

Editorial

Welcome to this special Iraq War edition of the Radical Statistics Newsletter. We feel the articles reflect the fundamental concerns of the group (see the inside cover and, for example, the *Demystifying Social Statistics* and *Political Arithmetic* books) and are also extremely topical. They attempt to redress some of the misuse of statistical argument before, during and after the invasion of Iraq by UK and US forces and include analysis of the 'debates' prior to the invasion, the media presentation of battles as permanent victories (à la 1984) and the rapid decomposition of that apparent 'victory' – all of which have defined politics for the last eighteen months.

It is a lesson learned from bitter experience that the first casualty of (preparations for) war is 'truth' - and this has been very publicly demonstrated during the Hutton Inquiry into the death of David Kelly. In arithmetical and statistical terms, we know that governments present numerical data as powerful 'objective' facts. An example of this was with the Prime Minister's claim that Iraq could launch weapons of mass destruction against its enemies within 45 minutes. However, there were several other assumptions and claims: that the public would 'back our boys'; that it would be a cheap, clean, efficient and sanitised war; and that there would be very few casualties. Thus, whilst the iniquity and misery of the war defy simplistic quantification, equally, statisticians cannot stay aloof from what has happened.

Radical Statisticians want to support progressive political campaigns, such as the anti-war movement, by providing scientifically rigorous analyses of the available statistical data as an alternative to those produced by the government. This edition of the Radical Statistics Newsletter shows what statisticians can say about the Iraq War.

We provide three different perspectives. Carr-Hill and others were concerned about the impact of the war on our own inter-cultural relations and carried out a detailed public opinion survey in communities with contrasting mixes of minority groups. They found popular revulsion at the violence of war and scorn with which the public view both Blair and Bush. Shaw comments on the survey findings from the perspective of a sociologist of war. Hartley, an analyst of expenditures on 'defence', comments on the economic rationale of the conflict, showing how an alternative solution would have had considerable benefits for Iraqis. Gordon, concerned about the minimisation of casualties of the conflict since 1990, attempts to put a figure on the death and human suffering that has actually occurred in Iraq over the past 13 years.