

Young Iraqis Overwhelmingly Consider U.S. Their Enemy, Poll Says

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More than 90 percent of young people in Iraq consider the United States to be an enemy of their country, according to a new poll.

After years spent justifying the war as a “liberation” of the Iraqi people, the survey casts further doubt on the success of that endeavor.

The [poll](#) was conducted by Penn Schoen Berland, a public relations and market research firm co-founded by [controversial](#) strategist Mark Penn, and was sponsored by a Dubai-based [affiliate](#) of Burson Marsteller, once described as “[the PR firm for evil](#).” Still, the undertaking, as outlined by organizers, sounds ambitious. It included 250 face-to-face interviews in three Iraqi cities, plus another 3,250 interviews in 15 other countries throughout the Arab world, all with men and women ages 18-24 “selected to provide an accurate reflection of each nation’s geographic and socio-economic make-up.” It claims an error rate of plus or minus 1.65 percent.

The survey found that overwhelming majorities of young people in Iraq, Yemen, and the Palestinian Territories consider the U.S. to be an enemy. In Gulf Arab states, on the other hand, perceptions of the United States were far more positive. Roughly 85 percent of those living in the Gulf say that they consider the U.S. to be an ally, with another 66 percent expressing the same view in North Africa.



ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2016

The results of the poll offer an interesting window into long-term perceptions of the Iraq War by Iraqis themselves. Advocates of the 2003 invasion often justified it by claiming post-Saddam Iraq would be an ally of U.S. interests in the region. In a [speech](#) leading up to the war, then-Vice President Dick Cheney cited experts who claimed Iraqis would “erupt in joy” over the invasion, predicting it would result in “strong bonds” created between the two countries. But years later, after hundreds of billions of dollars spent and more than a hundred thousand Iraqis dead, the United States is overwhelmingly considered an enemy by young men and women who were children when the war began.

In Yemen, too, where the U.S. [conducted](#) an assassination campaign via drones and special forces, and where for the past year the U.S. has supported [bloody](#) Saudi bombings, over 80 percent of respondents described the U.S. as an enemy. These figures are particularly worth

noting since the Obama administration has repeatedly cited Yemen as a counterterrorism [success](#) story. In recent months, that country has been pummeled by American weapons that have blown up weddings, marketplaces, and rural villages. Far from aiding stability, attacks on the country have in fact helped al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, according to recent [reports](#).

The poll also asked participants to weigh in on a variety of other issues, including the rise of Islamic State, sectarianism, and women’s rights. Participants overwhelmingly rejected ISIS, predicting that it would fail in its goal of remaking the region and would be insupportable even if it didn’t resort to extreme violence. Most worried that sectarianism was increasing in the region and would prove an obstacle to stability. Across both genders, strong majorities said that rulers must do more to promote women’s rights in their countries.

But from an American perspective, the report’s most salient features pertain to anti-Americanism among young Arabs abroad.

“For years, many have argued that Muslims and Arabs, like other humans, don’t appreciate being bombed or occupied,” says Haroon Moghul, a fellow at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. “Finally, we have a study to confirm this suspicion.”

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