

Government public opinion polling and the 'CNN Effect'

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June 22, 2012

***Kogen & Price, 2011, ““Deflecting the CNN Effect: Public opinion polling and Livingstonian outcomes.” *Media, War & Conflict*, 4(2), 109-123.**

Three uses of public opinion polls

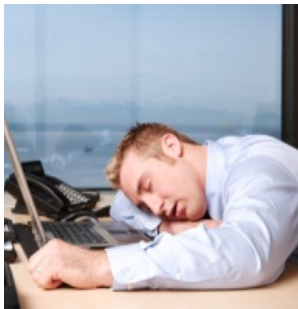
- 1) Re-framing public debate**
- 2) Allowing space for decision-making**
- 3) Moving forward stalled negotiations**

Politicians' Use of

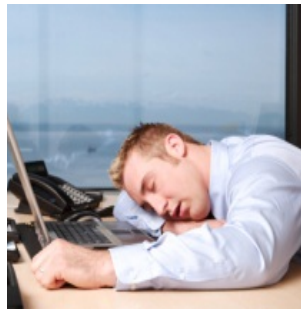
Polls

- 1) Dictate their own position
- 2) Frame their position

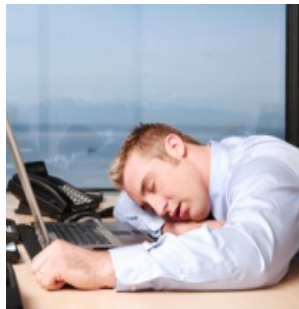
Monday



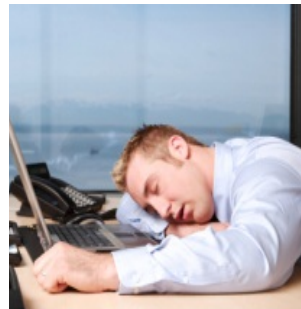
Tuesday



Wednesday



Thursday



Friday



The CNN effect

- **24-hour news channels**
- **Suddenly:**
 - **Government decisions under the public eye**
 - **Increased pressure to respond to events quickly**
- **Three elements: (Steven Livingston, 1997)**
 - **Agenda setting**
 - **Decision catalyzing**
 - **Decision impeding**

Using Public Opinion Polls to Counteract the CNN Effect

1) Focus on evidence-based decision making

➤ *counteracts media as decision-catalyzer*

2) Re-frame narratives

➤ *counteracts media as agenda-setter*

US government poll use in Iraq and Afghanistan

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Survey finds hope in occupied Iraq

About 15% say foreign forces should leave Iraq now, but many more say they should stay until an Iraqi government is in place or security is restored.

Looking back, more Iraqis think the invasion was right than wrong, although 41% felt that the invasion "humiliated Iraq".

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"The conten
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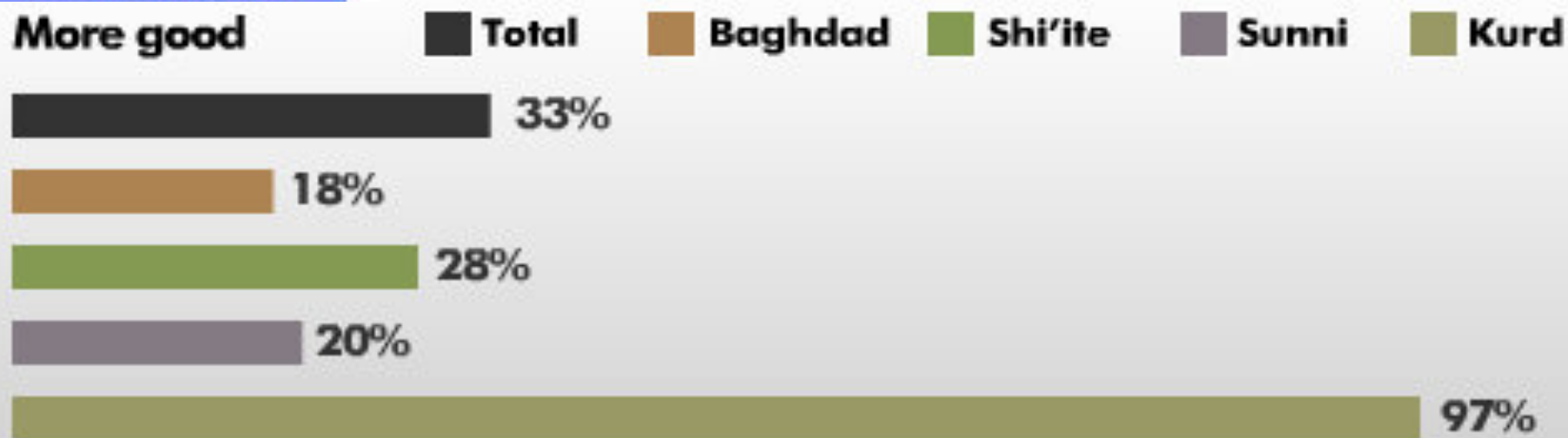
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Poll: Iraqis out of patience

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](#))

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- 1) Decision catalyzer workaround: allows time to gather evidence**
- 2) Agenda-setting workaround: allows for focus on desires of Iraqis, rather than, for example, presence of WMDs**
- 3) Decision impeder workaround: gives a reason to stay if that is the government's preference**

Darfur, Sudan

- 1. How do people in Darfur understand the conflict, its roots, and current events?**
- 2. How do Darfurians feel about current and past peace processes in Darfur, including the Darfur Peace Agreement, the UN/AU peace process, and the Sudan People's Initiative?**
- 3. How do Darfurians view Darfuri and Sudanese political and traditional leadership and the Darfuri movements?**
- 4. What are Darfuri attitudes about peace, justice, and reconciliation in Darfur?**
- 5. What role do Darfurians see for themselves in the 2009 elections and in democratization in Sudan more generally?**

Darfur, Sudan

- 1) Agenda-setting workaround: allows for focus on the political needs of Darfurians, rather than, for example, their feelings about a no-fly zone**
- 2) Decision catalyzer workaround: allows time to gather evidence**
- 3) Decision impeder workaround: gives a reason to engage in the kind of diplomatic action they want to engage in**

Results of first poll

- **Some support for Sudanese government**
- **Desire for international community to provide financial support**
- **Truth and reconciliation commission was low priority**

Public Opinion Polling for Negotiations

- **Peace Polling (Colin Irwin)**
- **Poll questions = specific elements of peace agreement**
- **Widened target from 'Darfuri public' to include nomads, the Government of Sudan, rebel group leaders**

Summary: Uses of Public Opinion Polls

- 1) Workaround the CNN Effect by re-framing the debate**
- 2) Workaround the CNN Effect by buying time in order to conduct evidence-based policymaking**
- 3) Move forward stalled negotiations**