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SETTING THE STAGE: PRESIDENT BUSH ONE YEAR OUT  
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

As he nears the one year pre-election milestone, there are both positive and negative aspects of President Bush's standing with Wisconsin residents. Overall, his job ratings are moderate, lacking either clear approbation or renunciation. Half of all residents rate his overall job performance as either "excellent" (15%) or "good" (35%), while almost as many choose one of the lower rankings of "fair" (27%) or "poor" (21%). The fact that almost twice as many choose the lowest point as choose the highest one would probably temper the reaction of Bush partisans to these findings. The fact good is the most common answer and a not insignificant group put him as high as the scale allows is probably encouraging to his backers.

Looking to different groups among the population, men are broadly similar to women in the evaluations they give the incumbent. Criticism of the Chief Executive is more common among older residents than younger (or, if one prefers, praise of him is relatively more common among younger respondents), but the differences are scarcely overwhelming. Partisanship shows the clearest patterns. As a group, fewer than one in five Democrats accord Bush a rating of good or better, contrasted with eight in ten willing to go no higher than "fair". Indeed, among his partisan opposites, the largest single group labels Bush as "poor". Independents are pretty evenly split.

If Bush's performance are moderate "in the abstract", the Wisconsin public has clearly held more positive sentiment toward the former Texas Governor. Last April and May were the most recent times the Badger Poll™ found Bush substantially more positively viewed than now. He now stands roughly comparable in public perceptions to where he was at the start of the calendar year -- before overt hostilities broke out in Iraq.

It is a full year to the election, and the public does not seem exactly captivated by the activities of the potential opponents. Fewer than one in ten (8%) say they have been paying "a lot" of attention to the candidates running for President. Even counting in those who say they are paying "some" attention (just under three in ten, or 28%), accounts for only one resident of about three. It is also telling that so far, Democrats are paying more attention-- manifesting less inattention(?)--than Republicans or Independents, two thirds of both groups are devoting no more than "only a little attention" to the candidates.

Going along with this, when respondents were asked -- without being prompted with a list of names -- "is there any person you would especially like to see

elected President next year". Six in ten (59%) explicitly said there was not. This does not mean that the public is "against everybody", but it is suggestive that the campaign remains in a very early stage in the public consciousness.

Interviewers recorded the specific answers given, which cover a wide range. Not surprisingly, the only individual to emerge from the pack is the incumbent, who is named by some one in four (22%) of the overall sample. Seven of the declared Democrats (all but Gephardt and Sharpton) appear, but none of them has the kind of constituency in response to this question which one would expect if a campaign had really taken off.

All told, sixteen individuals (some by title) were named. As noted, none has yet emerged from the pack. Only among Republicans does a "clear leader" emerge. And with the exception of two persons who named Arnold Schwarzenegger (not currently eligible), everyone of them named the President. Only about one quarter of either Independents or Democrats named anyone at all. This is less a judgement on the candidates than a telling marker of just how early things really are. Both Bill and Hillary Clinton came up (only among Democrats and Independents). This, however, is probably less an indication of any great clamor for either in itself (and of course he is not eligible) than of just how little attention there seems to be at the moment.

Overall Presidential Rating  
Polls from March 2002 to October 2003

	OCT03	AUG03	MAY03	APR03	MAR03	FEB03	JAN03	SPT02	JUN02	MAR02
Overall rating										
Excellent	15%	14%	27%	31%	18%	19%	16%	19%	25%	28%
Good	35	38	35	38	35	39	38	45	44	40
Fair	27	28	24	21	30	25	29	23	22	22
Poor	21	19	13	10	16	16	14	12	8	7

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

This question was also put on Badger Polls™ in May and August. In May, Bush did slightly better (53%-42% wanting him re-elected) than he now does, and in August he did slightly worse (50%-43% preferring "someone else"). But all three are close to being evenly balanced. No clear trend is evident, but it would appear both that Bush enters the year before the election with both a clear base constituency and a large group already prepared to seek an alternative.

This perception is reinforced when respondents were presented with a list of individuals, and asked for each whether they had a favorable impression, an unfavorable impression, or did not have enough information to make up their minds. (This latter category is meant both to accommodate those who really lack an impression -- rather than "forcing" them into a choice -- and for the probably rarer case where what information they have leaves them split between positive and negative impressions.

Clearly, the public CAN have clear impressions. More than nine in ten know enough about George W. Bush to have an impression, and the balance is almost two to one favorable (60%-34%). As would be expected, Bush is known across the partisan spectrum, with at least nine in ten of each group being willing to take a stand on him. But the balance changes a good deal. He is weakest (about seven to three unfavorable) among those who are self-described Democrats. Independents break (a bit less clearly) to the favorable side, while almost all Republicans have a favorable impression of the President.

His campaign 2000 rival, former Vice President Al Gore, also casts a relatively clear overall image among the Wisconsin public. Overall, eight in ten now know enough about Gore to take a stance, but on balance (a bit more than four to three) it is UNfavorable. Impressions of Gore start out at almost two to one favorable among Democrats, mirror the population among Independents and are more than five to one unfavorable among Republicans.

This pattern means that Bush is more widely known among each of the groups (the proportion viewing Bush EITHER favorably or unfavorably is higher for each than is the corresponding proportion for Gore. For both men, Democrats were less onesided than Republicans, and Bush is more favorably viewed by his partisan "friends", and less favorably among his partisan "enemies" than is the case for his erstwhile opponent.

Compared to these two, few of the current crop of nine candidates is widely known at all, and a number have "unfavorability problems". Al Gore's running mate, Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman, is most commonly known, with some six in ten (31% favorable, 29% unfavorable) coming down on one side or the other. Overall, the balance of views toward Lieberman is more balanced than is that towards Gore. But one striking feature is that views of Lieberman differ remarkably little across party lines. This leaves him less positively seen among Democrats than Gore, but more positively seen among Republicans than is the former Vice-President.

Dick Gephardt comes next in terms of overall familiarity. Overall, four in ten take a stance on him. But he is no better known among Democrats than either Independents or Independents. The balance of opinion varies a lot by partisanship. Overall, views of Gephardt are split (21% favorable, 22% unfavorable). But Democrats and Republicans are roughly mirror images of one another, the former view Gephardt favorably by about the same margin as the latter see him unfavorably.

The Rev. Al Sharpton presents a clear enough image for almost four in ten to come down on one side or the other, but in his case overall views are onesidedly (31%-7%) unfavorable. This balance is somewhat less clearly negative among self-described Democrats than it is among those calling

themselves either Independents or Republicans.

John Kerry is familiar enough to three in ten for them to have a general impression. Among residents overall, views to the Massachusetts Senator are closely split (15% favorable, 16% unfavorable). He like Gephardt, shows a partisan symmetry, with the balance of views roughly as favorable to him among Democrats as it is negative among Republicans. Because Gephardt is better known, however, while the relative proportions are similar for the two men, the difference between favorable and unfavorable is larger for the former House Leader.

Both Carol Mosely-Braun and Howard Dean are familiar to about one in four residents. The balance between favorable and unfavorable impressions is also close for each, with him coming a bit closer to a literal split (12% favorable, 13% unfavorable) than she is (11% favorable, 16% unfavorable). The fact that these numbers are so close, however, means that one can have only a limited degree of confidence that the patterns in the sample reflect real differences in the population as opposed to the "luck of the draw" in who was chosen for the survey. Views of each decline as one moves across the partisan spectrum, with GOP adherents being more negative on balance than Democrats are positive.

Wesley Clark, John Edwards, and Dennis Kucinich are familiar to between slightly less than one in five to slightly more than one in ten. While differences are small (and hence provide only limited evidence of clear distinctions in the population), the overall views are closest to being evenly balanced for Edwards, and least so for Kucinich. Clark and Edwards are each viewed about the same by Democrats and Independents, while Kucinich is viewed similarly by Independents and Republicans.

Overall, Lieberman who has been a national candidate before, is the most widely known of the active Democrats, but he is also noteworthy but the evenness of his appeal across the spectrum. Overall, this makes him look as good as anyone (and better known than most), but it also means that his appeal is not particularly strong among Democrats and thus he is weaker in a Democratic field than would be the case if everyone were allowed AND inclined to vote. (And it should be noted that while favorable and unfavorable impressions play a role in what and how people learn about candidates and may relate to predisposition to support or oppose a candidate all else being equal, they should NOT be mistaken for vote intention. A key finding is that it is still early.

Further, it is not only the calendar, which shows three to four months to primary season and more than a year to the general election, that provides "space". As we have seen there is plenty of room for views of the candidates to be formed, let alone for "conversions" to take place. And residents know this. While the field is not well known, partially probably because it IS so large, potential voters expect they will ultimately know a good deal more.

Specifically, respondents -- few of whom it will be recalled were yet paying much attention -- expect that they WILL do so. Overall, one in three (36%) say they are "very confident" that "by the time the campaign is over" they "will have enough information to really make up your mind about who would make the best President in 2004". Adding in the 38% who are "somewhat confident" makes up three residents in every four. This, coupled with the low levels of existing attention and familiarity suggest

that residents are well aware that the campaign is still in an early stage, and allows plenty of "space for movement".

A final indication of where the campaign is may be found in the final question on this topic, "as of now, do you think you would like to see President Bush re-elected in 2004, or would you rather see someone else in the White House". This is NOT the same as vote intention, whether or not willingness to see "someone else" would result in a vote for a specific challenger would depend on his or her appeal and whether each would provide a good alternative. On the other side of the coin, wanting now to re-elect does not indicate a settled intention to remain in the incumbents camp, merely lack of a reason at this point to look aggressively at potential alternatives.

That said, at present views on this question are split almost exactly down the middle: 46% would like to see Bush serve a second term; 45% would rather see "someone else". This latter group means that at the moment this set of residents are open to the appeals of other candidates and unhappy enough to consider an alternative. Not surprisingly, this sentiment is hard to find among self-described Republicans (who by more than seven to one want to see Bush re-elected). Independents split with equal numbers predisposed to give Bush another term and wanting some alternative. By five to one, Democrats would like at this point to replace Bush, without necessarily agreeing on whether a given candidate would be better or not.

Basic stance on Bush	Inclination to Give Bush Another Term		
	10/03	8/03	5/03
LIKE BUSH RE-ELECTED	46%	43%	53%
LIKE SOMEONE ELSE	45	50	42
DON'T KNOW	9	6	4
REFUSED	*	*	1

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%	--%	43%	48%	58%	53%	54%	46%	43%
FEMALE	51	--	100	57	52	42	47	46	54	57

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	15%	18%	13%	1%	15%	37%	20%	16%	13%	14%
GOOD	35	35	35	18	36	48	36	40	33	31
FAIR	27	27	28	37	30	14	26	28	29	23
POOR	21	19	24	43	19	1	15	15	25	31
TOO SOON TO TELL (VOL)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	1	2	1	1	1	--	3	--	1	1
REFUSED	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	*	--	*

VOTE01. Up to now, how much attention have you paid to the candidates running for President in 2004? A lot, some, only a little, or none at all?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
A LOT	8%	11%	6%	9%	5%	12%	13%	4%	9%	10%
SOME	28	28	28	38	30	22	16	23	36	34
ONLY A LITTLE	40	40	39	36	39	38	30	50	35	40
NONE AT ALL	24	20	27	17	26	28	41	23	21	16
DON'T KNOW	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

VOTE02. Is there any person you would especially like to see elected President next year?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
NO NAME MENTIONED	59%	53%	65%	64%	64%	39%	59%	65%	57%	54%
GEORGE W. BUSH	22	30	15	1	18	56	28	19	22	22
GENERAL WESLEY CLARK	*	*	1	--	2	--	--	*	1	--
FRMR GOV HOWARD DEAN	2	2	2	5	2	--	1	2	2	4
SENATOR JOHN EDWARDS	*	1	--	1	--	--	3	--	--	--
REP. DICK GEPHARDT	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
SENATOR JOHN KERRY	1	1	1	4	--	--	--	1	2	2
REP. DENNIS KUCINICH	*	1	*	--	1	--	2	--	--	1
SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN	*	1	*	1	1	--	--	1	--	1
CAROL MOSELEY-BRAUN	*	--	*	1	--	--	1	--	--	--
THE REV. AL SHARPTON	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
SENATOR RUSS FEINGOLD	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
SENATOR HERB KOHL	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
GOVERNOR JIM DOYLE	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
GOV. TOMMY THOMPSON	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
TOM BARRETT	*	--	*	1	--	--	--	1	--	--
BILL CLINTON	1	1	*	2	1	--	--	--	2	*
HILLARY CLINTON	1	1	2	3	2	--	--	1	2	2
JOHN MCCAIN	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	*	--
ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER	1	1	--	--	1	1	--	1	--	1
OTHER (SPECIFY)	1	1	1	*	3	--	--	1	1	1
"REPUBLICAN"	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
"DEMOCRAT"	2	1	3	6	--	--	1	1	2	3
ANYBODY BUT BUSH	*	*	*	1	--	--	1	--	*	--
COMBINATION (SPECIFY)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	7	7	7	10	7	3	1	8	7	10
REFUSED	1	1	2	1	--	1	3	*	2	--

VOTE03. I'm going to read you a list of people in public life. For each of them, please tell me if you have a favorable impression of them, an unfavorable impression, or don't know enough to make up your mind. George W. Bush

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVORABLE	60%	65%	54%	27%	60%	94%	66%	68%	55%	48%
UNFAVORABLE	34	29	39	64	34	5	27	27	39	44
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	5	4	5	7	5	1	4	5	6	6
DON'T KNOW	2	1	2	3	1	1	3	1	1	2
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

VOTE04. Al Gore (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVORABLE	33%	33%	33%	50%	35%	13%	23%	35%	33%	35%
UNFAVORABLE	46	49	44	29	44	71	57	42	46	45
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	19	15	23	20	17	14	18	21	20	15
DON'T KNOW	2	2	1	1	3	1	2	2	--	3
REFUSED	1	1	*	--	1	1	--	--	1	1

VOTE08. Wesley Clark (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVORABLE	8%	10%	5%	12%	13%	4%	8%	7%	7%	11%
UNFAVORABLE	11	16	6	9	7	18	17	6	15	9
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	80	73	86	78	80	76	74	87	77	78
DON'T KNOW	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	2
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

VOTE09. Howard Dean (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVORABLE	12%	13%	11%	21%	15%	5%	16%	10%	12%	13%
UNFAVORABLE	13	17	10	11	11	23	14	10	18	11
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	73	69	77	68	72	71	68	79	70	74
DON'T KNOW	2	1	2	1	3	1	2	2	*	3
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

VOTE10. John Edwards (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVORABLE	7%	8%	6%	8%	7%	6%	16%	5%	5%	3%
UNFAVORABLE	8	13	4	9	9	12	12	8	8	8
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	83	78	88	81	84	79	70	84	86	87
DON'T KNOW	2	1	2	2	--	2	2	2	1	2
REFUSED	*	1	*	*	--	1	--	1	--	*





VOTE16. Al Sharpton (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVORABLE	7%	8%	5%	10%	2%	5%	13%	5%	7%	4%
UNFAVORABLE	31	38	25	25	39	39	32	28	34	32
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	61	53	69	62	58	56	53	65	59	63
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	2	*	*	2	2	--	2
REFUSED	*	*	--	--	1	--	--	--	--	--

VOTE20. By the time the campaign is over, how confident are you that you will have enough information to really make up your mind about who would make the best President in 2004? Are you very confident, somewhat confident, only a little confident, or not confident at all?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
VERY CONFIDENT	36%	42%	31%	29%	42%	50%	36%	35%	39%	37%
SOMEWHAT CONFIDENT	38	35	41	45	34	37	35	38	36	45
ONLY A LITTLE CONF.	17	12	22	20	15	9	13	17	19	12
NOT CONFIDENT AT ALL	8	11	6	6	10	4	14	10	6	6
DON'T KNOW	*	1	--	1	--	--	2	--	--	--
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

BUSH06. As of now, do you think you would like to see President Bush reelected in 2004, or would you rather see someone else in the White House?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
LIKE SEE RE-ELECTED	46%	51%	41%	15%	45%	84%	49%	50%	45%	41%
LIKE SEE SOMEONE ELSE	45	40	50	79	44	11	43	40	45	50
DON'T KNOW	9	9	9	6	11	5	7	11	10	9
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	*

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	30%	27%	33%	100%	--%	--%	28%	28%	32%	33%
REPUBLICAN	30	36	25	--	--	100	41	30	25	28
INDEPENDENT	21	21	21	--	100	--	8	21	25	26
OTHER	11	10	12	--	--	--	13	10	14	6
NONE	6	6	5	--	--	--	6	9	2	4
DON'T KNOW	1	--	1	--	--	--	1	1	1	--
REFUSED	2	1	3	--	--	--	2	1	1	3

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	15%	17%	14%	14%	6%	21%	100%	--%	--%	--%
30-44	31	34	28	29	31	31	--	100	--	--
45-59	30	29	32	32	37	25	--	--	100	--
60 and over	21	18	23	23	26	20	--	--	--	100
DK/REFUSED	3	2	3	2	1	3	--	--	--	--

\* 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 October 21 and 28, 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".