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ISSUES IN THE EVOLVING CAMPAIGN FOR THE WHITE HOUSE  
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

A little less than a year before the presidential election, there is a panoply of issues which residents expect to influence their choices. While two (the economy and Iraq) tend to stand out somewhat, it is noteworthy that many of the nine issues are cited as very important by significant proportions of the electorate, which allows the possibility of "cross-cutting" divisions where different issue sets pull different people in different directions. There are, moreover, distinctions among groups defined by age, gender, political party, and the current propensity to either favor Bush's re-election or to hope for someone else in the White House in his place.

These conclusions come from a series of questions on the most recent Badger Poll™, which interviewed 510 randomly chosen state residents by phone from December 2 to 9, inclusive. Respondents were first asked to rate each issue in terms of its importance to them in making up their minds (on a four point scale). They were then explicitly asked to designate the single most important issue among those cited as very important. Finally, respondents were queried whether they would base their vote on that issue (if one was named) regardless of where the candidates stood on other issues.

Two issues stand out as at the top of the priority ladder for residents taken as a group. The first of these is "the candidate's position on handling the economy". Overall, almost eight in ten (78%) cite this as "very important". Moreover, almost four in ten (38%) named this issue when asked explicitly to say which was the single most important one to them in making up their minds how to vote. However, one limit on the power of this issue is seen in the fact that only 6% of the sample said that they would cast their ballots on the basis of this issue regardless of where the candidates stood on other issues.

The other issue which is very widely named as very important (in this case by 76%) is "dealing with Iraq" -- recall that this question was asked and answered BEFORE Saddam Hussein's capture. By itself, this would put this issue virtually in a tie with the economy for first place. But when respondents were asked which single issue was most important, only 19% named Iraq, half as many as named "handling the economy". The proportion who said they would cast their ballot solely on the basis of this issue (6%) is the same as the parallel group which saw the economy as clearly central. Both issues are on the radar screen of the vast bulk of residents by having at least "some" importance (98% for the economy, 93% for Iraq).

Self-described Democrats were about nine points more likely to call the economy very important than were Republicans or Independents, but this is a relatively modest distinction. Age-based patterns are even weaker. Those who, as of now, are predisposed to look for someone other than Mr. Bush to be elected are nine points more likely to call the economy very important than are those who would as of now like to see him re-elected. Groups are essentially identical, however, when it comes either to regarding the issue as the single most important or in their tendency to say it outweighs all the others so that one would vote on its basis regardless of other issues.

When it comes to Iraq, Republicans are modestly more likely to call it very important than either Independents or Democrats. Those forty-five or older tend to give the issue more "absolute" importance (in terms of the proportion calling it very important). The gap in importance between those looking to Bush's reelection and others is similar in size, but opposite in direction to what was found for the economy.

Almost as high on the importance ladder in the abstract was "creating jobs" -- related to, but more tightly focused than, the economy overall. Almost three in four (72%) called this very important to their choice. The distinction with the first issues is more clearly drawn when one considers the more exacting measures of issue importance. One in ten (10%) called this the single most important issue, half as many as cited Iraq, and only 2% said it was crucial to their vote.

Men and women as groups differed scarcely at all on the economy or Iraq, but women give job creation a bit more emphasis than men do. The proportion labeling this issue as very important falls of from eight in ten among Democrats to six in ten among Republicans, with Independents falling between the two, but closer to Democrats. Age is more complicated, with those under thirty according this particular issue the most importance, and those in the next older group (thirty to forty-four) giving it LEAST, though still a substantial amount. As was the case with the economy generally, those least predisposed to vote for Bush's re-election were more likely to see jobs as very important, and the distinction is, if anything, a bit bigger than it was for the economy. These patterns hold, to some extent, when one considers groups in terms of the proportion calling an issue the single most important or saying the would vote on jobs regardless of where candidates stood on other issues. Perhaps the key finding is that "the economy" and "creating jobs" are not simply two ways of saying the same things.

Two thirds (67%) called "improving access to health care" very important. This gives this issue fourth place. It is basically tied with job creation as regards the proportion calling the issue the most important". Again, only a handful (1% of respondents) would vote on the basic This is the first issue discussed where women as a group seem to be distinguished from men, with three quarters of the former and six in ten of the latter calling it very important. There is a relatively sharp drop-off in importance as one moves from Democrat (over eight in ten) to Republicans (under half) in absolute importance. Age is relatively flat, with those forty-five to fifty-nine according the issue a bit more weight than others. There is almost a thirty point gap (80%-59%) between the proportion of those hoping for "someone else" in the White House and those who want to see Bush re-elected.

In overall importance, "dealing with the deficit" and "prescription drug benefits for seniors" come next, with 58% and 56% of the residents, respectively, saying each is "very important" in their voting choice. Only 3% call the deficit this the single most important issue, and a handful (fewer than

1%) would vote on the basis of this issue alone. Prescription drugs are at least as often cited as most important and some 2% claim they would find this issue determinative regardless of where candidates stood on other issues.

Men and women differ little on the deficit's absolute importance. Democrats and Independents are about half again as likely as those who call themselves Republicans to call this one issue very important. Its importance rises with age, from just over four in ten among the youngest group to seven in ten among the oldest calling it very important. The distinction between those favoring Bush's reelection and those predisposed to an alternative is almost as large as was the case for improving access to health care.

Prescription drugs (which were asked about PRIOR to the more general question about improving access to health care to be sure that the latter was not being reacted to as a proxy for the former), show a rather different pattern. Two thirds of women, but only half of men called this very important. All three partisan groups accord this particular issue less "absolute" importance than the more general improving access to health care (though Republicans come close) but its importance clearly declines as one moves from Democrat to Republican across the partisan divide. Age differences tend to be a bit more pronounced, although the group most likely to call prescription drugs a very important issue is not literally the oldest, but those behind them on the age ladder, that is respondents between forty-five and fifty-nine. The oldest group, however, IS most likely to label this issue as the single most important, and as crucial to their vote.

Roughly half say that "federal taxes" (50%) or "dealing with world trade" (49%) is very important. Neither area is often cited as the single most important (3% and 2%, respectively). And only a handful says either by itself could determine their vote. The various measures of importance fail to distinguish groups defined by gender, age, or partisanship much on the issue of federal taxes. Those predisposed to back Bush's reelection at this point give the issue only modestly more attention than do those who would tend to look for someone else (just over half and somewhat less than half of these two groups call it very important).

World trade distinguishes groups rather more. Men as a group are a bit more likely to call this very important than do women as a group. Republicans are about ten points less likely than Independents or Democrats to cite it as very important. The proportion so labeling trade rises from just above one third to more than half as one moves up the three younger groups, with those over sixty looking like those immediately younger. Those looking to an alternative to Bush are about ten points more likely to call trade very important than are those who at this point want him returned to office.

Bringing up the rear is the issue of "abortion". Overall, between one in three and four in ten (37%) call this very important, but the proportion who label it as at least somewhat important or more (70%) is the lowest for any of the nine issues as well. Only a small group (6%) cite the issue as being the single most important. However, when it comes to the proportion being willing to cast a ballot solely on this issue, the "abortion constituency" at 4% comes close to the two issues at the top of the "absolute" scale -- the economy and Iraq.

Men and women do not differ much in any of the measures of importance. Self-described Republicans are more likely (by eight to ten points) to call the issue very important than either Independents or Democrats, Half of the oldest respondents call abortion very important, but only about one in four of those

from thirty to forty-five do. Those predisposed to back Bush give the issue marginally more weight than those predisposed to an alternative. Except for Republicans (who give many issues about the same level of "absolute" importance, save for the economy and Iraq and to a lesser extent creating jobs and taxes) all groups put abortion clearly at the bottom.

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. The final two columns separate those who said that as of now they wanted to see Bush re-elected from those who said they would rather see "someone else" in the White House.

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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
MALE	49%	100%	--%	47%	50%	50%	48%	48%	49%	48%	54%	44%
FEMALE	51	--	100	53	50	50	52	52	51	52	46	56

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				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
LIKE BUSH RE-ELECTED	46%	51%	41%	13%	29%	88%	45%	50%	43%	44%	100%	--%
LIKE SOMEONE ELSE	47	42	51	80	63	9	46	44	49	46	--	100
DON'T KNOW	7	6	8	6	7	3	8	6	7	9	--	--
REFUSED	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	1	*	--	--

PRES06. Please tell me how important, if at all, each of the following issues is for making up your mind how to vote for President next year. First, the candidate's position on ... Handling the economy. Is that very important, somewhat important, only a little important, or not important at all?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
VERY IMPORTANT	78%	78%	79%	85%	77%	76%	79%	75%	82%	77%	75%	84%
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	20	20	20	14	21	22	19	25	15	21	24	15
ONLY A LITTLE	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1
NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	1	--	*	*
DON'T KNOW	*	--	1	--	--	1	--	--	1	1	--	*
REFUSED	*	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	*	--	--



## PRES12. Dealing with the deficit

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
VERY IMPORTANT	58%	57%	59%	66%	68%	44%	43%	49%	64%	71%	44%	69%
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	31	30	33	26	29	38	40	36	30	20	40	25
ONLY A LITTLE	7	10	4	5	3	11	10	11	3	4	10	4
NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL	3	4	3	2	1	7	8	3	2	2	6	1
DON'T KNOW	1	*	1	1	*	1	--	--	1	2	*	1
REFUSED	*	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	*	--	--

## PRES13. Federal taxes

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
VERY IMPORTANT	50%	51%	50%	49%	49%	52%	51%	44%	49%	58%	52%	46%
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	43	41	44	45	43	40	39	47	47	34	42	45
ONLY A LITTLE	5	7	4	5	6	7	8	8	3	4	5	6
NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL	1	1	1	*	2	1	3	1	*	1	1	1
DON'T KNOW	1	--	2	*	1	1	--	--	1	3	*	1
REFUSED	*	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	*	--	--

## PRES14. Abortion

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
VERY IMPORTANT	37%	36%	38%	36%	34%	44%	32%	27%	39%	49%	39%	33%
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	34	33	34	35	32	31	34	37	37	24	32	36
ONLY A LITTLE	12	14	11	13	13	12	10	17	12	9	16	9
NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL	15	16	15	15	20	12	22	18	11	14	12	19
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	--	1	1	--	--	1	2	1	1
REFUSED	1	*	1	1	*	--	1	1	1	1	*	1

## PRES15. (IF ANY "VERY IMPORTANT") Of these issues, which is the single most important one for you? (READ LIST OF THOSE CALLED VERY IMPORTANT)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
NONE CITED	5%	4%	6%	5%	3%	6%	7%	9%	3%	3%	7%	3%
HANDLING THE ECONOMY	31	32	31	31	32	33	34	36	31	24	31	33
CREATING JOBS	10	9	11	8	10	7	22	8	6	9	7	11
DEALING W/ WORLD TRADE	4	6	1	4	2	3	--	5	4	4	5	4
DEALING WITH IRAQ	19	21	17	18	19	24	14	14	25	17	24	15
PRESCRIPTION DRUGS	5	3	6	7	6	2	3	1	3	13	3	6
IMPROVING HEALTH CARE	11	7	15	15	12	5	8	12	14	6	6	16
DEALING W/ DEFICIT	3	5	2	4	6	1	1	3	3	5	1	4
FEDERAL TAXES	3	3	2	--	3	5	1	4	3	2	4	1
ABORTION	6	7	6	3	4	13	9	6	4	7	10	3
DON'T KNOW	3	3	3	6	3	2	2	*	3	8	2	4
REFUSED	1	1	*	1	*	1	--	--	1	1	1	*

PRES16. And would you base your vote on THIS ISSUE by itself regardless of where the candidates stood on the other issues? (name of issue inserted if only one "very important")

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
NONE CITED	6%	6%	5%	8%	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	12%	5%	5%
YES	23	24	22	25	22	23	27	22	21	23	27	19
NO	69	68	71	66	69	72	68	74	73	57	67	73
DON'T KNOW	2	3	2	1	5	1	1	1	2	7	1	2
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	1	--	--	--	--	1	--	*

CRUCIAL. (CONSTRUCTED VARIABLE based on PRES15, PRES16) Issue named as crucial to vote

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
NONE CITED	78%	76%	79%	75%	79%	77%	73%	79%	79%	77%	74%	81%
HANDLING THE ECONOMY	6	6	7	8	6	7	8	8	5	4	7	6
CREATING JOBS	2	2	2	2	2	1	7	1	1	2	2	3
DEALING W/ WORLD TRADE	1	1	--	1	--	1	--	2	--	--	1	1
DEALING WITH IRAQ	6	7	5	8	7	6	4	4	10	5	8	5
PRESCRIPTION DRUGS	2	1	2	3	3	--	3	1	1	4	1	3
IMPROVING HEALTH CARE	1	*	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	*	1	1
DEALING W/ DEFICIT	*	*	--	--	*	--	--	--	*	1	*	--
FEDERAL TAXES	*	*	*	--	1	--	1	--	1	--	*	*
ABORTION	4	5	3	2	*	9	3	4	2	6	6	1

ONLY01. HANDLING THE ECONOMY (SUMMARY ITEM, CATEGORIES ARE CUMULATIVE)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
Crucial to vote	6%	6%	7%	8%	6%	7%	8%	8%	5%	4%	7%	6%
Single most important	31%	32%	31%	31%	32%	33%	34%	36%	31%	24%	31%	33%
Very important	78%	78%	79%	85%	77%	76%	79%	75%	82%	77%	75%	84%
At least somewhat	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	99%	97%	97%	99%	98%

ONLY02. CREATING JOBS (SUMMARY ITEM, CATEGORIES ARE CUMULATIVE)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
Crucial to vote	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%	7%	1%	1%	2%	2%	3%
Single most important	10%	9%	11%	8%	10%	7%	22%	8%	6%	9%	7%	11%
Very important	72%	68%	75%	80%	75%	62%	79%	66%	76%	70%	65%	80%
At least somewhat	96%	95%	97%	98%	96%	96%	97%	99%	95%	94%	96%	98%

ONLY03. DEALING W/ WORLD TRADE (SUMMARY ITEM, CATEGORIES ARE CUMULATIVE)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
Crucial to vote	1%	1%	--%	1%	--%	1%	--%	2%	--%	--%	1%	1%
Single most important	4%	6%	1%	4%	2%	3%	--%	5%	4%	4%	5%	4%
Very important	49%	52%	47%	55%	53%	44%	38%	45%	56%	56%	44%	54%
At least somewhat	92%	94%	90%	93%	92%	92%	84%	94%	94%	92%	92%	93%

## ONLY04. DEALING WITH IRAQ (SUMMARY ITEM, CATEGORIES ARE CUMULATIVE)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
Crucial to vote	6%	7%	5%	8%	7%	6%	4%	4%	10%	5%	8%	5%
Single most important	19%	21%	17%	18%	19%	24%	14%	14%	25%	17%	24%	15%
Very important	76%	75%	77%	74%	77%	83%	66%	67%	85%	81%	82%	72%
At least somewhat	93%	94%	92%	92%	94%	96%	94%	90%	95%	94%	96%	91%

## ONLY05. PRESCRIPTION DRUGS (SUMMARY ITEM, CATEGORIES ARE CUMULATIVE)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
Crucial to vote	2%	1%	2%	3%	3%	--%	3%	1%	1%	4%	1%	3%
Single most important	5%	3%	6%	7%	6%	2%	3%	1%	3%	13%	3%	6%
Very important	56%	47%	64%	69%	53%	43%	47%	47%	66%	60%	49%	60%
At least somewhat	89%	86%	93%	96%	89%	81%	83%	86%	96%	91%	84%	93%

## ONLY06. IMPROVING HEALTH CARE (SUMMARY ITEM, CATEGORIES ARE CUMULATIVE)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
Crucial to vote	1%	*%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	*%	1%	1%
Single most important	11%	7%	15%	15%	12%	5%	8%	12%	14%	6%	6%	16%
Very important	67%	59%	75%	83%	73%	46%	65%	60%	75%	68%	51%	80%
At least somewhat	93%	90%	96%	98%	94%	88%	86%	93%	97%	93%	88%	98%

## ONLY07. DEALING W/ DEFICIT (SUMMARY ITEM, CATEGORIES ARE CUMULATIVE)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
Crucial to vote	*%	*%	--%	--%	*%	--%	--%	*%	1%	*%	--%	
Single most important	3%	5%	2%	4%	6%	1%	1%	3%	3%	5%	1%	4%
Very important	58%	57%	59%	66%	68%	44%	43%	49%	64%	71%	44%	69%
At least somewhat	89%	87%	92%	92%	96%	82%	83%	85%	95%	91%	83%	94%

## ONLY08. FEDERAL TAXES (SUMMARY ITEM, CATEGORIES ARE CUMULATIVE)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
Crucial to vote	*%	*%	*%	--%	1%	--%	1%	--%	1%	--%	*%	*%
Single most important	3%	3%	2%	--%	3%	5%	1%	4%	3%	2%	4%	1%
Very important	50%	51%	50%	49%	49%	52%	51%	44%	49%	58%	52%	46%
At least somewhat	93%	92%	93%	94%	92%	92%	89%	91%	96%	92%	94%	91%

## ONLY09. ABORTION (SUMMARY ITEM, CATEGORIES ARE CUMULATIVE)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
Crucial to vote	4%	5%	3%	2%	*%	9%	3%	4%	2%	6%	6%	1%
Single most important	6%	7%	6%	3%	4%	13%	9%	6%	4%	7%	10%	3%
Very important	37%	36%	38%	36%	34%	44%	32%	27%	39%	49%	39%	33%
At least somewhat	70%	69%	72%	71%	66%	75%	66%	65%	76%	73%	71%	70%



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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
DEMOCRAT	26%	25%	27%	100%	--%	--%	23%	22%	30%	30%	8%	45%
REPUBLICAN	34	34	33	--	--	100	38	36	27	35	65	6
INDEPENDENT	25	25	24	--	100	--	25	25	25	26	16	33
OTHER	10	11	9	--	--	--	10	13	10	5	7	11
NONE	3	2	4	--	--	--	4	2	5	1	3	2
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	*	2	2	1	1
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	1	1	1	1	1

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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELECT	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
18-29	14%	14%	15%	13%	14%	16%	100%	--%	--%	--%	14%	14%
30-44	30	30	31	25	30	32	--	100	--	--	33	28
45-59	32	32	32	37	32	26	--	--	100	--	30	34
60 and over	22	22	22	25	23	23	--	--	--	100	21	22
DK/REFUSED	1	2	*	--	--	3	--	--	--	--	1	2

\* 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 510 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between December 2 and 9, 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".