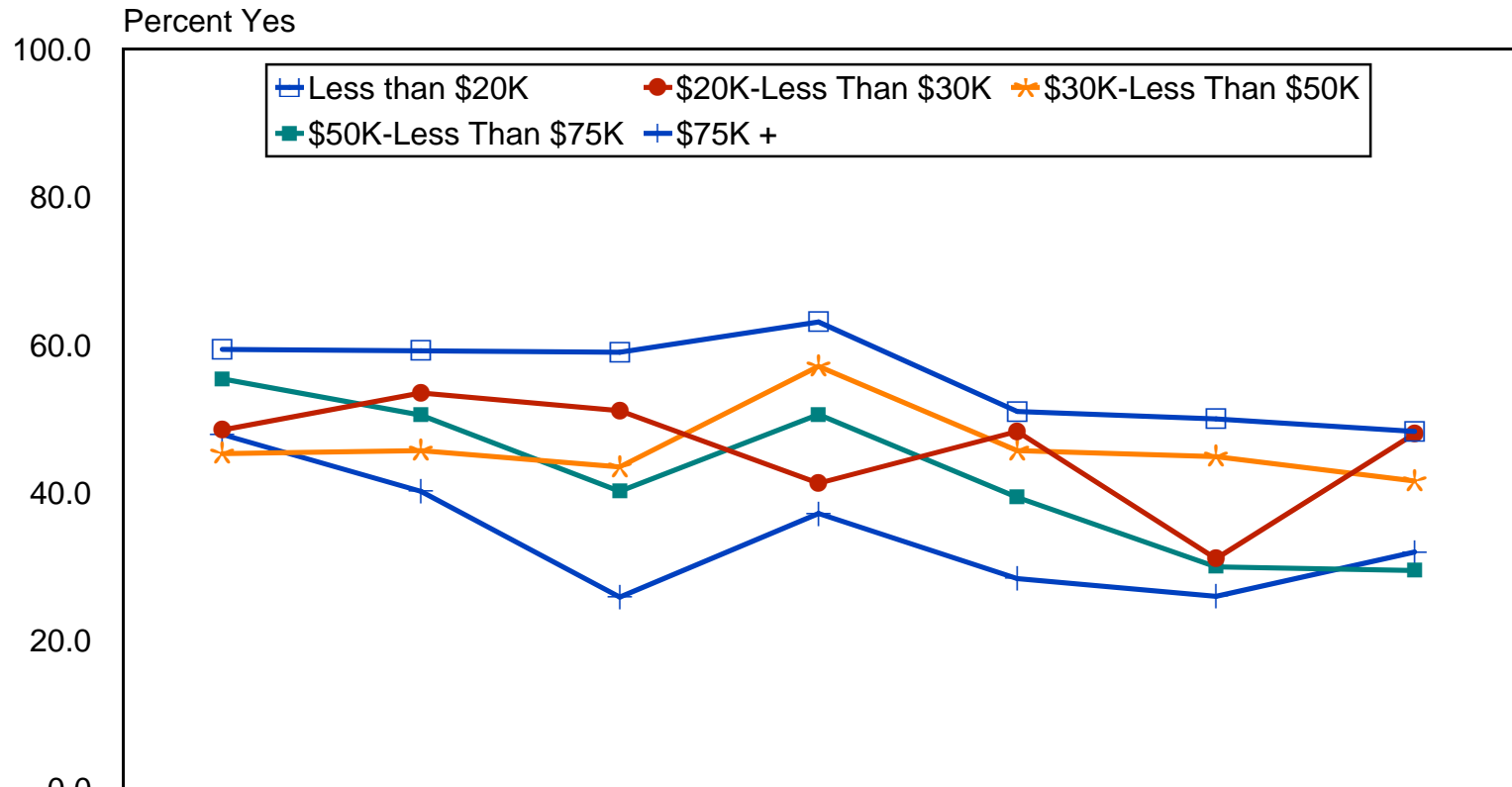
Source: Gallup (2006a)

# 19. Saddam Involved by Race



Source: Gallup (2006a)

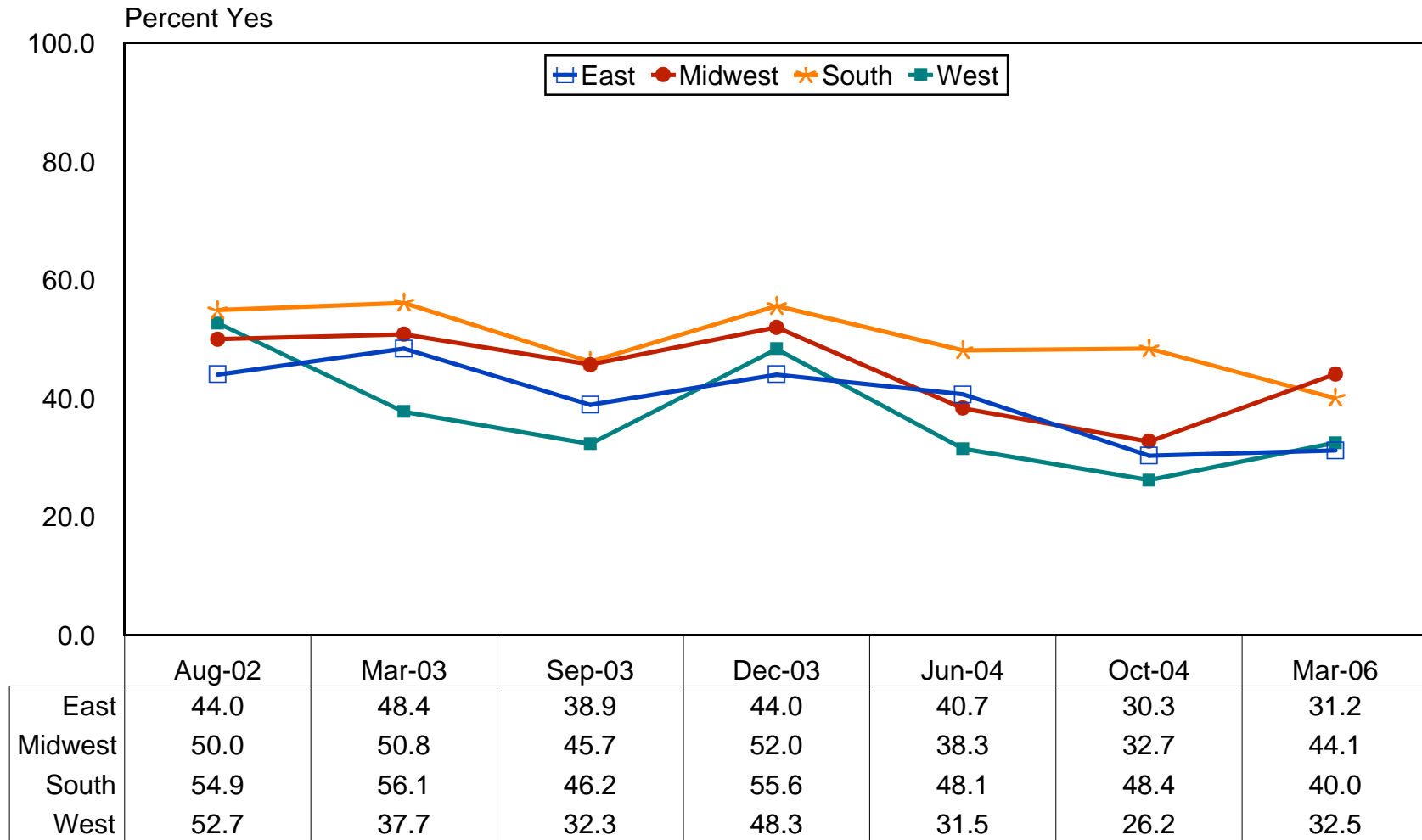
# 20. Saddam Involved by Income



	Aug-02	Mar-03	Sep-03	Dec-03	Jun-04	Oct-04	Mar-06
Less than \$20K	59.4	59.2	59.0	63.1	51.0	50.0	48.3
\$20K-Less Than \$30K	48.5	53.5	51.1	41.3	48.3	31.1	48.0
\$30K-Less Than \$50K	45.3	45.7	43.5	57.1	45.7	44.9	41.6
\$50K-Less Than \$75K	55.4	50.5	40.2	50.6	39.4	30.0	29.5
\$75K +	47.9	40.2	25.9	37.2	28.4	26.0	32.0

Source: Gallup (2006a)

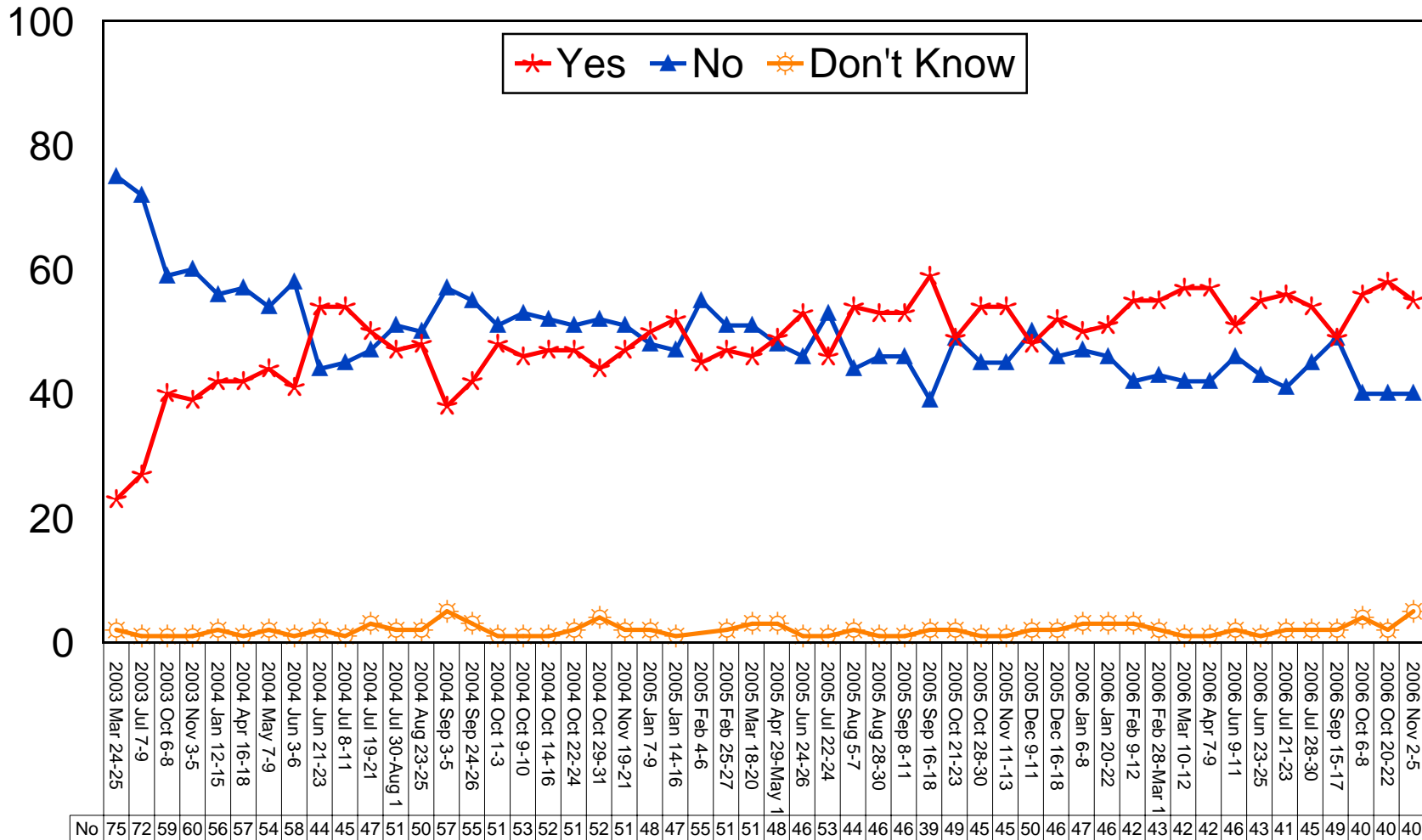
# 21. Saddam Involved by Region



Source: Gallup (2006a)

# 22. Support for War

In view of the developments since we first sent our troops to Iraq, do you think the United States made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq, or not?



Source: Gallup (2006b)