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Perception, Memory, and Partisan Polarization on the Iraq War

GARY C. JACOBSON

The Iraq war has divided the American public along party lines far more than any other U.S. military action since the advent of scientific polling back in the 1930s. The war's architect, President George W. Bush, also provoked the widest partisan differences in presidential job approval ratings ever recorded.¹ Figure 1 displays the trends in support for the Iraq action and approval of the President's performance among self-identified Republicans and Democrats during the Bush administration.² Partisan views of the war diverged as soon as the issue vaulted to the top of the national agenda after the terrorist attacks of September 11. The gap between Republicans and Democrats grew steadily wider in the months leading up to the war and continued to expand afterward, with only a brief narrowing during the first month or so of the conflict. Between July 2004 and January 2009, it averaged 58 points, much wider than for U.S. engagements in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.³

Partisans were even more divided about Bush's job performance than about the war. After the attacks of September 11 on New York and

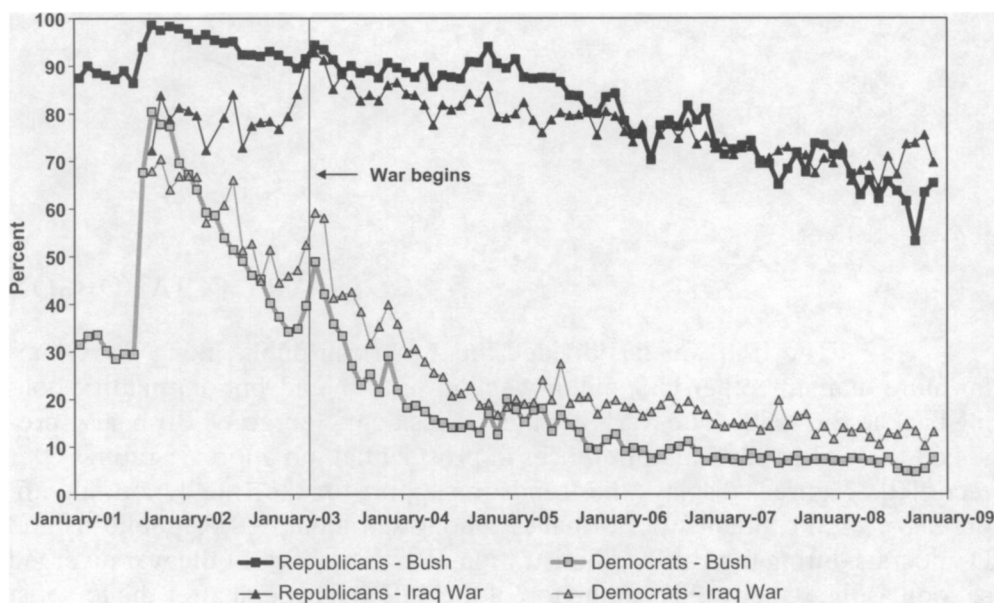
¹ Gary C. Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People*, 2d ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2010), Figure 1.4.

² The presidential approval data monthly averages are from 412 CBS News/*New York Times* and Gallup polls; Iraq war support data are from monthly averages from 719 individual surveys, data gathered by 16 national media and academic survey organizations; for details see Appendix II and Jacobson, *Divider*, Appendix.

³ The gap was lowest in the most-controversial of these earlier ventures, Vietnam, averaging 5 percentage points; party differences over actions in Korea and Kosovo averaged 11 to 12 points, over the 1991 Gulf War, 21 points; partisans were in full agreement on supporting the action in Afghanistan in 2001, although after Democrats had soured on the Iraq war, they also became less supportive, producing a partisan gap averaging 40 points during Bush's second term; see Jacobson, *Divider*, Figures 6.2 through 6.8.

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FIGURE 1
Approval of George W. Bush's Performance and Support for the Iraq War, by Party (Monthly Averages)



Washington, DC, he had received the highest ratings from the opposing party (and from independents) of any president ever. By the beginning of 2006, however, Bush was receiving the lowest ratings from the opposing party's identifiers ever recorded for any president; the average during his last three years in office was 8 percent. Even with the huge post-September 11 rally, Bush's career average approval among out-party identifiers was the lowest on record. Meanwhile, despite this late-term decline, Bush's career average rating among Republicans was only two points below that of Dwight D. Eisenhower, the all-time leader. Before Bush and going back to Eisenhower, the partisan gap in approval ratings had never exceeded 70 percentage points in any Gallup Poll or averaged more than 66 points in any quarter. In the 166 Gallup Polls taken between January 2004 and January 2009, the gap exceeded 70 points more than half of the time, reaching a quarterly average as high as 77 points.

Opinions on the war and the President were, not surprisingly, tightly linked. Levels of presidential approval and support for the war declined in parallel, albeit with very different trajectories for Republicans and Democrats. Meanwhile, the relationship between the two remained strong and stable, with an average of 83 percent of both Republicans and Democrats offering consistent evaluations—for the war and approving of Bush's performance, or opposing

the war and disapproving of Bush's performance.⁴ This level of consistency is far higher than it was for Harry Truman and the Korean War (averaging 60 percent) or for Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War (averaging 64 percent).

Why were reactions to this president and this war so closely linked and so polarized along party lines? The well-established effects of party identification are of course a major part of the answer. As Larry M. Bartels concluded from his review of the evidence, party identification remains "a pervasive dynamic force shaping citizens' perceptions of, and reactions to, the political world. Partisan bias in political perceptions pays a crucial role in perpetuating and reinforcing sharp differences in opinion between Democrats and Republicans," justifying "the emphasis placed by the authors of *The American Voter* on 'the role of enduring partisan commitments in shaping attitudes toward political objects.'"⁵ It would be difficult to imagine a more powerful illustration of this point than Figure 1. But partisan bias cannot by itself explain why the Iraq war and Bush provoked such extreme partisan differences compared to other modern wars and presidents. In this article, I show how specific features of the war and the Bush presidency intensified ordinary partisan biases by provoking unusually consequential exercises of motivated reasoning among substantial segments of the population, affecting both Republican and Democratic partisans but in quite distinct ways: Republicans—especially those most strongly committed to the President—tended to avoid, misperceive, or disbelieve information that called the war's premises, and thus Bush's judgment, into question, while Democrats tended to forget that they had once accepted the war's rationale and supported the venture. These exercises in motivated reasoning combined to produce the unprecedented partisan divisions revealed by surveys probing popular support for the war and the President.

THE THEORY OF MOTIVATED REASONING

The theory of motivated reasoning is an intellectual descendent of cognitive dissonance theory and related approaches.⁶ The central idea is that a "tension between drives for accuracy and belief perseverance underlies all human reasoning."⁷ Or as Matthew Lebo and Daniel Cassino put it, "in motivated

⁴ The consistency measures come from the 215 surveys currently available for secondary analyses; data sources are described in Appendix II.

⁵ Larry M. Bartels, "Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions," *Political Behavior* 24 (June 2002): 117–150, at 138.

⁶ Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957); Ziva Kunda, "The Case for Motivated Reasoning," *Psychological Bulletin* 108 (1990): 636–647; Milton Lodge and Charles S. Taber, "Three Steps toward a Theory of Motivated Political Reasoning," in Arthur Lupia, Matthew D. McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin, eds., *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 183–213; Charles S. Taber and Milton Lodge, "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs," *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (July 2006): 755–769.

⁷ Taber and Lodge, "Motivated Skepticism," 756.

reasoning, ... it is important not just to get the right outcome, but also to get a certain preferred outcome, regardless of correctness.”⁸ Insofar as prior attitudes and beliefs are at stake, people will engage in motivated reasoning, and new information will therefore be absorbed in a biased fashion. The principal psychological mechanisms producing biased information processing include:

Selective judgment, also called motivated skepticism.

- People invest more time and cognitive resources in picking apart arguments or questioning information that challenges their current opinions than arguments and information confirming them; the former tend to receive skeptical scrutiny, the latter, uncritical acceptance. Skepticism, then, is asymmetrical.

Selective perception.

- People are more likely to get the message right when it is consistent with prior beliefs and more likely to miss it when it is not.

Selective memory.

- People are more likely to remember things that are consistent with current attitudes and to forget or misremember things that are inconsistent with them.

Selective exposure.

- People tend to seek out and attend to information from sources likely to confirm prior opinions and beliefs and to avoid information from sources likely to challenge them.

People can thus defend current beliefs and attitudes against discordant information by some combination of avoiding, disbelieving, misperceiving, misremembering, or forgetting it. The theory does not claim that current views are immune to new information, for it assumes that people also prefer their knowledge of the world to be accurate; hence, the “tension” noted by Charles Taber and Milton Lodge. The balance, Danielle Shani suggests, “hinges ... on the relative weight that people assign to reality itself against their desire to arrive at convenient conclusions.”⁹

The extent to which these psychological mechanisms are mobilized to defend current attitudes against discordant information thus depends on several variables. First, the more strongly held the prior attitude, the more it will be defended by one or more of these psychological devices; that is, the stronger

⁸ Matthew J. Lebo and Daniel Cassino, “The Aggregated Consequences of Motivated Reasoning and the Dynamics of Partisan Presidential Approval,” *Political Psychology* 28 (2007): 722.

⁹ Danielle Shani, “Know Your Colors: Can Knowledge Correct Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions?” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, 20–23 April 2006), 4.

the motive, the more biased the reasoning. Second, the more complex or ambiguous the situation, the more priors will hold sway; the more readily available unambiguously “objective” information, the more likely “reality” will prevail.¹⁰ Third, greater knowledge and sophistication do not necessarily produce greater objectivity in processing information, because they also enable more-effective exercises in motivated skepticism; when partisanship induces motivated skepticism, the informed may be more biased and thus more polarized along party lines than the uninformed.¹¹

THE IRAQ WAR AND ITS RATIONALES

The particulars of the Bush administration and the Iraq war created an informational context exceptionally conducive to motivated reasoning. Moreover, the nature of its challenges to prior beliefs led Republicans and Democrats to adopt quite different combinations from the menu of psychological options for defending current opinions from discordant information.

The administration portrayed the Iraq invasion as a response to the terrorist attacks of September 11 on New York and Washington, DC. Saddam Hussein’s complicity in the attacks was suspected and sometimes alleged but remained unproven, so the main rationale for compelling “regime change” was that Iraq was pursuing weapons of mass destruction (WMD), including nuclear weapons, that would eventually be used to blackmail or attack the United States and its allies. The United States and its “coalition of the willing” defeated Saddam Hussein’s military forces handily, taking control of all of Iraq’s major cities in less than three weeks. But Hussein’s fall triggered widespread looting, metastatic sectarian and criminal violence, and the beginnings of an insurgency that grew increasingly lethal over the next few years. Moreover, the principal *casus belli* was gradually discredited, as months of diligent searching failed to turn up the alleged WMD. Neither could any persuasive evidence of Saddam’s complicity in September 11 be found. The Bush administration thereupon adopted new rationales for fighting: that the war was now the central front in a global war on terrorism and that victory would lead to the spread of democracy and peace in the Middle East.

Developments in Iraq thus presented quite different challenges to the beliefs and opinions of Republicans and Democrats. Ordinary Republicans had been virtually unanimous in their approval of Bush after the trauma of September 11 and remained overwhelmingly supportive when the President ordered the invasion of Iraq 15 months later (Figure 1). As the war progressed, however, they faced an onslaught of information calling into question their prior beliefs about the wisdom and necessity of the war and soundness of

¹⁰ Lodge and Taber, “Three Steps,” 211.

¹¹ Taber and Lodge, “Motivated Skepticism,” 757; Shani, “Know Your Colors,” 13; see also John Zaller, *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

the President's judgment. The theory of motivated reasoning suggests that they would tend to misperceive, disbelieve, or avoid the discordant news. The theory also suggests that people with the strongest prior commitment to the President would be the most likely to display these modes of motivated reasoning, as would the most politically informed and engaged Republicans.

Democrats (and, to a lesser extent, independents) had no special commitment to Bush; indeed, their biases lay in the opposite direction. Insofar as they supported the war, it was because they believed that invading Iraq and deposing Saddam were necessary to remove a threat to the United States and would lead to peace and democracy in the Middle East.¹² The failure to find WMD or evidence of Saddam's involvement in September 11, and the chaos and bloodshed in Iraq that followed the invasion, left them with no reason to support the ongoing war other than to avoid a precipitous exit that might compound the damage. They would readily perceive and accept negative information about the war, conclude that it had been a bad idea all along, and take it as grounds for rejecting the President who had initiated it; their problem would be in reconciling their previous support for the war and belief in its premises with their current heartfelt opposition to it.

THE DATA

The data for testing these hypotheses and assessing the contribution of motivated reasoning to the stark divisions of partisan opinion on the war and the President come from four online surveys that included questions designed to measure attitudes and beliefs about various aspects of the Iraq war. Two studies surveyed subsets of 1,000 respondents embedded in the much larger 2006 and 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Surveys (CCES), both conducted in October–November of the election year. The third was the 2007 CCES study of 2,000 respondents conducted in November–December 2007. The fourth was undertaken courtesy of Time Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS) in January 2008 and included 1,030 respondents.¹³ These studies are

¹² Jacobson, *Divider*, Figures 5.5 and 5.6.

¹³ Stephen Ansolabehere, COOPERATIVE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION STUDY, 2006: COMMON CONTENT. [Computer File] Release 2: 14 November 2007, Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. [producer]; Stephen Ansolabehere, COOPERATIVE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION STUDY, 2007: COMMON CONTENT. [Computer File] Release 1: 13 February 2008, Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. [producer]; Stephen Ansolabehere, COOPERATIVE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION STUDY, 2008: COMMON CONTENT. [Computer File] Release 1: 2 February 2009, Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. [producer]; Gary C. Jacobson, COOPERATIVE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION STUDY, 2006: UCSD CONTENT. [Computer File] Release 2: [2007], UCSD [producer]; Gary C. Jacobson, COOPERATIVE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION STUDY, 2008: UCSD CONTENT. [Computer File] Release: 5 February 2009, UCSD [producer]; Gary C. Jacobson, "Question Order Effects on Reported Memories and Perceptions Regarding the Iraq War," TESS Research Report, October, 2009.

described in Appendix II. To facilitate comparisons across surveys, analysis is confined to registered voters.¹⁴

All four surveys included standard questions about party identification, ideology, political interest, presidential approval, and demographics. The CCES studies also included a wide variety of additional political questions, and the TESS study contained a question order experiment. The focus here will be on questions probing: first, respondents' current support for the Iraq war; second, respondents' current beliefs in the war's main initial premises, that Iraq possessed WMD at the time the United States invaded Iraq and that Saddam Hussein had been involved personally in the terrorist attacks of September 11 on Washington, DC and New York; third, respondents' memories of opinions on the war at the time it was initiated; and fourth, respondents' memories of beliefs in the war's premises at the time it was initiated. Respondents to the CCES surveys were also asked if they believed George W. Bush was chosen by God to lead a global war against terrorism. The texts of these questions are in Appendix I.

BELIEFS ABOUT THE WAR'S PREMISES

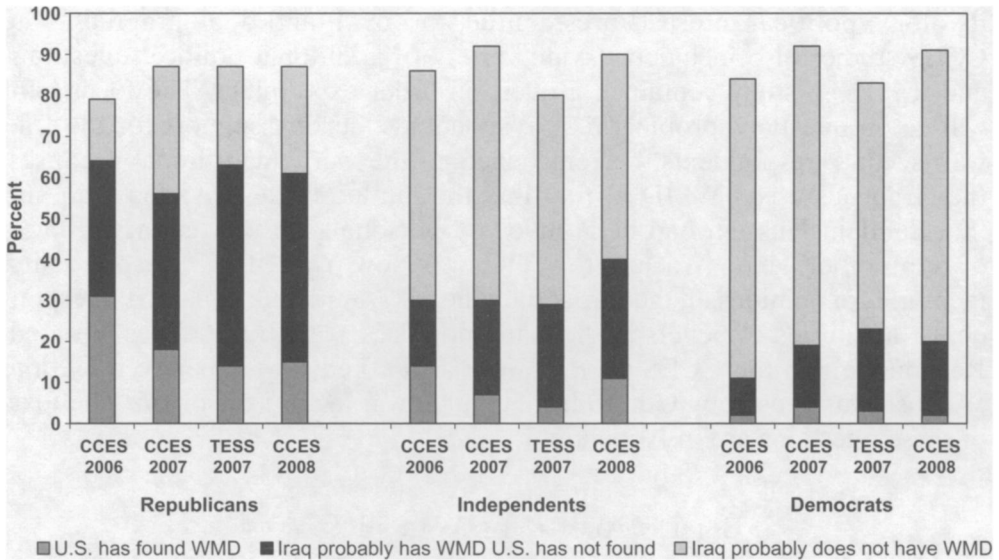
The theory of motivated reasoning suggests that information that might erode positive views of the war would be readily accepted by Democrats but either avoided, misperceived, or rejected as false by Republicans. Moreover, Republicans with the strongest commitment to Bush and greatest political engagement would be most likely to display symptoms of biased information processing. An examination of beliefs about the war's premises, that Iraq possessed WMD and that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in September 11, provides a test of these hypotheses.

Surveys taken prior to the war found widespread consensus that Iraq did possess WMD. Although none were found, most Republicans continued to believe that Iraq had WMD at the time the United States invaded long after the administration had officially abandoned the claim and American forces in Iraq had given up looking for them, while Democrats and independents grew increasingly skeptical.¹⁵ Figure 2, based on data detailed in Table A1 of Appendix I, shows that more than five years into the war, a non-trivial proportion of Republicans still believed that WMD had actually been found, and a larger proportion thought they probably existed but had not yet been found. Thus until the end of Bush's presidency, more than 60 percent of Republicans continued to credit what had once been the administration's chief justification

¹⁴ Citizens who said they were not registered to vote were seriously underrepresented in the 2006 CCES. The substantive findings reported here do not change appreciably when the full samples are analyzed instead.

¹⁵ Jacobson, *Divider*, Figure 6.10.

FIGURE 2
Belief in Iraq's WMD



for invading Iraq. Independents and Democrats, in contrast, were much less likely to retain such beliefs.

Several manifestations of motivated reasoning can be detected in Republicans' continuing belief that Iraq possessed WMD. Those who believed WMD had actually been found certainly managed to miss the well-publicized fact that, to its profound embarrassment, the Bush administration never turned up any. Those who believed WMD probably existed but had not been found either misread or consciously rejected official reports to the contrary. There is evidence for both. For example, a survey taken in September–October 2004 found that 57 percent of Bush supporters got the Duelfer Report, commissioned and accepted by the administration, exactly backward, believing incorrectly that it had concluded that Iraq possessed WMD or had a major program to build them. Another 18 percent got the report right but disbelieved it—an exercise in motivated skepticism.¹⁶ Any inclination toward skepticism could be reinforced by stories still circulating in the conservative media as late as 2006 that WMD had actually been found.¹⁷ Even if aware that no WMD had been

¹⁶ Steven Kull, "The Separate Realities of Bush and Kerry Supporters," The PIPA/Knowledge Networks Poll: The American Public on International Issues, 2004, accessed at <http://zzpat.tripod.com/cvp/pipa.html>, 24 November 2004.

¹⁷ "Report: Hundreds of WMDs found in Iraq," Fox News, 22 June 2006, accessed at <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2006/06/22/report-hundreds-wmds-iraq/>, 10 July 2009. The claim was based on the discovery of pre-1991 ordnance contaminated with degraded chemical nerve agents.

found, Republicans could take comfort in Donald Rumsfeld's maxim that "the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence,"¹⁸ resolving the irreducible residual uncertainty in favor of their prior beliefs.

Belief in the war's second unconfirmed premise, that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in September 11, was less widespread but also more common among Republicans. In the three CCES surveys that asked about his involvement, an average of about 18 percent of respondents reported believing that he was involved, while 65 percent said he was not.¹⁹ Among Republicans, it was 29 percent, compared to 14 percent among independents and 12 percent among Democrats.²⁰

The theory of motivated reasoning holds that people with more-strongly held attitudes are more likely to resist discordant information than people with more-weakly held attitudes. Consistent with this hypothesis, in three of the four surveys, self-identified strong Republicans were the most likely to continue to think Iraq had WMD. Strong Republicans were also the most likely to believe that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in September 11. The CCES studies provide additional leverage on this hypothesis, for they identified a set of respondents whose religious beliefs made support of the President and his decision to go to war especially compelling and therefore resistant to discordant information. The most-tenacious Republican supporters of Bush and the war were the Party's white, born-again or evangelical Christians.²¹ After September 11, the idea that God had chosen Bush to lead a global war of good against evil circulated in their communities;²² insofar as it was believed, it implied a religious duty to give the President and his policies steadfast support. The CCES surveys thus posed a question designed to determine the prevalence of such beliefs. After answering an initial question about belief in divine intervention generally (see Appendix I), respondents were asked, "Do you believe that George W. Bush was chosen by God to lead the United States in a global war on terrorism?" The distribution of responses, averaged across the three surveys, is displayed at the bottom of the columns in Figure 3 (distributions from the individual surveys are displayed in Tables A2 and A3 in Appendix I). On average, 31 percent of Republicans said they believed Bush was God's chosen instrument, and another 24 percent said they were not sure, which, in light of the responses displayed in Figure 3, most often meant "maybe." A much

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, News Transcript, 2 June 2002, accessed at <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3490>, 15 January 2006.

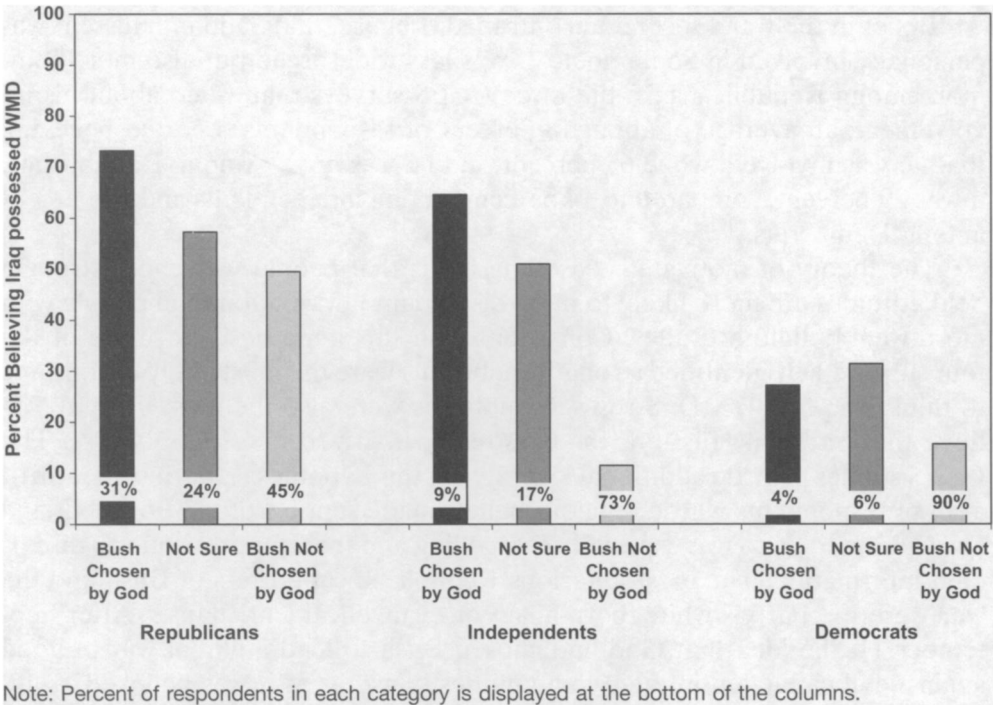
¹⁹ The ranges were 15–21 percent and 63–67 percent across the three CCES; there was no evidence of any trend over the 2006–2008 time period.

²⁰ The ranges were 26–32 percent for Republicans, 11–17 percent for independents, and 11–14 percent for Democrats.

²¹ Jacobson, *Divider*, Figures 6.15 and 6.16.

²² See, for example, the comments of Ralph Reed quoted in Howard Fineman and Martha Brant, "This is Our Life Now," *Newsweek*, 3 December 2001, 29.

FIGURE 3
Belief in Bush's Divine Mission and Belief in Iraq's WMD



smaller share of independents took either of these positions, and nine of ten Democrats said that Bush was not God's chosen instrument.

Respondents who believed Bush was God's chosen instrument were much more likely to believe Iraq possessed WMD (average of 68 percent) than those who did not (25 percent), and large differences between the two groups reappear within partisan categories (73 to 50 percent among Republicans, 65 to 12 percent among independents, and 27 percent to 14 percent among Democrats). They were also much more likely to believe that Saddam Hussein was complicit in September 11 (average of 39 percent, compared to 12 percent of other respondents). Thus the subset of Republicans with the most powerful incentive to engage in biased information processing showed the most evidence of doing so.

Another source of variation in motivated reasoning deserves attention. In general, we would expect the accuracy of information to increase with political knowledge and involvement. Under motivated reasoning, however, resistance to discordant information may increase with knowledge and involvement. Knowledge batteries are not available for all of the surveys, but they do contain measures of education and political interest. I examined the effects of both of these variables, and both were related to beliefs about the Iraq war's

premises, but political interest had a greater effect than education. For example 85 percent of the very interested Democrats thought it unlikely that Iraq had WMD, compared to 52 percent of those who were not very interested. Republicans very interested in politics, by contrast, were significantly *more* likely to believe in Iraq's WMD, 67 percent to 52 percent for the rest.²³ I thus use political interest to test for the effects of motivated reasoning in the multivariate analyses reported in the next section.

MODELING THE EFFECTS OF MOTIVATED REASONING ON BELIEFS IN THE WAR'S PREMISES

To assess the joint effects of these diverse sources of motivated reasoning on beliefs about the war's premises, I estimated a set of ordered logit models with beliefs about WMD and Saddam's complicity in September 11 as the dependent variables. I chose ordered logit because the dependent variables offered three categories: believing in the premise, disbelieving it, or being unsure. The independent variables include party identification, ideology, beliefs about Bush's divine selection, interest in politics, and a term interacting political interest with party identification. I also estimated models that included a variety of demographic variables (age, sex, race, education, and income); few showed significant effects, and none altered the coefficients on the variables of interest, so I present only the stripped-down models here.

Table 1 lists the results of models estimating belief in Iraq's WMD from the three CCES surveys (the TESS survey did not include the question on Bush's divine selection). The fourth column of the table shows the average estimated effect of each variable—that is, the difference in probability of believing Iraq possessed WMD between respondents with the lowest and highest values on the variable with the other variables set at their mean values.²⁴ All three equations tell the same story. Respondents who believed that Bush was chosen or even might have been chosen by God to lead a global war on terrorism were much more likely to continue to believe that Iraq possessed WMD at the time of the American invasion. Conservatives were much more likely to believe in WMD as well, liberals much less likely. Partisanship interacts strongly with political interest to affect beliefs; among the very interested, beliefs were strongly related to partisanship; among those not very interested, partisanship had little or no independent effect.

²³ In the 2006 CCES, about 60 percent of respondents said they were very interested in politics; in the 2007 CCES, the figure was about 35 percent; in 2008, it was 68 percent; these percentages were consistent across partisan categories in each survey; the 2006 CCES did not ask the interest question of all respondents (about 26 percent were missed), hence the reduced number of cases for 2006 in Table 3; the TESS survey did not include a political interest question.

²⁴ Estimates were made by using *Clarify*; see Michael Tomz, Jason Wittenbert, and Gary King, "Clarify: Software for Interpreting and Presenting Statistical Results," 5 January 2003, accessed at <http://www.stanford.edu/~tomz/software/clarify.pdf>, 10 November 2008.

TABLE 1
Belief that Iraq Possessed WMD at the Time the United States Invaded

	CCES Study			Average Effect ^a
	2006	2007	2008	
Party identification	-.01 (.09)	.18 (.04)***	-.01 (.09)	.06
Ideology	.78 (.18)***	.30 (.09)***	.41 (.18)*	.36
Bush was chosen by God	.95 (.28)***	.95 (.22)***	1.38 (.25)***	.24
Not sure Bush was chosen by God	1.16 (.31)***	.69 (.17)***	1.00 (.34)**	.20
Very interested in politics	-.79 (.24)***	-.78 (.14)***	-.21 (.23)	} .32
Party ID × very interested	.61 (.13)***	.35 (.07)***	.34 (.11)**	
Cut 1	.01 (.19)	-.02 (.10)	.25 (.21)	
Cut 2	1.07 (.22)	.85 (.11)	.86 (.22)	
Wald chi squared	173.61	271.76	143.56	
Pseudo R ²	.28	.15	.18	
Number of cases	563	1,627	714	

^aEstimated change in probability between the lowest and highest values of the variable, with the other variables set at their mean values.

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, two-tailed tests.

Note: The dependent variable is 1 if respondent believed Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the attacks of September 11; 0 if unsure, -1 if respondent believed he was not involved; party identification is a 7-point scale from strong Democrat (-3) to strong Republican (3); ideology is a 5-point scale from very liberal (-2) to very conservative (2); the other variables take values of 1 if true, 0 if not; robust standard errors are in parentheses. WMD, weapons of mass destruction.

The coefficients indicate that with the other variables set at their means, believing in Bush’s divine appointment increased the probability of believing that Iraq possessed WMD by an average of .24 in the three equations; the average estimated difference between very liberal and very conservative respondents was .36; and the difference between very interested strong Republicans and very interested strong Democrats averaged .32. The mean estimates for respondents with characteristics least and most likely to produce beliefs in Iraq’s WMD were .04 and .88, respectively. Clearly, respondents with the strongest motives for continuing to credit the principal rationale for the Iraq war showed the strongest tendency to do so.

The pattern is similar in some respects regarding the question of Saddam Hussein’s involvement in September 11, although far fewer respondents held this view than believed in WMD. The ordered logit estimates are in Table 2. Again, belief in Bush’s divine selection and partisanship (among those very interested in politics) are strongly related to beliefs in Saddam’s complicity; however, ideology was significant only in the 2006 survey. With the other variables set at their means, belief in Bush’s divine appointment increased the probability of belief in Saddam’s complicity by .19, and the difference between strong partisans who were very interested in politics was .13. The averages for respondents with characteristics predicting the lowest and highest probability of believing were .06 and .66, respectively. Again, respondents with the strongest motivation were the likeliest to express beliefs that justified support for the war.

TABLE 2

Belief that Saddam Hussein Was Personally Involved in September 11

	CCES Study			Average Effect ^a
	2006	2007	2008	
Party identification	.22 (.10)*	.04 (.05)	-.03 (.08)	-.03
Ideology	.79 (.18)***	.10 (.10)	.08 (.14)	.11
Bush was chosen by God	.90 (.41)*	1.41 (.23)***	1.55 (.27)***	.19
Not sure Bush was chosen by God	1.24 (.32)***	1.22 (.19)***	.74 (.34)**	.13
Very interested in politics	-1.64 (.26)***	-1.29 (.14)***	-1.10 (.23)***	} .13
Party ID × very interested	.43 (.12)***	.23 (.07)**	.23 (.10)*	
Cut 1	.55 (.20)	1.08 (.27)	.37 (.21)	
Cut 2	1.87 (.25)	2.04 (.28)	1.47 (.24)	
Wald chi squared	131.63	204.01	121.22	
Pseudo R ²	.20	.12	.12	
Number of cases	561	1,625	718	

^aEstimated change in probability between the lowest and highest values of the variable, with the other variables set at their mean values.

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, two-tailed tests.

Note: The dependent variable is 1 if respondent believed Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the attacks of September 11; 0 if unsure, -1 if respondent believed he was not involved; party identification is a 7-point scale from strong Democrat (-3) to strong Republican (3); ideology is a 5-point scale from very liberal (-2) to very conservative (2); the other variables take values of 1 if true, 0 if not; robust standard errors are in parentheses.

I left one very important incentive to engage in biased information processing about the war's premises out of these equations: attitudes toward G.W. Bush. I did so for two reasons: collinearity with other independent variables (party identification, ideology, and beliefs about his relationship with the Almighty), and potential endogeneity (people who believe Iraq had WMD and that Saddam was complicit in September 11 would be more likely to approve of Bush's performance). Nonetheless, when a measure of Bush's job approval is added to the equations, the basic relationships are attenuated but retain their signs and, in most cases, statistical significance. Of course, Bush approval has a strong effect in every equation. On average in the three surveys, 72 percent of respondents who strongly approved of Bush's performance thought that Iraq probably had WMD when the United States invaded, compared to 12 percent of respondents who strongly disapproved; the comparable figures for beliefs about Saddam's complicity in September 11 are 43 percent and 6 percent, respectively.

RECONSTRUCTED MEMORIES

The analysis so far mainly provides evidence of motivated reasoning among Republicans. It is harder to detect biased information processing among Democrats using these questions for the simple reason that Democrats were less likely to have strong priors to defend against the official information contradicting

the war's premises. If anything, their biases would incline them to credit information that discredited the administration and its war policies. More clear-cut evidence of motivated reasoning among Democrats is provided by survey questions asking respondents to remember what they believed in the months preceding the March 2003 invasion. All four surveys asked whether, at that time, respondents had believed Iraq possessed WMD, and the three CCES surveys also asked if they had believed that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in September 11. A large majority of respondents—from 89 to 95 percent in these surveys—said they did remember and were willing to answer the question. Their responses can be instructively compared to the results of surveys taken in late 2002 and early 2003, before the war began. Figure 4 displays the average distribution of responses to the questions tapping memory of belief in the war's two central premises.

The results of this comparison are striking. The evidence suggests that a rather large proportion of Democrats and independents reconstructed their memories to match their current beliefs. In eight surveys taken prior to the war, between 57 and 83 percent of Democrats said they thought Iraq possessed WMD; the average was 71 percent.²⁵ But in the CCES and TESS surveys, less than half this proportion remembered believing in WMD; the average difference between Democrats' remembered views on WMD and those expressed in surveys taken before the war is thus a remarkable 38 percentage points. The pattern among independents is similar although less dramatic, with a difference of about 22 points between remembered opinions and those measured in the earlier surveys. Republican memories, in contrast, matched opinions expressed in the months leading up to the war exactly. Panel data would of course provide more definitive evidence of faulty individual memories, but the magnitude of these cross-sectional differences, and their confirmation through four separate studies, leaves no reasonable doubt that a substantial proportion of Democrats and independents either misremember past belief in Iraq's WMD or refuse to admit to it when responding to surveys.²⁶

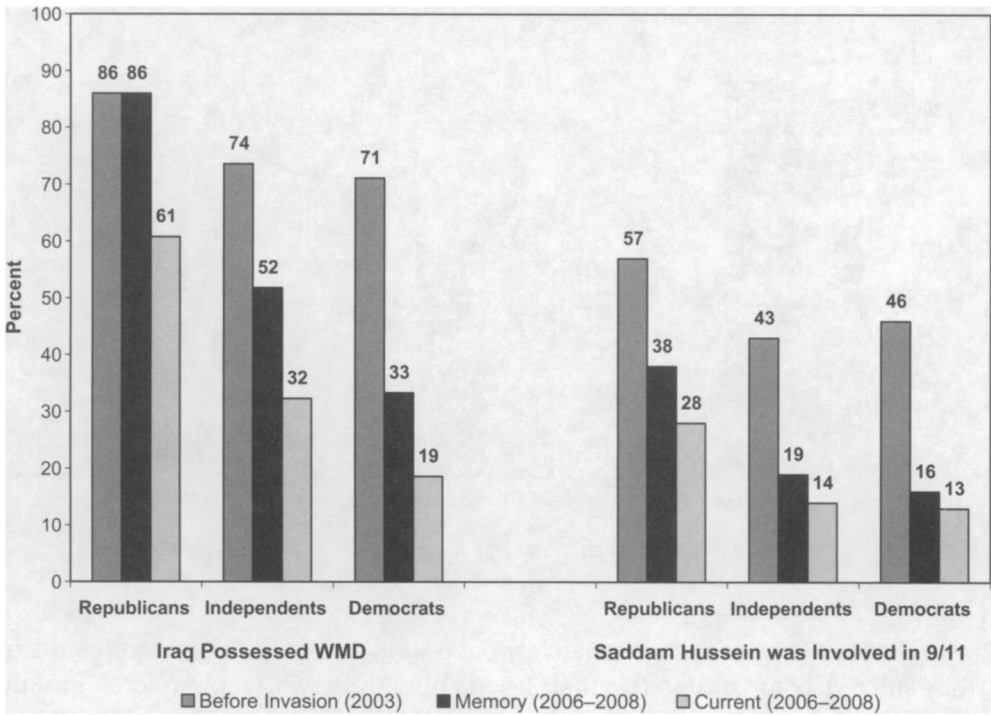
On the question of Saddam Hussein's personal involvement in September 11, the gap between remembered beliefs of Democrats and independents and those expressed in the months leading up to the war is also wide.²⁷ Only about 16 percent of Democrats remembered having believed Saddam was involved, whereas in five polls taken before the war, between 38 and 50 percent of Democrats (average, 46 percent) expressed this view. The difference is nearly as large for independents; respondents in both categories produced memories

²⁵ Data are from five CBS News/*New York Times*, an ABC News/*Washington Post*, and two Gallup surveys taken between September 2002 and February 2003.

²⁶ The TESS study included a split-half experiment to determine whether question order—memory questions before or after current belief question—made any difference in the distribution of responses; it did not; see Jacobson, "Question Order Effects," 7–13.

²⁷ Data are from three CBS News/*New York Times* and two Gallup surveys taken between August 2002 and March 2003.

FIGURE 4
Remembered and Current Beliefs about the Iraq War's Justifications

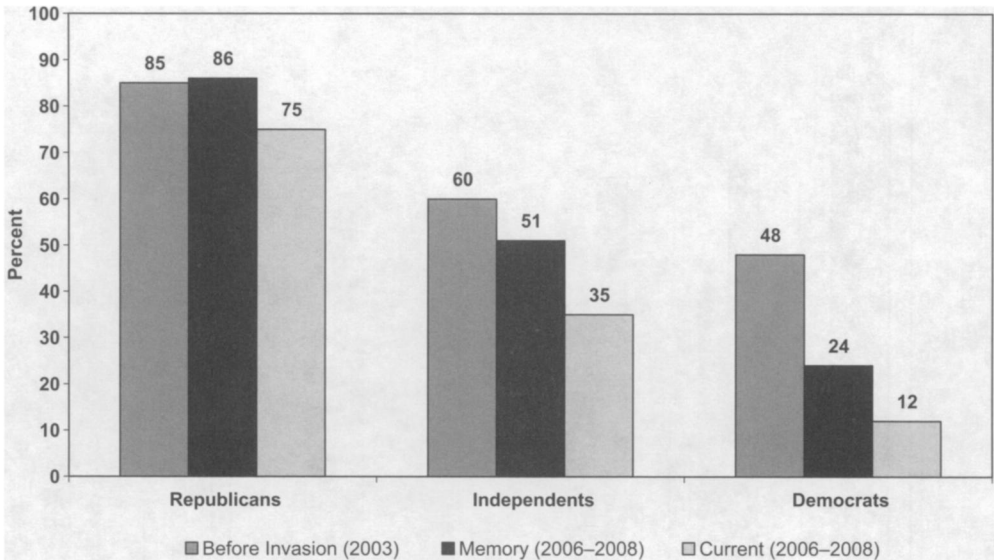


that were far closer to their current views than those expressed during the run-up to the war.

Democrats and independents tended to forget that they had once believed in Iraq's WMD and Saddam's complicity in September 11; they also, not at all coincidentally, tended to forget that they once supported the war (Figure 5). In 27 surveys taken between 1 February 2003 and the beginning of the war, between 36 and 61 percent of Democrats (average, 48 percent) and between 52 and 70 percent of independents (average, 60 percent) said they had favored going to war.²⁸ But only about 24 percent of Democrats, and 51 percent of independents, remembered having done so at that time. Republicans in these surveys, by contrast, remembered favoring going to war to the same extent as Republican respondents in the pre-war surveys. Democrats' selective memories contribute to the wide party differences on the war. An average of 26 percent of Democrats who remembered once believing that Iraq possessed WMD expressed current support for the war, compared to less than 2 percent of those

²⁸ Data are from ABC News/*Washington Post*, CBS News/*New York Times*, Gallup, *Time/CNN*, *Newsweek*, *Los Angeles Times*, Pew, and NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* surveys taken between 1 February and 18 March 2003.

FIGURE 5
Remembered and Current Support for the Iraq War



who did not. Of those who remember once supporting the war, 34 percent said they still did, compared to less than 1 percent of those who remembered initially opposing it.

Selective Exposure

According to the theory of motivated reasoning, another way to protect prior attitudes is to avoid exposure to discordant information. Americans are now able to draw on ideologically diverse sources of news and information, and there is plenty of evidence that they tend to select sources more likely to confirm than to challenge their political opinions.²⁹ Specifically regarding Iraq, Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis found strong variation across users of different news sources in acceptance of the Bush administration's version of Iraqi realities and perceptions of established facts about the war, with the Fox News audience showing the highest levels of support for the war and misperception of facts that might have undermined it.³⁰ The 2006 and 2007 CCES surveys also asked a subset of respondents where they got most of their national

²⁹ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "News Audiences Increasingly Polarized," news release, 8 June 2004, accessed at <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=215>, 11 May 2009; Natalie Jomini Stroud, "Media Use and Political Predispositions: Revisiting the Concept of Selective Exposure" *Political Behavior* 30 (September 2008): 341–366.

³⁰ Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis, "Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War," *Political Science Quarterly* 118 (Winter 2003–2004): 575–590.

news and found sharp differences between the viewers of Fox News and viewers of other news programs.³¹ An average of 64 percent of respondents who watched Fox News still thought that Iraq possessed WMD, compared to 22 percent of respondents who watched other news programs. Of course, the Fox audience was heavily skewed toward Republicans (in these surveys, nearly half said they watched Fox, compared to 7 percent of Democrats and 23 percent of independents). But among Republicans, 72 percent of the Fox watchers believed Iraq possessed WMD, compared to 46 percent of the rest. Democrats and independents who watched Fox were also significantly more likely to believe in the WMD.³² When a “Fox News Watcher” variable is added to the equations in Table 1, the coefficients are positive and significant; with the other variables set at their means, watching Fox News increases the probability of believing Iraq possessed WMD by .26 in the 2006 data and by .16 in the 2007 data. Unfortunately, these surveys provide no data on television news viewing for about 70 percent of the respondents, so I had to drop this variable from the main analyses. Still, the limited data available provide clear evidence of selective exposure and its close association with beliefs about the war’s premises.

Motivated Reasoning and Partisan Polarization

How did the biased information processing produced by the various modes of motivated reasoning contribute to the wide partisan divisions on the Iraq war? To address this question, I estimated an ordered logit model with support for the war as the dependent variable and party identification, ideology, beliefs about Bush’s divine selection, current and remembered beliefs about Iraq’s WMD and Saddam Hussein’s complicity in September 11 as independent variables (memory of belief in Saddam’s complicity in September 11 had no independent effect in any of the equations and thus was dropped from this part of the analysis). Table 3 lists the results. The estimated coefficients confirm that beliefs and memories about the war’s premises were strongly and significantly related to support for the war; only one of the nine relevant coefficients fails to meet the $p < .001$ level of statistical significance (Saddam’s involvement, 2008, $p = .11$). Table 4 displays the differences in the probability of supporting the war associated with beliefs and memories regarding the war’s rationales as calculated from the equations in Table 3. Each of the three variables had an appreciable effect; the probability of supporting the war was an average of .25 higher if respondents believed Iraq possessed WMD, .28 higher if they remember believing in the WMD at the war’s outset, and .17 higher if they believed in Saddam Hussein’s complicity in September 11. Collectively, opinions

³¹ Jacobson, *Divider*, Figure 9.7 and Table 9.2.

³² Fox watchers were also about twice as likely as other respondents to believe Saddam had been complicit in September 11 (28 percent to 13 percent), although all of the difference here is accounted for by Democrats and independents; among Republicans, belief in Saddam’s complicity was about the same—around 28 percent—regardless of primary television news source.

TABLE 3
Beliefs About and Support for the Iraq War

	CCES Study		
	2006	2007	2008
Party identification	.43 (.08)***	.34 (.05)***	.41 (.06)***
Ideology	.26 (.21)	.32 (.10)**	.28 (.19)
Bush was chosen by God	1.31 (.39)***	1.23 (.29)***	1.09 (.35)**
Not sure Bush was chosen by God	.95 (.29)***	.32 (.20)	.57 (.35)
Iraq had WMD	.86 (.16)***	.56 (.10)***	.60 (.15)***
Remember believing Iraq had WMD	1.04 (.19)***	.58 (.10)***	.94 (.20)***
Saddam involved in September 11	.63 (.20)***	.38 (.11)***	.28 (.18)
Cut 1	.53 (.28)	2.30 (.28)	2.87 (.66)
Cut 2	1.20 (.27)	3.52 (.29)	3.67 (.68)
Wald chi squared	193.23	467.80	186.40
Pseudo R ²	.52	.32	.41
Number of cases	760	1,625	710

p < .01, *p < .001, two-tailed tests.

Note: The dependent variable is 1 if respondent thought the war in Iraq was the right thing to do, 0 if unsure, -1 if mistake or wrong thing; the other variables are as described in Tables 3 and 4; robust standard errors are in parentheses.

on these questions made a very large difference in the probability of supporting the war. Among respondents who believed all three, the average probability of supporting the war was .70; among those who believed none of them, it was .05.

As the coefficients on party identification indicate, support for the war was strongly related to partisanship, but partisan divisions were much wider if respondents displayed evidence of motivated reasoning as measured by the beliefs about the war's premises. For example, on average, the estimated difference in the probability of supporting the war between a weak Republican who believed Iraq possessed WMD and that Saddam was complicit in September 11 and a weak Democrat who did not and who claimed never to have believed in the WMD was .78; the difference in the same probability between a weak Republican who no longer believed these rationales for the war and a weak Democrat who remembered having once believed Iraq had WMD was .35, a difference of .44.³³ For strong partisans, this average difference was .39; for independents leaning toward a party, it was .50.

The same pattern appears in simple bivariate analyses; for example, Republicans (of any strength) who believed that Iraq possessed WMD supported the war an average of 84 percent of the time across the four surveys (the TESS data can be used here), compared to only 3 percent of Democrats who said they had not thought that Iraq was hiding WMD at the time of the invasion, producing a partisan gap of 81 percentage points. By comparison, an average of 54 percent of Republicans who did not now believe Iraq possessed WMD supported the war, as did 26 percent of Democrats who remembered

³³ Estimated using *Clarify* with the other variables set at their means for the respondent's party.

TABLE 4

Estimated Effects of Beliefs on the Probability of Supporting the Iraq War

<i>Beliefs and Memories</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>Average</i>
Iraq had WMD	.42	.36	.42	
Iraq did not have WMD	.12	.16	.18	
Difference	.30	.20	.24	.25
Iraq had WMD (memory)	.40	.33	.42	
Iraq did not have WMD (memory)	.08	.13	.10	
Difference	.32	.20	.32	.28
Saddam involved in September 11	.42	.34	.35	
Saddam not involved in September 11	.17	.19	.24	
Difference	.25	.15	.11	.17
Yes to all three	.82	.61	.68	
No to all three	.03	.07	.06	
Difference	.79	.54	.62	.65

Note: Entries are the probability of supporting the war with the other variables set at their means, estimated by *Clarify* from the ordered logit equations in Table 6.

once believing in WMD, a gap of only 28 points. By this evidence, then, modes of motivated reasoning made a major contribution to the unusually wide partisan divisions revealed by surveys assessing popular support for the Iraq war.

The equations also show that beliefs about Bush's divine selection were strongly related to support for the war over and above their effect on beliefs about the war's premises. In simple terms, between 78 and 88 percent of respondents in the surveys who thought Bush had been chosen by God supported the war, compared to 27 to 31 percent of those who did not.³⁴ Belief in Bush's divine mission was of course far more prevalent among Republicans than among Democrats (Figure 3, Table A2). Not surprisingly, it was most prevalent among the Party's conservative Christians, who had recognized Bush as a like-minded believer since he first sought the White House. About 80 percent of those who believed in Bush's divine mission described themselves as born-again Christians; about three-quarters classified themselves as conservatives, and 70 percent, as Republicans. The highly skewed partisan distribution of theological views therefore also contributed to the extraordinarily wide partisan differences on the war.

PARTISAN DIFFERENCES IN CAUSAL SEQUENCES

The same variables predicting polarized opinions on the Iraq war also predict polarized opinions on the President's performance; substitute presidential

³⁴ The 2008 CCES included questions on beliefs about evolution and creationism; 75 percent of those who said that God had chosen Bush also said they believed that God had created the world in six days; see David C. Barker, Jon Hurwitz, and Traci L. Nelson, "Of Crusades and Culture Wars: 'Messianic' Militarism and Political Conflict in the United States," *Journal of Politics* 70 (April 2008): 207–322.

approval for war support as the dependent variable in the equations in Table 3 and the pattern of coefficients is very similar. This is hardly surprising, because views on the President and the war are highly correlated (about 89 percent of respondents in the four surveys who express opinions on Bush and the war either support both or reject both). But this relationship raises an important issue that these data alone cannot resolve: the direction of causality remains ambiguous, because opinions on Bush, the war, and its rationales obviously had reciprocal effects on one another. That is, exercises in motivated reasoning were a consequence of, as well as a contributor to, the huge partisan differences in evaluations of this President and the war that appear in the survey data.

That said, the findings reported here, along with the broader evolution of public attitudes toward the war and the President, suggest that the wide partisan divisions on both were generated by two distinct processes. Commitment to Bush was the primary reason Republicans continued to support the war, while disillusionment with the war was the primary reason Democrats and, to a lesser extent, independents developed such strongly negative opinions of the President. Viewed schematically, the typical sequence among Republicans was:

attitudes toward Bush→opinions on the war→beliefs about the war's premises;
among Democrats, the sequence was:
beliefs about the war's premises→opinions on the war→attitudes toward Bush.

The trajectories depicted in Figure 1 reflect these distinct processes. Bush's response to the trauma of September 11 left him with a deep reservoir of support among ordinary Republicans, and they remained overwhelmingly supportive of the President when he ordered the invasion of Iraq. Thereafter, most of them continued to back both the President and the war, while rejecting, ignoring, or downplaying discordant news from Iraq. Those who believed God had chosen Bush to lead a global war against terrorism, and who were therefore especially motivated to continue supporting him and the war, were especially unreceptive to dissonant information and thus inclined to express views of Iraqi realities that justified the war.

Nearly half the Democrats and about 60 percent of independents had backed the invasion just prior to its onset, and almost all who did so thought that Iraq possessed WMD. For example, in the three CBS News/*New York Times* surveys taken in January and February 2003, 87 to 90 percent of Democrats who supported going to war believed Iraq possessed WMD; the February survey also asked about Saddam Hussein's involvement in September 11, and in that survey, 94 percent of Democrats who supported the war believed either that Saddam was involved in September 11 or that Iraq was hiding WMD or both. Those who favored going to war also approved of Bush's performance at rates averaging 41 points higher than those who did not. When neither WMD nor a September 11 connection could be confirmed, and with continuing

sectarian and criminal violence in Iraq and a growing list of American casualties, many Democrats (and not a few independents) who had initially backed the war and the President no longer had any reason to do so. Disillusionment was sufficiently profound to induce many of them to forget, or at least to refuse to acknowledge, that they had once believed in the war's justifications and had supported the venture.

Once disillusioned, and having developed strongly negative opinions of Bush, Democrats also exhibited strongly biased information processing. Regarding the war's origins, for example, about 95 percent of Democrats in the 2006 and 2008 CCES surveys who thought the war was a mistake believed that, in making the case for war, the Bush administration had deliberately misled the public; two other recent national surveys put that figure at 87 percent.³⁵ No one knows for sure how confident the President and his advisers were in their judgment that Iraq was making and hiding WMD, but their reactions suggest that they were as surprised as anyone when they could not find at least some hidden caches or manufacturing facilities. But primed to think the worst of the President, Democrats who had turned against the war resolved the uncertainties about Bush's candor in his disfavor.

In sum, partisan differences on the war and the President grew extraordinarily wide because the particulars of the war and the administration both permitted and inspired many Americans to engage in various modes of motivated reasoning. This is not to say that, absent biased information processing, partisan differences on these questions would disappear. In fact, support for the war was consistently higher among Republicans who did *not* believe that Iraq possessed WMD, that Saddam Hussein was involved in September 11, or that Bush was chosen by God to lead the global war on terrorism than among Democrats who *did* believe these things. Yet partisans who expressed opposing views on them displayed by far the most divergent evaluations of the war and of Bush. The availability of ideologically diverse news outlets also facilitated what emerged from these myriad processes as the most polarized distribution of partisan opinions on a president and a war ever measured.

APPENDIX I: SURVEY QUESTIONS AND DATA FOR FIGURES 2, 3, AND 4

I. Considering everything, do you think the United States did the right thing in going to war with Iraq or do you think it was a mistake? (CCES 2006, 2007; TESS)

1. U.S. did the right thing
2. It was a mistake
3. Don't know

³⁵ CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll, 9–11 March 2007; Gallup Poll, 21–24 February 2008.

IA. Considering everything, do you think the United States did the right thing or the wrong thing in going to war with Iraq? (CCES 2008)

1. U.S. did the right thing
2. U.S. did the wrong thing
3. Don't know

II. Has the U.S. found Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction in Iraq? [IF NO] Do you think Iraq probably does or probably does not have weapons of mass destruction that the United States has not found yet? (CCES 2006, 2007, 2008; TESS)

1. WMD found
2. Probably has WMD
3. Probably does not have WMD
4. Don't know

III. Do you think Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? (CCES 2006, 2007, 2008)

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

IV. As you know, in March of 2003, the United States took military action in Iraq to depose Saddam Hussein. Do you remember whether you favored or opposed the U.S. taking action *at that time*? [If YES] Did you favor or oppose that decision? (CCES 2006, 2007, 2008)

Again, thinking back to March 2003 just before the U.S. took military action in Iraq, *at that time*, did you favor or oppose the U.S. taking the action? (TESS)

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't remember

V. Thinking back to just before the U.S. took military action in Iraq in March 2003, did you believe *at that time* that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on Washington, D.C. and New York City? (CCES 2006, 2007, 2008)

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't remember

VI. Again, thinking back to just before the U.S. took military action in Iraq, did you believe *at that time* that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction that were a threat to the U.S. or its allies? (CCES 2006, 2007, 2008).

As you know, in March of 2003, the United States took military action in Iraq to depose Saddam Hussein. Thinking back to March 2003, *at that time* did you believe that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction that were a threat to the U.S. or its allies? (TESS)

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't remember

VII. Do you believe that God intervenes in human affairs and shapes historical events? (CCES 2006, 2007, 2008)

1. Yes, regularly; history is determined by God
2. Yes, but only rarely; history is mostly made by human beings and natural events
3. No, history is made by human beings and natural events without divine intervention
4. Don't know

VIII. Do you believe that George W. Bush was chosen by God to lead the United States in a global war against terrorism? (CCES 2006, 2007, 2008)

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

TABLE A1
Beliefs About Iraq's WMD

	CCES 2006	CCES 2007	TESS 2008	CCES 2008	Average
All respondents	N = 951	N = 1,835	N = 852	N = 951	
U.S. has found WMD in Iraq	15	9	6	9	} 36
Iraq probably has WMD U.S. has not found	19	25	29	30	
Iraq probably does not have WMD	50	54	47	50	50
Don't know	11	11	18	11	13
Republicans	N = 272	N = 516	N = 230	N = 235	
U.S. has found WMD in Iraq	31	18	14	15	} 61
Iraq probably has WMD U.S. has not found	33	38	49	46	
Iraq probably does not have WMD	15	31	24	26	24
Don't know	21	13	14	16	16
Independents	N = 304	N = 511	N = 277	N = 233	
U.S. has found WMD in Iraq	14	7	4	11	} 32
Iraq probably has WMD U.S. has not found	16	23	25	29	
Iraq probably does not have WMD	56	62	51	50	55
Don't know	15	9	20	10	13
Democrats	N = 307	N = 613	N = 230	N = 269	
U.S. has found WMD in Iraq	2	4	3	2	} 18
Iraq probably has WMD U.S. has not found	9	15	20	18	
Iraq probably does not have WMD	73	73	60	71	69
Don't know	16	8	18	9	13

TABLE A2
Belief in George W. Bush's Divine Mission (Percent)

	CCES 2006	CCES 2007	CCES 2008	Average
All Respondents	N = 788	N = 1,804	N = 749	
Bush was chosen by God	14	12	16	14
Don't know	16	14	16	16
Bush was not chosen by God	70	73	68	71
Republicans	N = 239	N = 510	N = 235	
Bush was chosen by God	30	28	36	31
Don't know	28	24	20	24
Bush was not chosen by God	42	48	45	45
Independents	N = 250	N = 506	N = 235	
Bush was chosen by God	11	6	11	9
Don't know	17	12	22	17
Bush was not chosen by God	72	82	67	73
Democrats	N = 253	N = 611	N = 268	
Bush was chosen by God	3	5	5	4
Don't know	4	7	7	6
Bush was not chosen by God	93	89	88	90

TABLE A3
Belief in George W. Bush's Divine Mission and Belief in Iraq's WMD (Percent)

	CCES 2006	CCES 2007	CCES 2008	Average
All respondents				
Bush was chosen by God	72.5	62.9	68.9	68.1
Don't know	56.9	48.8	55.9	53.9
Bush was not chosen by God	21.3	26.4	27.3	25.0
Republicans				
Bush was chosen by God	82.7	68.5	68.5	73.2
Don't know	63.1	54.4	54.4	57.3
Bush was not chosen by God	47.4	50.6	50.6	49.5
Independents				
Bush was chosen by God	63.1	62.4	68.3	64.6
Don't know	43.2	46.9	62.8	51.0
Bush was not chosen by God	19.1	25.2	28.6	11.5
Democrats				
Bush was chosen by God	11.6	44.8	25.1	27.2
Don't know	18.8	30.7	44.7	31.4
Bush was not chosen by God	11.6	16.3	17.6	15.7

Note: Entries are percentages of respondents who believe WMD were found or that they probably existed even if not found.

APPENDIX II: DATA SOURCES

The 2006, 2007, and 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Studies

The 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study was a survey of 38,443 Americans conducted during October and November of 2006. The survey had a pre/post design and was a cooperative venture of 39 universities and more than 100 Political Scientists. CCES was completed on-line and fielded by the survey research firm Polimetrix, Inc., located in Palo Alto, CA. Steve Ansolabehere (MIT) was the Principal Investigator of the project and Lynn Vavreck (UCLA) served as the Study Director. All respondents completed a common content section of the survey. Each CCES team then drafted its own unique content that followed the Common Content asked of 1,000 unique respondents who completed both the Common Content and the Team Module. I designed the questionnaire for UCSD's sub-sample, which included 951 registered voters.

The Common Content sample for CCES is a nationally representative sample. Interviewed respondents were selected from the Polimetrix PollingPoint Panel using sample matching. A random sub-sample size of 36,501 was drawn from the 2004 American Community Study (ACS), conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, which is a probability sample size of 1,194,354 with a response rate of 93.1 percent (participation in the ACS is mandatory). For each respondent in the selected ACS sub-sample, the closest matching active PollingPoint panelist was selected using the following measure of distance: $d(x,y)$. Following matching, the sample marginals were raked to the ACS marginals for age, race, gender, and education. Raking was performed using iterative proportional fitting. The final weights were trimmed to lie between .33 and 3.

The 2007 CCES study consists of a collaboration among seven teams, yielding a common sample of 10,000 cases. All 10,000 cases were subjects originally interviewed as part of the 2006 study, creating a two-wave panel. (Or, for variables from 2006 that are asked in the pre- and post-election studies as well as 2007, such as ideology and party, a three-wave study.) Interviews for the 2007 survey were conducted over the last two weeks of November 2007. Courtesy of Steve Ansolabehere's MIT cases, the sample included 1,975 registered voters who were asked the Iraq war questions from the 2006 UCSD sub-sample questionnaire.

The 2008 CCES involved 30 teams, yielding a Common Content sample of 32,800 cases. Each research team purchased a 1,000-person national sample survey, conducted in October and November of 2008 by YouGov/Polimetrix of Palo Alto, CA. As in 2006, half of the questionnaire was developed and controlled entirely by each individual research team, and half of the questionnaire was devoted to Common Content. The Common Content consists of the questions common to all team modules and has a sample size equal to the total sample size of all team modules combined. All cases were selected through the Internet, and YouGov/Polimetrix constructed matched random samples for this study. The Pre-Election interview wave was conducted during October, 2008;

the Post-Election wave was conducted during the two weeks following Election Day (4 November 2008). Data Release 1 occurred on 2/3/2009 and corresponds to the file CCES08_Common_Matched.sav.

The 2008 Time-sharing Experiments in the Social Sciences Study

Time-sharing Experiments in the Social Sciences is a project funded by the National Science Foundation to conduct experimental survey research for the social sciences. Diana Mutz (Pennsylvania) and Arthur Lupia (Michigan) serve as Principal Investigators. TESS collects data for individual researchers, providing investigators an opportunity to run experiments on a random sample of the population that is interviewed via the Internet and WebTV. To achieve a representative sample, Knowledge Networks, the firm conducting the TESS studies, uses a random RDD sample. People who agree to participate are provided with free Internet access (via webTV) and are given the necessary hardware for as long as they remain in the sample.

The TESS study used in this paper was designed by the author to determine whether the question order affected the relationship between current beliefs and memories regarding the Iraq War and its premises. It was in the field 23–29 January 2008. The study produced 1,030 completed surveys out of the 1,664 initially fielded, for a completion rate of 61.9 percent.

Other Surveys

In addition to the CCES and TESS studies, the research in this paper uses data from CBS News/*New York Times*, ABC News/*Washington Post*, Pew Research Center for the People and Press, Gallup, *Los Angeles Times*, NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, CNN, Quinnipiac, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and CBS News/*New York Times*, and Associated Press/Ipsos polls. Some results are taken from reports of these surveys at PollingReport.com or from Web sites maintained by these organizations; secondary analyses are based on survey data provided by the Roper Center, ICPSR, and the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.