

# British polling agency: More than one million Iraqi deaths since US invasion

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As part of its campaign to justify a long-term US occupation of Iraq, the Bush administration has increasingly resorted to warning of chaos and even genocide in the wake of a withdrawal of American troops. But a new report suggests that something akin to genocide is already taking place, under American auspices.

The British polling agency ORB reported Thursday that the death toll in Iraq since the 2003 US invasion has passed the one million mark.

According to ORB, US-occupied Iraq, with an estimated 1.2 million violent deaths, has “a murder rate that now exceeds the Rwanda genocide from 1994 (800,000 murdered),” with another one million wounded and millions more driven from their homes into internal or external exile.

ORB (Opinion Research Business), which has conducted polls in Iraq since 2005, released the findings of a survey of 1,461 adults across the country. Among other questions, it asked: “How many members of your household, if any, have died as a result of the conflict in Iraq since 2003 (i.e., as a result of violence rather than a natural death such as old age)? Please note that I mean those who were actually living under your roof.”

Of those responding, 78 percent said their households had experienced no violent deaths, 16 percent had experienced one death, 5 percent two deaths, 1 percent three deaths or more. Given the number of households in the country, 4,050,597 according to 2005 census figures, this works out to nearly 1.2 million deaths.

By far the worst death rate was in Baghdad, where nearly half of all those interviewed reported at least one violent death in their household. The reported death rate in Diyala province (Baquba) was 42 percent, and in Ninewa province (Mosul), 35 percent.

The survey found that 48 percent of the violent deaths were due to gunshot wounds, 20 percent to car bombs, 9 percent to aerial bombardment, 6 percent to other ordnance or explosions, and 6 percent to accidents.

The figure for aerial bombardments is particularly noteworthy since such deaths—numbering well over 100,000

according to the ORB study—go virtually unreported in the American media. This is doubtless because such killings are entirely the work of the US and British occupation forces, the only ones equipped with helicopters and warplanes.

The ORB survey found a far higher death rate than the figures released by Western media outlets, the US-established Iraqi government in Baghdad, or the United Nations. But it dovetails with the public health survey conducted last year by a team of scientists from Johns Hopkins University and published in the British medical journal *Lancet*, which estimated the death toll (as of early 2006, nearly 18 months ago), at about 665,000.

The *Lancet* figures were denounced by the US and Iraqi governments and dismissed by the American media, and the ORB figures are likely to face the same fate. The study’s findings were reported only in passing in Friday’s daily newspapers, most prominently by the *Los Angeles Times* and *Boston Globe*, not at all by the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*.

None of the network evening news broadcasts on Friday even mentioned the ORB report.

Opinion Research Business is not a left-wing or antiwar group, but an established polling organization, founded in 1994 by Gordon Heald, who headed Gallup Britain from 1980 to 1994. Its customers include the huge mining concern Anglo American, the Bank of Scotland, and the Conservative Party. Its non-executive director is Geoffrey Martin OBE, currently special adviser to the secretary general on strategic relationships of the British Commonwealth.

The ORB survey was based on face-to-face interviews conducted between August 12 and August 19 among a nationally representative sample of 1,720 adults (of whom 1,461 responded), with a standard margin of error of 2.4 percent. Random sampling was used to select those interviewed in 15 of Iraq’s 18 provinces.

For security reasons, no interviews were conducted in Al Anbar or Karbala provinces, or in the province of Irbil, where Kurdish authorities refused to allow field interviews.

Since Anbar and Karbala are among the bloodiest battlefields of the war, and Irbil among the quietest, the exclusion of the three provinces would more likely lead to an underestimation of the death toll than an exaggeration.

The ORB study was made public on the same day that President Bush went on national television to deliver a report on conditions in Iraq that was nothing short of delusional. With a million Iraqis dead, a million wounded, and four to five million displaced, Bush hailed the return of “normal life” to the devastated country. “Sectarian killings are down, and ordinary life is beginning to return,” he said.

The next day Bush and Vice President Cheney appeared before hand-picked audiences to press their campaign for an unlimited US occupation of Iraq. Bush spoke at the Marine base at Quantico, Virginia and Cheney at the Gerald Ford Museum in Michigan and the headquarters of the Central Command in Florida.

Cheney claimed that the result of a rapid US troop withdrawal would be “chaos” and “carnage,” declaring, “In all the calls we’ve heard for an American withdrawal from Iraq, these negative consequences haven’t really been denied, they’ve simply been ignored.”

Cheney raised the specter of Iranian intervention in a post-US Iraq, which “would unloose an all-out war, with the violence unlikely to be contained within Iraq. The ensuing carnage would further destabilize the Middle East and magnify the threat to our friends throughout the region.”

Bush, speaking before an audience of 250 Marines and their families in Quantico, claimed, “We got security in the right direction and we are bringing our troops home.”

Also Friday, the State Department quietly released a report noting that religious freedom has sharply deteriorated in Iraq over the past year because of the upsurge in sectarian killings, with minority religions (Sunnis in Shiite areas, Shiites in Sunni areas, secular Iraqis, Christians and smaller groups in all areas) subjected to systematic persecution.

The report cited “frequent sectarian violence including attacks on places of worship,” as well as “harassment, intimidation, kidnapping, and killings,” adding that “non-Muslims (are) especially vulnerable to pressure and violence, because of their minority status and, often, because of the lack of a protective tribal structure.”

The Democratic Party is fully complicit in the creation of conditions of near-genocide in Iraq, since the congressional Democratic leadership has refused to cut off funding for a war which has cost the lives of more than one million Iraqis, as well as over 3,700 American soldiers.

In response to Bush’s Thursday night speech, there were renewed professions of impotence by leading Senate Democrats. Barack Obama, who began his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination touting his antiwar

credentials, said the Democratic-controlled Congress could not force Bush to accept a deadline for ending the war.

“One way of ending the war would be setting a timetable,” he said in a speech in Iowa. “We’re about 15 votes short. Right now it doesn’t look like we’re going to get that many votes.”

Obama was referring to the 67 votes required in the Senate to override a presidential veto. He was silent on the fact that there are other constitutional methods of ending the war, such as refusing to appropriate the funds to finance it, which the Democratic congressional leadership has rejected.

Senator Kent Conrad of North Dakota, chair of the Senate Budget Committee, told *Congressional Quarterly*, “The truth is we don’t have the votes to end the war.” He said Senate Democrats would seek to “move the things that we can move on domestic issues” in order to “have tangible accomplishments,” rather than persist in debates on Iraq.

Other senators endorsed this view, including Charles Schumer of New York, who said, referring to the upcoming 2008 campaign, “This election is shaping up to be about change. Not only change in Iraq, but change at home.” Senator Ken Salazar of Colorado said, “The Democratic message has to focus on things that are good for the middle class. The war should not be the only issue.”

In the House of Representatives, Speaker Nancy Pelosi has not scheduled any vote on Iraq war policy this month, although the defense authorization bill still remains to be adopted for the fiscal year beginning October 1. All indications are that the congressional Democrats will rubber-stamp both the authorization and the emergency funding bill for the war, expected to approach \$200 billion, which has not yet been sent to Congress by the Bush administration.

The silence from the Democratic and Republican parties and the media on the latest evidence of mass killing and social devastation in Iraq as a result of the US colonial war and occupation underscores the complicity of the entire American ruling elite and all of its official institutions in a war crime of catastrophic proportions.



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