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PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS AS THE PRIMARY APPROACHES  
 by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

Overall, President Bush's job ratings are best described as moderate. Among all age-eligible persons, just shy of half rate his performance as President either excellent (11%) or good (37%). Combined, these groups are essentially the same size as that composed by those who think one of the two lower ratings (fair, named by 28%, or poor, chosen by 22%) are more apt.

Not surprisingly, there is a strong distinction among residents based on their party affiliation. Nine in ten GOP adherents call the President good or better with one third opting for the highest available rating. Among Democrats, seven in eight are willing to go no higher than fair. These distinctions are at least as large if one looks only at those who say they will probably vote in the upcoming primary.

Overall Presidential Rating  
 Polls from March 2002 to January 2003

	JAN03	DEC03	OCT03	AUG03	MAY03	APR03	MAR03	FEB03	JAN03	SPT02	JUN02	MAR02
Overall												
Exc	11%	17%	15%	14%	27%	31%	18%	19%	16%	19%	25%	28%
Good	37	35	35	38	35	38	35	39	38	45	44	40
Fair	28	26	27	28	24	21	30	25	29	23	22	22
Poor	22	19	21	19	13	10	16	16	14	12	8	7

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

Bush's overall ratings are similar to what he got in December (excellent 17%, good 35%, fair 26%, poor 19%). That survey took place just before Saddam Hussein's capture so any bounce Bush may have gotten from that occurrence (noted by a number of national polls) either has dissipated or counteracted by the attention paid to the Democratic campaign, where the rivals have been focusing fire on the incumbent as well as one another.

Attention to the campaign seems modestly up, but still has not exactly captivated the Wisconsin public. Overall, one in five (20%) say they are paying "a lot" of attention to the candidates running for President. Counting in those who say they are paying some (44%) accounts for two thirds, but it is clear that the campaign (or at least its actors) are not yet center stage.

Interest is somewhat higher among Democrats, for whom after all the primary season will determine the nominee, but not hugely so. Thus seven in ten Democrats are paying at least some attention, compared to about six in the GOP adherents. Nonetheless, while the level of attention is scarcely impressive in an absolute sense, it does seem to be increasing. Thus, in October, only one in three was paying at least some attention (8% a lot, 28% some). By December this had inched up to something more than four in ten (13% a lot, 31% some). Figures from the current poll mean that about half again as many are paying "some" attention or more than was the case in early December.

Self-assessed probably voters (those who said they either certainly would vote or probably would) manifest only modestly more attention than do age-eligible respondents overall. This suggests that whatever opinions they now have could shift, and leaves open the possibility that one or more particular groups of persons could find something in the campaign of sufficient interest to pull them out to the polls. (Of course, it must be recalled that the coincidence of the presidential primary with particular local issues is also a wild card, since some people who would not vote if they thought they were only choosing among candidates could turn up for other issues and then have the opportunity of taking part in the primary).

When respondents were asked (without being prompted with any names) if there was "any person you would especially like to see elected President this year", nearly half failed to name anyone. Among age-eligible residents, Bush -- who clearly enjoys some advantage from incumbency -- is most often named. But that is only by about one fourth of respondents, and is largely due to the fact that almost seven in ten Republicans name their incumbent fellow partisan.

Kerry "leads" among Democrats, cited by just under one in five of this group, and about four times as often as the next closest person. He is (as one would expect) also most commonly named among those Democrats who say they are at least "probably" going to vote. It should also be noted, that while Kerry is out-mentioned, compared to any other named individual, Democrats show as much tendency to say either "some Democrat or anybody but Bush" as to line up behind the Massachusetts Senator.

If the level of identification with one of the candidates seems low in an absolute sense, it does appear to have risen. In December, more than six in ten came up with no name at all. while in October, two thirds have no camp they identified with sufficiently to come up with the candidate's name unprompted.

Bush and the Democrats were included in a list of "people in public life" for whom respondents were asked to indicate if they had a favorable impression, an unfavorable impression, or "didn't know enough to make up you mind".

The period since December hastended to find Bush lower and most of the Democrats viewed at least as favorably as they were, though individuals differ much in terms of the magnitude of any shift.

The President remains more familiar than any of his potential challenger in terms of the proportion willing to come down on one side or the other. More than nine in ten are as has been the case since October. Yet the balance has modestly tended to be less favorable than it was (remembering that the poll to poll shifts are quite small). Now he is seen favorably for almost three persons for every one who views him unfavorably. Earlier as may be seen in the special table, this was almost a two to one tendency. Still, the fact that he remains favorably seen on balance is a real advantage for an incumbent.

## Comparisons from Three Surveys

	JAN	DEC	OCT
Attention to candidates			
A LOT	20%	13%	8%
SOME	44	31	28
ONLY A LITTLE	26	35	40
NONE AT ALL	11	20	24
Anyone in mind for President			
NO NAME MENTIONED	38%	53%	59%
GEORGE W. BUSH	28	27	22
GENERAL WESLEY CLARK	3	2	*
FRMR GOV HOWARD DEAN	2	3	2
SENATOR JOHN EDWARDS	1	*	*
REP. DICK GEPHARDT	--	*	--
SENATOR JOHN KERRY	8%	*	1
REP. DENNIS KUCINICH	1	*	*
SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN	*	*	*
CAROL MOSELEY-BRAUN	--	--	*
SENATOR RUSS FEINGOLD	--	*	--
TOM BARRETT	--	--	*
BILL CLINTON	*	1	1
HILLARY CLINTON	1	1	1
JOHN MCCAIN	--	*	*
ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER	--	--	1
OTHER	1	3	1
"REPUBLICAN"	*	*	--
"DEMOCRAT"	3	1	2
ANYBODY BUT BUSH	4	1	*
COMBINATION	1	*	--
DON'T KNOW	8	7	7
REFUSED	*	*	1

Joe Lieberman, who withdrew just after the last interview was conducted, was the most widely known Democrat earlier, and he remained essentially tied for the top on this survey, with an essentially equal balance of favorable and unfavorable impressions.

John Kerry, however, now rivals Lieberman in terms of the proportion stating an impression, which is six in ten for both. But the Massachusetts Senator is favorably seen on balance by more than two to one. This is a clear improvement from earlier when views of Kerry were more evenly matched, and only about four in ten were willing to come down on one side.

Dean comes next in familiarity (about half rate him one way or the other). Recent weeks have not been kind to him, however. Earlier residents split evenly on their perceptions of Dean. Now those who have an unfavorable impression outnumber those who view him favorably by roughly two to one.

Edwards has moved up modestly and has a favorable balance of views while he lags in familiarity. Clark is modestly better known, but the balance has not moved very much. Dennis Kucinich has scarcely moved at all. Al Sharpton's familiarity has not shifted but his unfavorability problem may have lessened somewhat.

	Awareness of Candidates		
	Jan	DEC	OCT
George W. Bush			
FAVORABLE	54%	57%	60%
UNFAVORABLE	39	34	34
Wesley Clark			
FAVORABLE	26%	16%	8%
UNFAVORABLE	17	13	11
Howard Dean			
FAVORABLE	18%	20%	12%
UNFAVORABLE	34	20	13
John Edwards			
FAVORABLE	25%	8%	7%
UNFAVORABLE	12	13	8
John Kerry			
FAVORABLE	42%	17%	15%
UNFAVORABLE	18	23	16
Dennis Kucinich			
FAVORABLE	6%	6%	4%
UNFAVORABLE	10	9	8
Joe Lieberman			
FAVORABLE	30%	30%	31%
UNFAVORABLE	32	31	29
Al Sharpton			
FAVORABLE	9%	5%	7%
UNFAVORABLE	31	35	31

Partisanship colors all these perceptions, of course, with Bush for instance strikingly more favorably viewed among those declaring themselves Republicans than is the case among Democrats. The same pattern (opposite in direction of course) applies for the Democratic hopefuls.

The pattern is flattest for Lieberman, who was viewed quite similarly by those in each partisan group. By contrast, favorable views of Kerry march upward from one in four Republicans to six in ten Democrats, with Independents in the middle. For Edwards, the big distinction is between Republicans on the one hand and BOTH Independents and Democrats on the other. This is also true for Sharpton (and to a less extent) Clark. Views of Dean differ rather more between Independents and Democrats, although it is Republicans who really take a quite onesidedly critical view of him.

Respondents were asked who among the (then seven) active Democrats they would most like to see get the nomination. Overall Kerry (32%) gets almost as many mentions as other specific people put together, with Clark, Dean, Lieberman, and Edwards closely bunched, leaving Kucinich and Sharpton with only a handful. Among Democrats, Kerry also gets more than half the nods, but Clark and Dean by themselves compose a second tier. If one looks only at those who identify as probably primary voters, overall the pattern is similar among the candidates

(thought there is a modest tendency to be more likely to name someone). Kerry's position is strongest (at 45%) among Democrats who say they are at least probably going to vote.

Still, it should be emphasized that Kerry has moved up sharply by several measures, against a backdrop of relatively limited information and attention, and things are by no means fixed. Moreover, while Kerry easily outdistances any particular alternative at present, as the field continues to shrink -- even absent other developments -- this leaves room for others to move.

At this stage, with the identity of the ultimate Democratic standard bearer quite unclear -- it was not long ago that the consensus of the pundits was that Dean was on the verge of locking things up, a key question is whether the incumbent is seen as deserving another term.

The weeks since early December have shown some modest erosion for George Bush on this dimension. At present, a narrow (49% to 42%) plurality among all age-eligible residents would prefer to see "someone else" in the White House rather than seeing Bush re-elected. Democrats and Republicans come down onesidedly on opposite sides of this question. Independents tilt toward an alternative.

#### Inclination to Give Bush Another Term

	01/04	12/03	10/03	8/03	5/03
Basic stance on Bush					
LIKE BUSH RE-ELECTED	42%	46%	46%	43%	53%
LIKE SOMEONE ELSE	49%	47	45	50	42

Views among probable voters are less positive (in favor of someone new by about three to two), but this is conceivably an artifact. Republicans are less likely to say they will vote in a primary in which nothing for their party is at stake -- though they could well complicate the picture on February 17th should large numbers vote among the Democrats. In any event, being open to "someone else" both reflects the common themes of all candidates in the Democratic field, and is quite different from deciding that any particular challenger is an improvement. Finally, of course, Bush has occupied less of the spotlight as the Democratic contests have taken center stage, so the fact that answers to this question have tended to move in a relatively narrow range every time it has been asked may be more important than small movement from poll to poll. It remains early, and much may shift as the contest slowly evolves down (principally at least) to a choice between the Republican incumbent and one particular Democratic alternative.









VOTE16. Al Sharpton (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	ALL AGE-ELIGIBLE						PROB/CERTAIN VOTERS					
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP
FAVORABLE	9%	12%	5%	10%	12%	3%	10%	14%	6%	11%	13%	4%
UNFAVORABLE	31	37	26	28	31	43	31	36	27	27	31	41
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	59	50	69	61	55	54	59	49	67	61	56	55
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	1	1	--	*	--	1	1	--	--
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

VOTE22. Among the currently active Democrats, that is, Wesley Clark, Howard Dean, John Edwards, John Kerry, Dennis Kucinich, Joe Lieberman and Al Sharpton, which one, if any would you most like to see get the Democratic nomination? (IF NAMES OTHER, PROMPT FOR LIST, TAKING "OTHER" ONLY IF R. INSISTS)

	ALL AGE-ELIGIBLE						PROB/CERTAIN VOTERS					
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP
CLARK	9%	9%	10%	10%	9%	5%	11%	10%	11%	11%	10%	7%
DEAN	8	8	8	12	9	3	8	8	8	12	8	3
EDWARDS	7	10	4	5	9	8	9	12	5	6	10	11
KERRY	32	31	33	43	27	30	35	33	36	45	29	31
KUCINICH	2	4	1	3	3	*	2	5	1	3	3	1
LIEBERMAN	8	11	6	5	9	16	8	10	6	4	8	15
SHARPTON	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	2
NONE OF THEM	8	7	8	2	6	15	6	7	6	2	5	14
INSISTS ON "OTHER"	*	*	--	1	--	--	*	1	--	1	--	--
DON'T KNOW	24	18	29	18	27	20	19	12	26	15	23	16
REFUSED	*	*	--	--	*	--	*	*	--	--	1	--

VOTE23. (ASK EVERYONE) On February 17, Wisconsin will be holding presidential primaries and various special local elections and referenda. Is it absolutely certain you will vote on February 17, would you say you probably will vote, probably won't vote, or definitely will not vote?

	ALL AGE-ELIGIBLE						PROB/CERTAIN VOTERS					
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP
CERTAIN TO VOTE	41%	39%	42%	48%	43%	32%	50%	49%	51%	55%	51%	44%
PROBABLY WILL VOTE	40	40	40	38	41	42	50	51	49	45	49	56
PROBABLY WON'T VOTE	12	12	12	10	12	15	--	--	--	--	--	--
DEFINITELY WON'T VOTE	6	8	4	3	3	11	--	--	--	--	--	--
50/50 CHANCE (VOL.)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
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?

	ALL AGE-ELIGIBLE						PROB/CERTAIN VOTERS					
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP
LIKE BUSH RE-ELECTED	42%	49%	36%	11%	36%	87%	38%	46%	31%	8%	33%	85%
LIKE SOMEONE ELSE	49	45	53	86	49	7	54	49	58	90	52	10
DON'T KNOW	8	6	11	2	14	6	8	5	11	2	15	6
REFUSED	*	1	--	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

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

	ALL AGE-ELIGIBLE						PROB/CERTAIN VOTERS					
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP
DEMOCRAT	32%	25%	39%	100%	--%	--%	35%	27%	41%	100%	--%	--%
REPUBLICAN	26	31	21	--	--	100	24	27	21	--	--	100
INDEPENDENT	25	29	22	--	100	--	27	31	23	--	100	--
OTHER	10	9	10	--	--	--	9	8	9	--	--	--
NONE	3	2	4	--	--	--	3	3	3	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	1	1	2	--	--	--	1	--	2	--	--	--
REFUSED	3	3	3	--	--	--	3	3	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 500 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between January 27 and February 3, inclusive. Telephone numbers were generated by computer in proportion to the number of adults living in each area of the state. Of these, 400 claimed they were either absolutely certain to vote in the upcoming primary or were probably going to vote.

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".