Greetings,

Back in the first semester this year, you participated in a study about "What’s going on in Iraq?," and said that you would be interested in hearing about the results. We appreciate your help with our research, and we are happy to tell you about the findings. Sorry about the long delay in sending out this summary! Normally we try to write up within weeks of the data collection, but a combination of illness, overseas trips, and work in the second semester resulted in several months’ delay.

The study was conducted under the supervision of Dr. Winnifred Louis by Janie Busby and Angela Nickerson. If you would like to ask questions or comment, you can phone (07) 3346 9515, e-mail w.louis@psy.uq.edu.au, or write to Dr. Winnifred Louis, School of Psychology, McElwain Building / University of Queensland / St. Lucia, QLD 4072. You can also read about other studies that we've done on political decision-making at http://www.psy.uq.edu.au/~wlouis/.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: “What’s going on in Iraq?”: CONFLICT FRAMES AND ATTITUDES RE THE WAR IN 2005
Working paper, 24/11/05. This paper has not been peer reviewed. Please do not copy or cite without author's permission.

WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR
This study builds on three previous studies that we ran in 2003 and 2004. The studies’ theoretical context is a model called self-categorisation theory (Turner, 1991), which says that people’s attitudes and actions often change in relation to how they’re thinking about themselves. Depending on the social context, different aspects of people’s identities come to mind or become salient. For example, you could think of yourself as an Australian, or a supporter of a particular political party, or an individual, depending on what context you were in. According to self-categorisation theory, when you think of yourself as a member of a group, you are likely to express the attitudes and engage in the actions that are normative, or appropriate, for that group.

As the model applies to the war context, people who have different levels of identity should have different representations of the conflict, and focusing on particular social contexts could change people’s identity, attitudes and behaviour. That’s what we think we showed in the earlier studies. For example, people who opposed the war were more likely to see Australia as an actor involved separately from the US, and focusing on the war context reinforced how strongly people identified as supporters of political opposition parties, but weakened the identification of Liberal-National supporters with their party.

However, in each of the previous studies we asked people to list spontaneously who they perceived as involved in the Iraq war. In this study, we ourselves manipulated the frame by asking people to focus on the goals of particular sets of actors. There were three versions, where participants had to consider the goals of “Coalition forces / Insurgents”; of “Americans / Australians / British / Iraqis”; or of “Americans / Iraqis”. In each case people could also list other actors perceived to be involved in Iraq.

SOME DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS
During March 2005, 429 people completed the study. All participants were UQ students, recruited from political science, economics, engineering, computer science, history, and biology classes. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 59 (with 53% 20 or younger). There were more men (53%). Politically, 24% had no party preference, 31% supported the coalition and 46% one of the opposition parties (30% ALP, 10% Green, 3% Democrat, 3% Other).

WHAT WE FOUND
1. REACTIONS TO THE FRAMES. We asked people to list the goals of the actors in the conflict (which is very interesting, but analyses of these goals are still on-going) and to rate the
power of each actor and the extent to which participants agreed with the goals. First, people rated “Americans” more powerful as a nation alone or with Australia and the UK against the Iraqis than they rated the “Coalition of the Willing”. However, on average they disagreed with the goals of the US as a nation but agreed with the perceived goals of the Coalition of the Willing. Second, “Iraqis” as a group were rated more powerful than “Insurgents”, and most people supported the perceived goals of Iraq but rejected those of the insurgents. Third, when Australia was considered as an actor, most agreed with the nation’s perceived goals, and considered Australia as highly able to achieve these goals. In the two conditions where Australia was not included Australia was spontaneously mentioned by 32% of participants in “Americans versus Iraqis” frame but only by 4% of people in “COW versus Insurgents” frame. Thus, consistent with a self-categorisation approach, framing the conflict in Iraq in terms of a superordinate “Coalition of the Willing versus Insurgents” produced more agreement with the American-led Coalition goals, less support for the Iraqi goals, and less consideration of Australia’s independent national goals compared to a frame of the US, the UK, and Australia versus Iraq. When the US-Iraq frame was considered, agreement with American goals was lower and independent Australian goals were more likely to be spontaneously considered.

2. POLITICAL AFFILIATION, PERCEIVED NORMS, and PRO-PEACE ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS. Participants gave their party affiliation, rated their identification with the party, their party’s power and perceived norms on the war, and their own personal war attitudes, activist identification, and past and future pro-peace activism. As described above, 24% of participants were unaffiliated, with 31% supporting the governing Liberal-National coalition and 45% an opposition party. Most people considered their party affiliation relatively unimportant, and this was the case across parties. However, the government was considered more powerful than the opposition. Government supporters perceived their party supported the war, while opposition voters perceived opposition, unsurprisingly! Overall, 53% perceived average Australians opposed the war while 57% of participants indicated they personally opposed the war. This included 75% of opposition party supporters as war opponents, but also 25% of Liberal-National supporters. Only 29% had taken any pro-peace action in the last month, however, with most signing a petition or donating money. Only 20% indicated they intended to engage in peace activism in the next month.

3. RELATIONSHIP OF FRAME TO POLITICAL IDENTITY, NORMS, AND ACTION. We didn’t find that the manipulated frame had any impact on choice of party, identification, perceived norms, or pro-peace attitudes or actions. We did find though that those who spontaneously added in Australia as an independent actor were more likely to be war opponents, more likely to identify as activists, and more likely to have acted in the past and intended to act in the future. And although few people mentioned other groups, the few who mentioned the UN or corporations as being involved in Iraq were more likely to be activists as well.

4. COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS YEARS. Opposition to the war has remained high (~60% in 2004 as in 2003) and levels of protest are about the same (~30%) as 2004, but lower than in 2003 (~50%). As in previous years, active war opponents were more likely to see Australia as an independent actor, and more likely to have complex representations of the conflict (adding in other actors, such as the UN and corporations).

SUMMARY

This year we asked people to evaluate particular frames for the conflict and found that the manipulation did impact on agreement and support. Most people supported the perceived goals of the Coalition of the Willing but opposed the perceived goals of the US, for example. It was interesting though that although agreement was higher in the “Coalition” condition, party affiliation, war attitudes, and peace activism didn’t shift. Overall, the results of the study provide support for the self-categorisation model in linking people’s identities (political and activist) to attitudes and behaviour, on the one hand, and framing of a social conflict, on the other. But it will be interesting
to try and focus in on when imposed frames for a conflict (e.g. “Coalition vs. Insurgents”) are taken on board by people vs. resisted (e.g., by people who spontaneously added Australia as an actor, or didn’t change their war views in response to the frame).

THANKS AGAIN....

So that’s a description of what we found in this study. If you have any questions, or would like a copy of the longer write-up when we get that done (in several months) please get in touch. And thank you again for your participation and interest!