

## **Oakland Tribune**

### **Poll shows Iraq tops list of voter concerns**

Education, health care, gay marriage could all play

'second fiddle' to occupation

**By Josh Richman**  
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**Thursday, May 13, 2004** - Voters are thinking about Iraq and little else, giving Democratic candidate U.S. Sen. John Kerry a bump, according to a new survey conducted by University of California, Berkeley researchers.

Some 53 percent of those surveyed recently see the Iraq situation as an "extremely serious problem," up from 34 percent of those surveyed in March. And those holding a strong negative view of the Iraq situation favor Kerry, D-Mass., over President Bush, 59 percent to 26 percent.

"It appears that the difficult situation in Iraq and the abuse scandals have all combined to suck much of the life out of many of the issues that might otherwise have begun to influence how the public is deciding who they are going to vote for in November," said Douglas Strand of UC's Survey Research Center.

"If Iraq continues to dominate in this way, we may have an election that says little about what the public wants to do on other big questions."

Yet the candidates remain close or in a statistical tie in terms of overall public support, noted UC political science professor Merrill Shanks.

"Some forces besides Iraq have brought Kerry down, have wiped out the gains against Bush that he appears to have made from the deterioration in Iraq," he said. "We speculate that those forces have certainly included Bush's \$70 million of ads and other critical commentary about Kerry that has appeared in the media."

The Public Agendas and Citizen Engagement Survey is directed by Strand and led by Shanks, UC political science professor Henry Brady and Indiana University professor Edward G. Carmines. Polling began Feb. 18 and will continue through November's election. So far, 545 Americans age 18 and older have completed the 170-question, 30-minute survey.

The most recent results were based on interviews conducted between April 1 and May 6, as the public saw news coverage of the killing and desecration of corpses of four American contractors in Fallujah, and the first photos of U.S. soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners.

The researchers concluded that if the election were held now, issues stressed by the candidates' campaigns -- like education, taxes and health care -- and even "hot button" issues like gay marriage and abortion would play second fiddle to Iraq, trailed by use of U.S. military force in general, the economy and, to a lesser degree, environmental protection.