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VIEWS OF GEORGE W. BUSH AS THE NATION CONSIDERS WAR  
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

President George W. Bush, continues to receive job ratings which stand him in good stead compared to most politicians, even if they have lost some of the luster earlier found. Overall, just under two thirds give him either "excellent" (19%) or "good" (45%) grades for his job performance, contrasted with about one in three who feel that "fair" (23%) or "poor" (12%) is more like it.

The oft-noted "gender gap" is present, if at all, only in attenuated form. Men are slightly more likely to choose on of the two higher ratings than women, but the difference between the genders is never more than around five percentage points. The much vaunted non-partisanship of Fall 2001 seem also to have weakened. Four in ten Democrats give him a rating of good or better, including only 5% who call him excellent. Almost nineteen of twenty Republicans rate Bush at least as "good" with more than four in ten choosing the top rating. Age betrays no sharp pattern, so neither an overwhelming gender gap nor a generation gap holds for overall judgements of the President.

Bush's overall ratings are -- in absolute terms -- quite positive. At the same time, they do seem to have come down some since earlier in the year. The following chart shows results (omitting those who expressed no opinion) for the four-point rating scale from two earlier Badger Polls™, one conducted in March, the other in June.

The earlier surveys were quite similar to one another, with the only difference a small diminution in the proportion calling Bush excellent, offset by a similar increase in the proportion choosing "good" as the appropriate label. Since then, there has been a small slippage. But this is limited, corresponding to just under one sixth of the population slipping one point on the scale (e.g. excellent to good, good to fair, fair to poor), and leaving all else the same. By comparison, the distinction between June and March was only one third as large. Thus, Bush may not be viewed quite so onesidedly positively as earlier this year, but the degree of decline is quite limited, and in the absolute sense, his ratings would be the envy of many politicians.

This was borne out when respondents were asked to compare how Bush is doing compared with his predecessor, just over half of all respondents said he was doing better, three in ten (31%) said worse, and almost one in ten volunteered that he was doing about the same job. These patterns pretty much hold for men



Cross-Time Comparisons (March, June, and September)

	SEPT	JUNE	MARCH
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Rating of GW Bush			
EXCELLENT	19%	25%	28%
GOOD	45	44	40
FAIR	23	22	22
POOR	12	8	7
TOO SOON (vol.)	--	*	*

Responses such as Don't Know or Refused are omitted

and women, and for all four age groups examined.

Partisanship is a different story. By two to one, self-described Democrats say Bush is doing a worse job than Clinton. Independents see an improvement by about four to three. Nine in ten Republicans think George W. Bush is doing better than Clinton.

The public certainly thinks that the change in administration has brought real policy change with it. Overall, six in ten (59%) believe that there have been big changes in policy, three in ten (28%) think Bush's policies have differed from Clinton's only in small matters, and a handful (6%) think they "have been pretty much the same as Clinton's".

As a group, men are about ten points more likely than women to perceive big changes. The perception of change tends to increase as one moves across the partisan spectrum from Democrats (just over half of whom see big changes) to Republicans, seven in ten of whom do.

Overall assessments of a president's performance reflect different (and potentially changing) aspects of the job. When respondents were asked to rate George W. Bush's handling of various facets of his responsibility, the answers reflected a fair amount of nuancing. To begin with, "handling foreign policy" results, in the aggregate, with ratings that parallel those for his overall performance. Six in ten call it excellent (20%) or good (41%) compared to under four in ten choosing either fair (23%) or poor (15%). As noted, this is quite similar to the overall rating, if a trifle less positive on balance, and a very small bit more "polarized" (that is, there are relatively more "excellents" and "poors" than "goods" and "fairs") for the more specific rating.

Group patterns are related to those for overall ratings, although the partisan distinction is somewhat muted since Democrats tend to rate Bush higher on foreign policy than overall, while the reverse is true for Republicans. In any event this suggests that, when the focus is specifically on "foreign policy", the partisan divide is smaller than when people are asked to consider Bush's performance as a whole. Even if the truism that "politics stops at the water's edge" no longer applies, it has not been completely overcome.

In any event, if the focus is on "problems here at home", the pattern is different. Overall ratings are clearly lower, if still respectable. Specifically, just over half choose either excellent (12%) or good (40%) to characterize the President's performance. Almost as many feel that fair (29%) or poor (18%) is more like it.

With the exception of the youngest age group (those below thirty, who give Bush at least as high ratings domestically as for foreign policy), every group examined takes a less positive view on how he is doing at home than they do when it comes to foreign policy. The falloff among Republicans giving excellent ratings is especially noteworthy. It should be noted that the phrase "problems here at home" in the wake of September 11 may have a somewhat different connotation than earlier.

If one focuses on more specific issue areas, some of the contrasts noted above are especially visible. Thus, when it comes to "the job he is doing handling the economy", views of Bush are decidedly less sanguine. Overall, only about one in three gives him either of the two higher ratings (6% excellent, 30% good), compared to more than six in ten who call it fair (36%) or poor (25%). This presents a clear distinction to "problems here at home". Partisan distinctions remain, but even as the most positive, Republicans can scarcely be said to be very enthusiastic about Bush on this issue, while fewer than one in five Democrats call Bush's handling of the economy good or better. Age distinctions are relatively muted, as are those between men and women. But every group, on balance, views the President less positively when the issue is specifically the economy than when it is on problems at home more generally.

On the other hand, there is "dealing with terrorism". Overall, nearly three in four rate George W. Bush as either excellent (32%) or good (40%) on this aspect of his performance. Just a bit over one in five call it fair (17%) or poor (11%).

The contrast with the economy is sharp, both across the board and within groups. Thus, for instance, while one third of men rate Bush as good or better on the economy and two thirds give him no higher than fair, on dealing with terrorism, more than three of four give him one of the two higher marks, contrasted with one in five saying it is fair or lower. Almost six in ten Democrats, two thirds of Independents, and nine in ten Republicans rate Bush good or better on terrorism, comparable figures for the economy are one in six, three in ten, and six in ten. Each age group as well is markedly more positive about Bush's dealing with terrorism than on handling the economy. Further, each group on balance rates Bush higher on dealing with terrorism than on foreign policy in general, and higher than his general ratings.

Other specific non-domestic areas produce less positive results, and thereby emphasize the extent to which people distinguish among areas, and the importance of how much focus is given to different facets of the job.

When it comes to "dealing with Iraq", Bush gets ratings which are respectable in the abstract, but clearly much less enthusiastic than for "dealing with terrorism". Overall, just over half call his Iraq performance either excellent (22%) or good (30%). Over four in ten say it is fair (23%) or poor (20%). This is slightly less positive than for foreign policy overall, and markedly less than for terrorism.

There is a modest "gender gap" with men more positive. Age finds the youngest group most positive with the other three broadly similar to each other. Partisanship relates to views of Iraq, with one in three Democrats calling Bush's job with regard to that country good or better and six in ten fair or worse -- with the largest single group rating him "poor"; three in four Republicans call it good or higher and fewer than one in four say it is fair or worse -- with the largest single group labeling it excellent.

Finally, when one broadens the focus geographically to "dealing with leaders of other countries", opinion is less polarized. Thus, six in ten call it excellent (19%) or good (40%), contrasted with almost four in ten saying fair (27%) or poor (12%). On balance, this is modestly more positive than when it comes to Iraq, but the two middle categories are relatively more common than the two extremes.

Some (perhaps by now) familiar group distinctions are once again evident. Men rate Bush somewhat higher than women. Backing increases as one moves across the partisan spectrum, with a plurality of Democrats calling Bush fair or lower, and a larger majority of Republicans saying it is good or higher. The age groups tend to be close. But for all, opinion is less polarized on this more general dimension than for Iraq specifically.

To sum up, Bush retains a good reservoir of support, even though his current overall ratings lack some of the luster evident earlier in this year. The public does distinguish among aspects of his performance, with dealing with terrorism singled out in the positive sense and dealing with the economy on the negative (or less positive side). There are partisan differences, which are especially sharp on some issues, but an asymmetry where Republicans tend to be more positive than Democrats are negative and where the absolute ratings are quite respectable, especially on foreign policy and dealing with terrorism even among Democrats.

#### Statewide Marginals and Percentages for Key Groups

What follows is the exact question wording for each of the items referred to in the release. All results shown are for the basic sample of state residents. (Earlier electoral results included interviews on political questions only for registered voters from this sample and a special supplement of registered voters). The first column is the percentage of the entire sample giving each response. The second and third reports the percentages for men and women separately. The fourth, fifth, and sixth columns show self-described Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. Columns seven through ten group respondents by age.

Q01. INTERVIEWER: (DO NOT ASK) Enter respondent's gender

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
MALE	49%	100%	--%	41%	55%	51%	51%	50%	50%	48%
FEMALE	51	--	100	59	45	49	49	50	50	52

Q02. How would you rate the job George W. Bush is doing as President?  
Excellent, good, fair or poor?

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
Excellent	19%	22%	16%	5%	13%	43%	14%	21%	20%	18%
Good	45	45	45	35	47	50	43	52	42	45
Fair	23	20	25	33	28	7	32	15	24	19
Poor	12	12	11	24	12	--	10	10	13	15
TOO SOON TO TELL (vol)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	1	*	2	1	--	--	1	1	1	2
REFUSED	1	1	1	2	--	--	--	1	1	1





QD05. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or something else?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
Democrat	33%	28%	38%	100%	--%	--%	21%	34%	36%	42%
Republican	29	30	27	--	--	100	23	35	28	25
Independent	21	24	18	--	100	--	28	15	22	21
Other	10	12	8	--	--	--	18	8	9	6
None	4	5	3	--	--	--	7	5	2	3
DON'T KNOW	2	1	4	--	--	--	3	2	2	2
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	2	1	1

#### HOW THE POLL WAS DONE

This BADGER POLL™ was conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center as part of its ongoing program of research designed to benefit the research community and the people of Wisconsin, under the direction of G. Donald Ferree, Jr., Associate Director for Public Opinion Research of the Center. The media sponsors of the survey are the (Madison) Capital Times, and the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel. The BADGER POLL™ is intended to be a "poll of record" for the state, investigating matters of concern to Wisconsinites including politics, culture, and their daily lives, adhering to the highest standards of polling methodology and rigorous independence.

A total of 500 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between September 17 to 26, inclusive. (A portion of this sample, along with a special supplemental sample of registered voters asked only election-related questions were the basis of releases earlier on on the upcoming election). Telephone numbers were generated by computer in proportion to the number of adults living in each area of the state. Theoretically, results from this survey have a "margin of error" of a little over +/- 4%. This means that, had we asked every eligible resident in Wisconsin, exactly these questions at the time the survey was conducted, there is only a one in twenty chance that the answers would differ by more than that in either direction from what we report here. There could be differences because of changes in question wording, events occurring in the meantime, or any of the practical difficulties involved in taking a scientific survey. Results based on subgroups are subject to a larger "margin of error".