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Badger Poll™ #10, Release #2
University of Wisconsin Survey Center
University of Wisconsin Madison
September 3, 2003

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IEWS OF IRAQ IN LATE SUMMER 2003
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

As summer turns to fall, Wisconsin residents' view of the war with Iraq, and of the Commander in Chief who decided on war, have become less positive than in the heady days after the initial military victory. At the same time -- and with the caveat that some partisan differences are clearly evident -- the public continues to support on balance many of the principles behind the case for war. The non-discovery of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction appears not yet to have made a major impact on residents of the Badger state. These are among the conclusions drawn from the most recent Badger Poll™, conducted by telephone by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Survey Center, with some 511 randomly chosen state residents between August 18 and 27, inclusive.

Overall, just over half of Wisconsin residents call George W. Bush's performance as President either excellent (14%) or good (38%). However, almost as many see it as either fair (28%) or poor (19%). There is a sharp partisan divide, with seven Republicans in eight opting for one of the two higher ratings, as do six in ten Independents. But only about one in five Democrats follow suit, with almost eight in ten opting for one or the other of the two lower ratings.

This question is a staple on Badger Polls™ and the complete trend is shown below. Bush's current ratings are on a rough par (albeit if anything very slightly weaker) than they were at the beginning of the year. That represented a drop from earlier in 2002. During the war Bush moved up in the public's estimation up to the point of the initial military victory over Hussein. There seems to have been a falloff since that point.

Overall Presidential Rating
Polls from March 2002 to March 2003

	AUG03	MAY03	APR03	MAR03	FEB03	JAN03	SPT02	JUN02	MAR02
Overall rating									
Excellent	14%	27%	31%	18%	19%	16%	19%	25%	28%
Good	38	35	38	35	39	38	45	44	40
Fair	28	24	21	30	25	29	23	22	22
Poor	19	13	10	16	16	14	12	8	7

Answers such as don't know, or refused, omitted for space

When it comes specifically to "dealing with Iraq", a parallel question yields rating close to, but somewhat weaker than his overall "grades". Overall, just under half rate him either excellent (15%) or good (32%) in this area. Just OVER half call his performance either fair (24%) or poor (27%). This means that the typical rating on this specific area is a bit weaker than his overall rating. There is an exceptionally strong partisan cast to these views. Fewer than one in four Democrats grade him "good" or higher, more than three in four label it fair or lower. These proportions are almost exactly reversed among self-described Republicans.

Attitudes to the war and its aftermath are complex. To begin with, Wisconsin residents tend to endorse the original stated goal of "threatening war if Saddam Hussein refused to give up any weapons of mass destruction he might have". Some seven in ten think this was the right thing to do. One in four (26%) say this was not the right thing to do. Even among Democrats, the most critical in general, opinion is pretty much split down the middle.

More telling, perhaps, by a five to three margin (57%-32%), state residents believed in late August that "the United States had to choose between letting Iraq have weapons of mass destruction or going to war with Iraq". Democrats are the only major group among whom this belief is NOT held by a majority. Independents look like the population overall, and for every Republican who feels this choice was not necessary, more than five think it was.

Granted this, however, there are signs of sentiment that the Bush administration may have been overeager for war. Specifically, when asked whether the "Bush administration did everything it reasonably could to avoid war with Iraq, or is there something else it should have done", a narrow five to four (55%-41%) thinks all reasonable steps were taken. This is a majority, but leaves a substantial minority who think other avenue(s) remained unexhausted. Again there is a partisan cast to these views. By more than seven to three Democrats think more could have been done to avoid war, but by more than twice as great a margin, Republicans think all appropriate steps were taken.

All in all, when respondents were reminded that there were many UN resolutions demanding Iraqi disarmament but no final resolution explicitly calling for war, a two to one (61%-34%) majority still supports the decision to use force. Among Democrats, a two to one majority now opposes that decision. Among Republicans the pro-war margin is greater than eight to one. Independents back the war decision by two to one.

An accompanying table shows results for some key Iraq-related questions for the period February to August, which covers the run-up to the outbreak of hostilities, the period of active large-scale military operations, and the low level conflict since then. Specific ratings of Bush on Iraq rose sharply with the outbreak of fighting, but now seem to have fallen off some, quite modestly from April to May, more visibly since. They are now generally similar to what was found before the actual initiation of hostilities.

Backing of the original threat is now lower than it was during the actual large-scale fighting, but (if anything) slightly HIGHER than it was in February and March. The notion that there was simply no other choice than that of war or allowing Iraq to possess WMD rose immediately before the war, but has lessened since, with the current reading still showing a clear majority backing the administration position, but that majority is less onesided than it was running up to the war.

Iraq Questions from Five Surveys

	AUG	MAY	APR	MAR	FEB
Bush's Dealing with Iraq					
EXCELLENT	15%	30%	40%	18%	19%
GOOD	32	32	35	31	30
FAIR	24	22	13	26	25
POOR	27	13	10	23	24
Original threat of war					
YES, DID RIGHT THING	70%	78%	80%	65%	65%
NO, HAS NOT	26	18	16	26	26
ONLY WITH OTHERS (VOL)	*	1	*	1	1
Necessary choice war/permit WMD					
YES, HAVE TO CHOOSE	57%	66%	66%	77%	71%
NO, NOT NECESSARY	32	28	25	16	20
IRAQ HAS NO WMD (VOL.)	2	1	1	*	1
Steps to avoid war					
DONE ALL REASONABLE	55%	65%	66%	56%	51%
SHOULD HAVE TRIED	41	32	31	36	41
Support US action alone w/o UN					
YES	61%	71%	75%	61%	58%
NO	34	25	19	31	32

Note: wording changes, primarily tense, to deal with outbreak of war between March and April surveys. Don't know and Refused omitted.

There has also been a modest falloff off the perception that the US did (or was doing) all it could to avoid war, which reached its high point after the initial big victories and has now retreated to about where it was in February or March. Similarly, support for the US going to war without the blessing of the UN (or at least without a resolution explicitly authorizing force), remains a majority position, but seems somewhere between what was found in February and March, and below the high point of April.

When one looks at the consequences of the war, the picture rapidly becomes more murky. Six in ten believe that it would have been either very likely (31%) or somewhat likely (31%) that if the US had decided NOT to go to war, it would eventually have been attacked with Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Somewhat over one in three felt this was either not very likely (24%) or not likely at all (12%). Thus, overall, this view reinforces the notion that the war was ultimately a good choice. However, there are some clear partisan differences. Just over four in ten Democrats felt this outcome was somewhat likely or more. The comparable proportion among Republicans was roughly twice as high.

The consequences for terrorism more broadly seem less clear on balance. Overall, when respondents were asked what impact the US decision to attack Iraq would have on "the risk of terrorism in the world", one in three (31%) expected it to increase that risk. Another one in three (35%) felt it would decrease it, and some three in ten (29%) felt it would not make that much difference one way or the other. This aspect of the Iraq war issue also has a partisan dimension. By three to one, Democrats say the war will increase rather than decrease the

terror risk. By about four to one, Republicans think that risk will be reduced rather than increased. Independents tend to split.

Trend from March

	AUG	MAY	APR	MAR
Use of WMD against US w/o war				
VERY LIKELY	31%	40%	42%	34%
SOMEWHAT LIKELY	31	32	32	33
NOT VERY LIKELY	24	19	17	23
NOT LIKELY AT ALL	12	8	8	8
Long-term impact of war				
INCREASE TERROR RISK	33%	24%	25%	42%
DECREASE TERROR RISK	35	44	46	27
NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE	29	31	27	28

Note: wording changes, primarily tense, to deal with outbreak of war between March and April surveys. Don't know and Refused omitted.

The sense that fighting the war lessened the risk of being attacked at some point with Iraqi weapons of mass destruction was a bit sharper during the active large scale hostilities. Current levels are similar to, but perhaps a bit lower than was the case in March, just before the outbreak of fighting (when there was much concern about possible Iraqi use of chemical or biological agents against coalition forces. On balance, as noted, the public is currently split on the impact of the war on the long-term terror threat (two thirds think there is a shift, but sentiment is split as to which direction it has moved). None of the four askings of this question has produced a consensus, but there was modestly LESS optimism just before the war than now, and modestly MORE during it than now seems the case.

Overall, Wisconsin residents give the war a mixed review at this point. Just under four in ten call it a success, either "a complete success" (3%) or "mostly a success" (35%). Slightly above four in ten (43%) say was "only partly a success". On the other side, one in six see it as a failure (mostly 13% or a complete failure 3%). This gives plenty of room for assessments to move either up or down, but clearly is less positive than seemed to be the case in the heady days after the swift and relatively painless toppling of the Saddam Hussein regime. No group examined labeled the war a failure (the closest was Democrats, one in three of whom called it mostly or completely a failure). On the other hand, six Republicans in ten called the war either completely a success or mostly so, and virtually all the remainder said it was "only partly a success". This reinforces the notion that reactions to the war seem clearly to have acquired a partisan coloring.

The specific issue of weapons of mass destruction finds interesting resonance in the Badger state. A common view is that the reason the US has not yet found clear evidence of WMD is that the Iraqis are hiding them, which view is held by six residents in ten (61%). One in six (17%) think the US was wrong about Iraq's possessing such weapons in the first place. Another one in seven (14%) think they once did exist but the Iraqis destroyed them secretly.

Among all three partisan groups, the most common view is that the weapons remain hidden. However, the proportion feeling this ranges from a low of 45%

among Democrats to a high of 74% among Republicans. One Democrat in three thinks the Administration was wrong about their existence, a belief much less common among either Independents or Republicans.

Future developments which might either confirm the existence of WMD or raise doubts about what the Administration thought at the time the decision to go to war was taken could substantially affect general views of the war. This is especially the case when one notes that despite evidence of some misgiving, the public at present feels on balance that the initial decision to go to war was appropriate.

Respondents were asked "If the US government thought the Iraqis didn't actually have weapons of mass destruction anymore, do you think it was a good idea to go to war with Iraq for other reasons, a bad idea, or don't you have an opinion?". Overall, views are quite split. Roughly equal numbers said it was a good idea for other reasons (35%), or a bad idea (37%). Almost another three in ten (28%) said they had no opinion, and could presumably be more easily swayed one way or the other as the situation develops.

Looking Back at War

	AUG	MAY
Assessment of war		
COMPLETE SUCCESS	3%	9%
MOSTLY A SUCCESS	35	52
ONLY PARTLY A SUCCESS	43	29
MOSTLY A FAILURE	13	6
A COMPLETE FAILURE	3	1
Why no WMD found		
US WAS WRONG	17%	10%
IRAQIS DESTROYED	14	14
IRAQIS HID THEM	61	66
If US thought no WMD		
GOOD IDEA ANYWAY	35%	47%
BAD IDEA	37	26
DON'T HAVE OPINION	28	25

Note: Answers such as Don't know and Refused omitted

Since May, assessments of the war's success seem to have been somewhat tempered. Then, six in ten called it completely or mostly a success. Indeed, the single most common view was that it was "mostly a success". That has now been replaced by "only partly a success". Still, those willing to apply the word "failure" even with qualification remain a distinct (and small) minority. When it comes to WMD, most continue to feel they still exist, and counting in those who think they DID but the Iraqis secretly destroyed them means that a strong majority believes they DID exist earlier. Only modest shifts are evident on this dimension. At the same time, there has been some slippage in the sense that the war would have been justified on grounds other than just ridding the world of weapons of mass destruction in Iraqi hands. Opinion was scarcely overwhelming on this point in May, but it is quite clearly divided in August.

Overall, it would appear that the last few months have brought about a general lessening of support for Bush and his Iraq policy, although their appears to be widespread acceptance of the original goals of the war. This also is now clearly a partisan issue, with Democrats expressing more doubt or disagreement than either Independents or Republicans. The possibility that the threat of WMD was deliberately exaggerated seems not to have really taken hold, with substantial belief that the weapons DID exist and have just not yet been found. Were this question to be clearly resolved, or were the aftermath of the war to appear sharply different, the views of Wisconsin residents concerning the war in particular and President Bush in general could well move in either direction in the months between now and the presidential election.

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. 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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
MALE	49%	100%	--%	39%	60%	48%	38%	54%	45%	51%
FEMALE	51	--	100	62	40	52	62	46	55	49

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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
EXCELLENT	14%	17%	12%	*%	10%	33%	14%	12%	12%	19%
GOOD	38	37	38	21	43	51	42	49	34	30
FAIR	28	26	30	41	27	13	28	26	31	25
POOR	19	19	19	36	19	2	15	13	23	23
TOO SOON TO TELL (VOL.)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	1	--	1	1	*	*	--	*	--	2
REFUSED	*	1	*	--	*	1	1	--	*	1

GWB08. Dealing with Iraq? (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
EXCELLENT	15%	21%	9%	3%	10%	33%	10%	20%	8%	17%
GOOD	32	32	32	19	35	44	38	34	34	25
FAIR	24	20	29	32	20	17	24	20	25	26
POOR	27	26	28	45	34	4	28	24	30	28
DON'T KNOW	2	2	2	3	1	1	--	2	2	3
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	1	--	--	--	1

IRAQ01. Do you think the United States originally did the right thing in threatening war if Saddam Hussein refused to give up any weapons of mass destruction he might have?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
YES, DID RIGHT THING	70%	76%	65%	46%	73%	92%	74%	76%	65%	67%
NO, HAS NOT	26	21	30	49	25	5	23	21	31	29
ONLY WITH/OTHERS (VOL)	*	1	--	--	1	--	--	--	1	--
DON'T KNOW	3	2	4	4	2	2	3	2	3	4
REFUSED	1	1	1	1	--	1	--	1	*	--

IRAQ02X. Do you think the United States had to choose between letting Iraq have weapons of mass destruction or going to war with Iraq?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
YES, HAD TO CHOOSE	57%	57%	57%	35%	57%	79%	58%	64%	49%	59%
NO, DID NOT HAVE TO	32	33	32	51	32	14	37	29	37	28
IRAQ HAS WMD (VOL.)	2	2	2	4	2	1	--	1	3	2
DON'T KNOW	6	5	8	8	6	4	4	5	9	7
REFUSED	3	4	2	3	3	3	1	2	3	5

IRAQ03X. Do you think the Bush administration did everything it reasonably could to avoid war with Iraq, or is there something else it should have tried?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
DONE ALL REASONABLE	55%	58%	51%	27%	54%	83%	56%	61%	53%	51%
SHOULD HAVE TRIED	41	40	42	68	42	13	38	37	42	44
DON'T KNOW	4	1	7	6	3	4	7	3	3	6
REFUSED	1	1	*	--	1	--	--	--	2	--

IRAQ09Z. Although the UN had passed many resolutions demanding Iraq disarm, the US was not able to get a final resolution explicitly calling for war. Do you support or oppose the decision of the US and other countries to use force anyway?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
SUPPORT	61%	67%	56%	32%	66%	87%	66%	71%	59%	52%
OPPOSE	34	30	37	63	29	10	31	28	35	42
DON'T KNOW	3	1	6	3	3	3	2	--	5	5
REFUSED	2	3	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1

IRAQ10X. If the US had decided NOT to go to war, how likely do you think it is that we would eventually be attacked with Iraqi weapons of mass destruction? Very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not likely at all?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
VERY LIKELY	31%	29%	33%	18%	31%	48%	39%	35%	26%	34%
SOMEWHAT LIKELY	31	29	33	25	33	34	33	32	31	24
NOT VERY LIKELY	24	25	23	39	21	11	18	21	28	29
NOT LIKELY AT ALL	12	15	9	17	15	3	10	11	12	13
DON'T KNOW	1	1	2	--	*	2	--	2	2	*
REFUSED	1	1	*	2	--	1	--	--	1	1

IRAQ10Y. In the long run, will the US decision to attack Iraq increase the risk of terrorism in the world, reduce it, or not make that much difference one way or the other?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
INCREASE	33%	32%	34%	50%	36%	14%	44%	26%	37%	32%
DECREASE	35	41	29	17	31	57	32	44	32	26
NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE	29	26	32	31	29	24	24	25	28	36
DON'T KNOW	3	1	6	3	4	4	--	5	2	6
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	1	--	--	1	--

IRAQ10Z. Would you call the US led war in Iraq a complete success, mostly a success, only partly a success, mostly a failure, or a complete failure?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
COMPLETE SUCCESS	3%	4%	2%	1%	2%	5%	2%	5%	1%	4%
MOSTLY A SUCCESS	35	42	29	15	37	58	44	35	37	24
ONLY PARTLY A SUCCESS	43	38	47	49	43	32	36	41	42	53
MOSTLY A FAILURE	13	9	16	29	10	1	10	10	14	14
A COMPLETE FAILURE	3	4	3	4	4	--	6	4	4	1
DON'T KNOW	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	4	1	4
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	1	2	--	*	2	*

IRAQ12A. So far, the United States has not found clear evidence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. If it turns out that none are found, do you think this means the US was wrong about Iraq having such weapons, that the Iraqis destroyed them secretly, or that they remain hidden somewhere?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
US WAS WRONG	17%	17%	17%	35%	12%	5%	10%	16%	21%	18%
IRAQIS DESTROYED	14	14	15	14	14	14	24	15	10	13
IRAQIS HID THEM	61	62	61	45	64	74	64	61	60	61
DON'T KNOW	6	5	7	6	7	5	2	7	8	6
REFUSED	1	3	--	--	3	2	--	1	1	3

IRAQ12B. If the US government thought the Iraqis didn't actually have weapons of mass destruction anymore, do you think it was a good idea to go to war with Iraq for other reasons, a bad idea, or don't you have an opinion?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
GOOD IDEA ANYWAY	35%	38%	31%	14%	35%	54%	36%	46%	31%	25%
BAD IDEA	37	35	39	57	40	14	26	32	45	37
DON'T HAVE OPINION	28	26	29	29	23	32	38	22	23	36
DON'T KNOW	*	--	*	--	--	1	--	--	1	--
REFUSED	1	1	--	--	2	--	--	*	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	29%	23%	35%	100%	--%	--%	25%	20%	36%	33%
REPUBLICAN	30	30	30	--	--	100	23	31	26	35
INDEPENDENT	29	35	23	--	100	--	34	30	27	26
OTHER	9	12	7	--	--	--	16	16	6	4
NONE	2	1	2	--	--	--	3	2	2	1
DON'T KNOW	1	*	2	--	--	--	--	1	2	1
REFUSED	*	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	1	--

QD11. In what year were you born? (ENTER FOUR-DIGIT YEAR) (Calculated and grouped as below)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
18-29	12%	9%	14%	10%	14%	9%	100%	--%	--%	--%
30-44	29	32	26	21	31	30	--	100	--	--
45-59	31	29	33	39	30	27	--	--	100	--
60 and over	24	25	23	27	22	28	--	--	--	100
DK/REFUSED	4	5	4	3	4	7	--	--	--	--

* denotes less than .5%

-- denotes 0%

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 511 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between August 18 and 27, inclusive. 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".