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IRAQ AND BUSH
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

Overall, President Bush's job ratings continue in the middle range. Just under half rate it as either excellent (16%) or good (30%), while just over half feel that fair (24%) or poor (30%) is more accurate. Among potential group differences, self-described partisanship stands out: seven of eight Republicans call his handling of his duties good or better, while seven of eight Democrats give him no more than fair. It is especially noteworthy, that six Democrats in ten give him the lowest possible rating of poor, twice as many as the comparable figure for self-described Independents. Only a handful of Republicans share this sentiment (at 2% the same proportion of Democrats who call Bush's performance excellent).

When the focus is narrowed to foreign policy, perceptions seem to worsen somewhat. Four in ten call that either excellent (12%) or good (28%), contrasting with the six in ten who rate it fair (28%) or poor (31%). Partisan differences are somewhat more muted here, but still quite strong.

Nonetheless, views of Bush's handling of foreign policy are more positive in the foreign policy arena than when respondents are asked about how he does "dealing with problems here at home". On that dimension, only three in ten call him excellent (6%) or good (25%), and just under seven in ten opt for fair (32%) or poor (36%). Fully nine in ten Democrats limit him to no higher than fair, including nearly two of three who call him poor.

Ratings of "the economy" specifically mirror those for domestic matters. The overall figures (excellent 6%, good 23%, fair 32%, and poor 38%) are essentially the same as for the broader area, as are the partisan profiles. A potential worrying sign for Mr. Bush is that while self-described Independents fall between Democrats and Republicans, their views of Bush's performance seem closer to the former than to the latter group of their fellow citizens.

Two more specific areas of foreign policy, however, are each more positive for the President than is the more general area. When it comes to dealing with terrorism, just over half rate Bush excellent (23%) or good (32%). About four in ten see his performance in this area as fair (23%) or poor (20%). Partisan differences persist here, with three in four Democrats choosing one of the lower grades and seven in eight Republicans rating him as at least good in this area (all groups rate him higher on fighting terrorism than on any other specific area investigated).

Ratings fall off some for "dealing with Iraq". There just under half grade Bush excellent (22%) or good (24%), and a bit more choose fair (24%) or poor (28%). Again party allegiance splits people, eight in ten Democrats call him fair or lower, about the same proportion of Republicans who rate him good or above.

These questions have occurred on a number of recent Badger Polls™, and results across time are summarized in the accompanying chart. Foreign policy is now rated about where it was in both January and October. There had been what now seems to be a "blip" up in December, however.

Job Ratings on Specific Areas

	3/04	1/04	12/03	10/03	8/03	5/03	4/03	3/03	2/03	1/03	9/02
Foreign policy											
EXCELLENT	12%	12%	16%	12%	12%			13%		12%	20%
GOOD	28	26	29	29	29			33		32	41
FAIR	28	27	35	28	34			30		34	23
POOR	31	33	19	30	24			23		20	15
Problems here at home											
EXCELLENT	6%	6%	10%	5%	4%			6%		6%	12%
GOOD	25	26	31	24	31			33		30	40
FAIR	32	31	35	33	36			35		39	29
POOR	36	37	23	36	28			25		24	18
Dealing with the economy											
EXCELLENT	6%	6%	12%	5%	3%	4%	7%	5%	4%	4%	6%
GOOD	23	23	28	23	23	34	32	22	26	23	30
FAIR	32	31	34	34	38	30	32	39	38	38	36
POOR	38	39	25	38	35	30	28	32	31	31	25
Dealing with terrorism											
EXCELLENT	23%	18%	22%	19%	17%	29%	34%	20%	20%	18%	32%
GOOD	32	35	37	36	42	41	44	46	43	42	40
FAIR	23	27	24	25	23	23	14	25	23	26	17
POOR	20	19	15	18	16	8	7	9	13	12	11
Dealing with Iraq											
EXCELLENT	22%	12%	18%	14%	15%	30%	40%	18%	19%	11%	22%
GOOD	24	27	30	31	32	32	35	31	30	31	30
FAIR	24	27	24	24	24	22	13	26	25	28	23
POOR	28	33	27	30	27	13	10	23	24	26	20

Note: Don't Know and Refused omitted for space

A similar pattern is seen for domestic policy (problems here at home), where the current results are quite close to what was found in January of this year and October of last. December also saw an upward blip in this area as well. This trend is also evident in ratings of Bush's specific economic performance, which has always been an area of relative weakness for him. Indeed, these ratings have not moved all that much since we have been asking about them.

Perceptions of Bush's handling of terrorism have usually been higher than most other ratings, and they have, if anything, gone up since January. The time

since late January and early February has also seen an improvement in the way the public views his handling of Iraq. Indeed, current views of that are as positive as we seen since they came down from the high point achieved in the immediate aftermath of the initial military victory in that country.

Views of Iraq are complex. To begin with, the public continues to endorse the original context of the war. Two thirds (65%) in March 2004 say 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". Three in ten (30%) feel we did not do the right thing. There are partisan differences, but it is noteworthy that a substantial minority (four in ten) Democrats say this policy was initially right. Moreover, as shown in the accompanying chart, this opinion has tended to hold from the time before hostilities broke out (going even higher in a pro-Bush direction when the initial military campaign went so well, before falling back some).

Reinforcing this point, when respondent were reminded that there had been a number of UN resolutions about Iraqi disarmament, but that the United States could not get UN endorsement for war, a five to three (59%-35%) majority supports "the decision of the US and other countries to use force anyway". This group includes three Democrats in ten, more than half of all Independents, and seven Republicans in every eight. This view has held more or less intact since close after the period of "major combat operations". Taken together, these two questions mean that -- while there is certainly dissent -- the public at large does NOT regard the Iraqi war as a mistake, at least not yet, though this view has more currency among Democrats than those of other partisan stripes.

Iraq Questions from Nine Surveys

	MAR	JAN	DEC	OCT	AUG	MAY	APR	MAR	FEB
Original threat of war									
YES, DID RIGHT THING	65%	64%	65%	65%	70%	78%	80%	65%	65%
NO, DID NOT	30	28	26	30	26	18	16	26	26
ONLY WITH OTHERS (VOL)	1	1	*	1	*	1	*	1	1
Support US action alone w/o UN									
YES	59%	57%	62%	62%	61%	71%	75%	61%	58%
NO	35	35	31	32	34	25	19	31	32

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

More than half think it either "very likely" (29%) or "somewhat likely" (26%) that "if the US had decided NOT to go to war" then "we would eventually have been attacked with Iraqi weapons of mass destruction". Just over four in three discount this threat, calling it "not very likely" (27%) or "not likely at all" (16%). Republicans are clearly more prone than others to see this threat as real, but discounting it entirely is going a bit far for most Wisconsin residents. Looking across time, at the time of major fighting this threat was taken more seriously, and had waned some by the period of August to December. Those levels were higher than we found in January, since when they are risen back up to where things were at the end of 2003.

One feature of the Democratic candidates' (first almost the whole field and now the presumptive nominee's) criticism of Bush is that the US war in Iraq has

actually harmed the security of the United States. But when asked "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", the public is split but those who think things have improved are somewhat more numerous than those who think they have worsened. This is also an area of partisan disagreement. Half of Democrats think the terror risk is now higher, only one in five think it has decreased. Almost two thirds of Republicans think it has lowered the risk of terrorism in the world, Independents are evenly balanced. (The poll began about one week AFTER the Madrid bombings). One year ago, when the war was breaking out, the balance of opinion was modestly that a change in the terror risk was more likely to be an increase than a decrease, but then -- save for last August when views were evenly split -- there has been a mild optimism if anything.

Trend from March

	MAR	JAN	DEC	OCT	AUG	MAY	APR	MAR
Use of WMD against US w/o war								
VERY LIKELY	29%	18%	30%	32%	31%	40%	42%	34%
SOMEWHAT LIKELY	26	34	31	33	31	32	32	33
NOT VERY LIKELY	27	26	23	22	24	19	17	23
NOT LIKELY AT ALL	16	20	13	13	12	8	8	8
Long-term impact of war								
INCREASED TERROR RISK	29%	25%	27%	25%	33%	24%	25%	42%
DECREASED TERROR RISK	39	40	37	39	35	44	46	27
NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE	28	32	32	32	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.

Overall, the war gets "mixed reviews". The single most common view is that the war was "only partly a success", the stance taken by four residents in ten (39%). One in three (34%) view it as "mostly a success", although only a handful (5%) endorse it as a "complete success". One in five assess the war as mostly (14%) or a complete failure (7%). Republicans are much more positive than others. Two thirds call it at least "mostly a success", and younger residents are more upbeat than their older fellow respondents. Independents and Democrats are more critical, but are far from writing off the war as a failure.

Characterizations of the war have been relatively stable since last August. They have clearly not gone down over the past months, but the public at large has far from concluded that the war was a mistake, even as they seem to have doubts.

Several questions addressed what has developed into the vexing matter of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. To begin with respondents were reminded that no clear evidence of them has yet been found, and were asked which of several explanations would make most sense "if it turns out that none are found. Half (53%) say they "remain hidden somewhere" (that is that they DID exist and just have not yet been uncovered). One in four (23%) believe the US was wrong in its assertions, another tenth (11%) say "the Iraqis destroyed them secretly". The single most common view among Democrats is that the United States was wrong in its assertions, but combining the other two categories -- the one in four who believe the WMD remain hidden and the one among seven who think they were

secretly destroyed at some point -- would both disagree that Bush knowingly lied about them. (Democrats stand out in that, among all other groups, the single most common view is that weapons have not yet been found, but are there for the discovery).

Looking Back at War

	MAR	JAN	DEC	OCT	AUG	MAY
Assessment of war						
COMPLETE SUCCESS	5%	4%	2%	4%	3%	9%
MOSTLY A SUCCESS	34	33	35	32	35	52
ONLY PARTLY A SUCCESS	39	42	38	45	43	29
MOSTLY A FAILURE	14	14	15	14	13	6
A COMPLETE FAILURE	7	5	7	1	3	1
Why no WMD found						
US WAS WRONG	23%	29	18%	17%	17%	10%
IRAQIS DESTROYED	11	15	17	16	14	14
IRAQIS HID THEM	53	45	54	60	61	66
If US thought no WMD						
GOOD IDEA ANYWAY	40%	39%	36%	38%	35%	47%
BAD IDEA	36	39	35	33	37	26
DON'T HAVE OPINION	22	19	26	27	28	25

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

Present results are not all that different from earlier surveys. Back in May, two thirds thought the weapons had been hidden and only one in ten felt the US assertion was wrong. The latter number has tended to slowly rise, the former to fall, but the current figures show something of a rebound from January, as opposed to any further movement away from the Administrations public statements.

There is some question about the centrality of weapons of mass destruction in the minds of the public. Some politicians have asserted that if there were no WMD the administration must have lied and that there was no justification for the attack on Iraq. Such views do not find much support in Wisconsin.

"If the US government thought the Iraqis didn't actually have weapons of mass destruction anymore", four in ten feel "it was a good idea to go to war with Iraq for other reasons". Just about as many (36%) say it was a bad idea, and almost one in four said they had no opinion. Many groups are closely divided -- men are narrowly pro-war while women are narrowly of the view that it was a bad idea. As might be expected, there are clear partisan differences, with two thirds of GOP-backers saying it was a good idea to go to war and one in ten disagreeing. Among Democrats, six in ten call going to war a bad idea. Save in May, when by almost two to one (47%-26%) residents said the war would have been a good idea even if the US had not thought Iraq had WMD, opinion has been pretty closely divided, and has not moved very much at all.

One new question on this survey attempted more directly to address the allegation that Bush had lied to the public in order to get us into war. When respondents were reminded that "before the start of the war, President Bush said that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction which would pose a real threat to the

GWB05. How would you rate the job George W. Bush is doing dealing with problems here at home? (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
EXCELLENT	6%	6%	5%	2%	2%	14%	7%	2%	5%	9%
GOOD	25	24	27	6	18	49	21	27	28	22
FAIR	32	35	30	29	38	31	34	36	33	29
POOR	36	35	37	63	42	5	39	35	34	38
DON'T KNOW	*	--	1	--	*	*	--	--	*	1
REFUSED	*	1	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	1

GWB06. Handling the economy? (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
EXCELLENT	6%	7%	4%	2%	2%	13%	1%	5%	6%	9%
GOOD	23	27	20	4	19	46	28	25	23	20
FAIR	32	27	36	25	34	33	35	36	30	28
POOR	38	38	38	68	44	7	37	34	40	40
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	--	1	1	--	1	1	2
REFUSED	*	1	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	1

GWB07. Dealing with terrorism? (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
EXCELLENT	23%	29%	18%	5%	21%	47%	32%	21%	20%	24%
GOOD	32	35	29	20	29	39	30	37	34	26
FAIR	23	18	29	33	26	13	18	26	24	23
POOR	20	18	22	41	23	1	16	16	21	24
DON'T KNOW	1	--	1	--	2	*	3	--	--	1
REFUSED	*	1	*	2	--	--	--	--	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	22%	28%	17%	5%	19%	44%	28%	21%	20%	23%
GOOD	24	25	23	14	20	34	23	27	26	19
FAIR	24	21	27	24	27	18	23	31	24	20
POOR	28	24	32	56	34	3	26	20	30	36
DON'T KNOW	*	*	1	*	*	--	--	*	*	1
REFUSED	*	1	--	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	65%	72%	58%	39%	62%	88%	66%	68%	66%	60%
NO, HAS NOT	30	26	35	52	38	7	30	26	30	35
ONLY WITH OTHERS (VOL.)	1	2	1	2	--	1	1	2	--	2
DON'T KNOW	2	--	4	3	*	3	--	4	3	2
REFUSED	1	*	2	4	--	--	2	1	1	1

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	23%	24%	23%	43%	32%	3%	19%	23%	24%	26%
IRAQIS DESTROYED	11	13	10	14	8	12	12	8	12	15
IRAQIS HID THEM	53	49	57	28	43	79	57	59	53	44
DON'T KNOW	11	12	10	14	15	5	11	11	10	14
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	2	1	--	--	1	1

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	40%	48%	34%	16%	33%	67%	41%	43%	42%	36%
BAD IDEA	36	33	40	59	46	11	38	29	38	39
DON'T HAVE OPINION	22	18	25	22	20	20	21	26	17	24
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	2	--	1	--	2	2	--
REFUSED	*	1	*	--	1	1	--	--	1	1

IRAQ12C. Before the start of the war, President Bush said that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction which would pose a real threat to the US. Do you think he believed at the time this was true?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
YES, BELIEVED WAS TRUE	73%	73%	73%	50%	69%	97%	78%	78%	72%	68%
NO, DID NOT	22	23	20	40	25	2	21	20	23	22
DON'T KNOW	5	4	6	9	6	1	1	2	5	9
REFUSED	*	--	1	1	--	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	27%	21%	34%	100%	--%	--%	20%	27%	27%	32%
REPUBLICAN	30	29	32	--	--	100	32	27	29	33
INDEPENDENT	27	33	21	--	100	--	29	27	26	27
OTHER	11	15	7	--	--	--	9	14	14	4
NONE	3	2	4	--	--	--	4	4	2	2
DON'T KNOW	1	1	2	--	--	--	5	--	1	*
REFUSED	1	--	1	--	--	--	--	1	--	1

* 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 March 23 and 31, 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".