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PRESIDENT BUSH IN THE MIND OF WISCONSIN RESIDENTS
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

President George W. Bush enjoys strong job ratings among Wisconsin residents according to a new Badger Poll™, conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center, and sponsored by Wisconsin Public Broadcasting and the Capital Times newspaper of Madison. The poll interviewed 597 randomly selected state residents by telephone between March 5 and 17, inclusive, and has a "margin of error" of about plus or minus 4%.

Overall, two thirds of state residents give Bush a rating of either excellent (28%) or good (40%), contrasted with the fewer than one in four (22%) who call his performance fair, and 7% who label it poor. On this dimension, at least, there is little evidence of the vaunted "gender gap", as men as women as groups give Bush neither identical ratings, varying by no more than a point or two for any category. Specific numbers may be seen in the detailed tables following this summary.

Self-described partisan identification is another story, however. While a (remarkably high) half of all Democrats rate Bush as "good" or better, this proportion increases to three in four among Independents, and over nine in ten among Republicans. Among his fellow partisans, Bush is given excellent ratings by some six in ten. Also noteworthy is the lack of strong negative sentiment. Only about one in ten Independents or Democrats call Bush's handling of his job "poor". He enjoys strong backing across age groups as well, ranging from a "low" of 66% among those sixty and older who rate him good or excellent to a "high" of 72%. These differences are small enough to leave real doubt as to whether they reflect real distinctions in the population, or are a product of who happened to be interviewed for the survey.

The sense that perceptions of Bush are relatively strong is reinforced when respondents were asked, looking back, on how they would assess Bill Clinton, using the same four point scale of excellent, good, fair, or poor. Just under half of all respondents gave him a grade of excellent (8%) or good (39%), and just over that chose one of the two lower categories of fair (30%) or poor (22%). Partisanship also makes a difference in retrospective assessments of Clinton, just under three in four Democrats called it good or better, while just over that proportion of Republicans gave him a rating of fair or worse.

One can compare the two ratings directly seeing what proportion of the sample rated Bush higher than Clinton, what proportion gave the two the same grade, and how many placed Clinton higher than Bush. (A fourth group, which failed to express an opinion on either or both, for whom a direct comparison is not possible, can also be identified.) Results are shown below for a "constructed

item", in the numerical summary.

Half of all residents rated Bush higher than Clinton (e.g. excellent for him, good or worse for Clinton, or good for him, fair or worse for Clinton). This includes just over half for men and just under that for women. Only one in six Democrats thinks Bush is doing better than Clinton, which proportion rises to half among Independents, and to almost seven in eight among Republicans. All four age groups hover around the 50% mark.

The remainder of those who can be classified split pretty evenly between those who give the two men identical "grades" and those who, looking back at his predecessor, see Clinton as having done better than Bush is now.

As before gender makes little difference, with men and women as groups appearing virtually identical. Among partisans, half of Democrats rate Clinton more highly, with one third rating the two men the same. Among Independents, slightly more rate them the same than give Clinton an edge (recalling that half felt Bush was doing better). Almost all of the Republicans who did not think Bush was outpacing Clinton gave the two identical marks, only a handful put Clinton over Bush. There is no sharp age distinction. So, overall, the largest single group awards Bush a higher grade, while taking into account the group which gives the two Chief Executives the same grade brings us to three state residents in four who believe Bush is doing at least as well as the former Governor from a state next to Texas.

A distinction has always been possible between how one feels about a President as a person and how one feels about his policies. Around the country, this was especially clear for Bill Clinton, for whom attitudes could often be summed up, "he's fine in the White House, but not in the house next door". A question put this distinction to Wisconsinites, asking them explicitly to relate whether they liked or disliked Bush as a person and whether they supported or opposed most of his policies. Results reinforce the notion that he occupies a strong place, for the moment at least, in the assessments of Wisconsin residents.

Just under six in ten (59%) say they both like Bush as a person and support most of his policies. This dwarfs the "opposite" group, those who dislike him and oppose most of his policies, which accounts for just over one resident in ten (11%). The "mixed" categories, which come down on one side for Bush as a person and the other for his policies together include only one resident in five, with those who like Bush, but oppose him slightly (13%-8%) outnumbering those who have a more favorable view of his policies than of the man. Only a handful took a position on only one dimension.

Men and women differ scarcely at all in their overall patterns. Similarly, the range in the proportion who fall in the "like/support" group ranges from a low of 55% (among 45 to 59 year olds) to a high of 66% (among those below thirty), but this group clearly constitutes the single most common perception across the board.

Partisans differ. Among Republicans more than nine in ten both like Bush and support his policies. Independents as a group tend to resemble the population, with the "double positive" position by far the most common. Democrats are spread out much more evenly across the categories. The largest single group (31%) likes Bush and supports him, but the groups of like/oppose (22%) and dislike/oppose (23%) balance each other and are not all that far behind. The least common pattern among Democrats are those who dislike Bush personally but support him.

These answers can also be looked at in terms of only one dimension at a time -- that is do respondents like or dislike Bush, ignoring their views of his policies, and do they support or oppose his policies, ignoring how they feel about him as a person. Results are shown as two "constructed items" in the tables below.

Overall, almost 73% like Bush personally. Men and women do not sharply differ (the latter are slightly less likely to say they dislike him, and correspondingly slightly more likely). Among age groups, those expressing a liking for Bush strongly outnumber those who dislike him but though the onesidedness of this varies a bit, highest among the youngest group, drops slightly for the next two groups, and then goes up a bit for those over sixty. More than half of all Democrats say they like Bush personally, three fourths of Independents do, and nineteen out of twenty Republicans like the President personally.

When it comes to policy, the picture is somewhat different. Just under seven residents in every ten (69%) say they support the President's policies. Men are very slightly more supportive than women, age shows little different, although the forty-five to fifty-nine group is least positive. There are two points to make about partisanship. First, the level of support is more than twice as high among Republicans as for Democrats, with Independents in the middle. But quite striking is the fact that while Republicans overwhelmingly support "their" President, he gets pretty much an even split among those in the "opposite" party.

Going along with this are the results when respondents were asked whether the Bush Administration's policies are helping the country, along with a parallel question about their impact on "people like you". Among those who see a clear impact one way or the other, those who believe Bush's policies are helping the country (52%) outnumber those who feel they are hurting it by a three to one margin. One in four (27%) felt they were not making much difference. Both the proportion who see a difference and the balance between "helping" and "hurting" are relatively high compared to times similar questions have been asked around the country in the past.

Patterns for gender and age tend to mirror what we have earlier noted, small gender and age differences. The most "pro-Bush" group being men and younger people, and the least the forty-five to fifty-nine group, but these differences are small. Also as before, there is a very clear partisan pattern. Here, Republicans are more than three times as likely to feel Bush's policies are helping than are Democrats, but the balance among the latter group, which averages out to neutral is noteworthy, especially considering the closeness and controversy of the election by which Mr. Bush entered the White House. But of course America in spring 2002 is a very different place.

When the emphasis shifts to the impact of his policies on "people like you", answers are more muted. The largest group (53%) sees no real difference. And the balance (28%-16%) among those who do see one is much closer than it was when the issue was the impact on the country as a whole. Again men are slightly more sanguine than women, and age makes a muted difference, with the same groups more "pro-Bush". Republicans stand out as the only group for which the personal impact is overwhelmingly onesided, and the only one for which those saying "not much difference" fails to be the biggest group.

Bush does well in a retrospective vote, in which respondents were asked how they voted in the previous election. It is common for a winner, especially a popular one to do even better as people color their recollections. Now, Bush

enjoys a four to three (41%-30%) advantage over Gore (who actually outpolled him narrowly in the Badger State. Support for Bush differs little proportionally by age, save that it is most divided among the forty-five to fifty-nine group. Men gave Bush a strong edge, women split more evenly. But Bush enjoys a "plurality" in recollected vote among all groups shown except self-described Democrats, among whom Gore handily "beats" him.

Respondents were also asked, however, how they would vote if they had it to do all over again. In that scenario, Bush increases his "lead" to more than two to one (53%-25%), which probably reflects current sentiment even more directly than the recollected vote. A modest gender gap is seen, though Bush clearly outpolls Gore in both groups. Younger groups opt for Bush more than older, particularly than the now familiar forty-five to fifty-nine group. Bush swamps Gore among Republicans, outpolls him seven to two among Independents, and has a very respectable showing of 25% among Democrats, fewer than six in ten of whom would opt for their candidate.

Taken together, these results paint a picture of a President who is positively viewed here in Wisconsin and therefore has some real political resources. But one should recall that it is still quite soon after the events of September 11, and we are still very much in the shadow of that day and its aftermath. History is replete with examples of changed perceptions of presidents. But for now, Bush appears to be in pretty good shape here.

Statewide Marginals and Percentages for Key Groups

What follows is the exact question wording for each of the items referred to in the release. 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 their age group (calculated from year of birth: 18-29; 30-44; 45-59; sixty and older.)

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%	52%	53%	51%	51%	50%	43%
FEMALE	51	--	100	57	48	47	49	49	50	58

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	28%	28%	27%	7%	26%	60%	30%	30%	30%	22%
Good	40	41	40	42	48	32	38	42	37	44
Fair	22	23	21	39	17	7	24	22	20	24
Poor	7	7	8	11	10	1	7	4	11	8
TOO SOON (vol.)	*	1	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	--
DON'T KNOW	*	--	1	1	--	--	1	--	--	2
REFUSED	1	*	2	--	--	1	1	1	2	1

Q03: And, looking back, how would you rate the job Bill Clinton did as President?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
Excellent	8%	7%	9%	21%	2%	2%	9%	7%	9%	8%
Good	39	41	36	52	50	20	30	38	40	40
Fair	30	26	34	24	30	33	44	31	26	26
Poor	22	25	18	2	18	45	15	23	23	25
DON'T KNOW	1	*	1	1	*	--	1	1	--	1
REFUSED	2	*	3	1	--	1	1	1	2	*

Q03X: (CONSTRUCTED ITEM from Q02, Q03) Comparison of Bush/Clinton rating

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
Bush higher	50%	53%	48%	17%	53%	84%	56%	53%	48%	50%
Bush same	23	24	23	31	26	12	20	25	23	21
Bush lower	24	22	25	50	21	3	22	20	27	26
Did not rate both	3	1	4	2	*	1	2	3	2	3

BUSH01: Which of the following comes closest to how you feel about George W. Bush?

- * I like him as a person AND I also support most of his policies
- * I like him as a person BUT I oppose most of his policies
- * I don't like him as a person BUT I support most of his policies
- * I don't like him as a person AND I oppose most of his policies

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
LIKE PERSON/SUPPORT	59%	59%	60%	31%	59%	92%	66%	61%	55%	61%
LIKE PERSON/OPPOSE	13	14	12	22	14	2	17	12	13	9
DISLIKE PERSON/SUPPORT	8	11	5	14	10	1	6	7	9	7
DISLIKE PERSON/OPPOSE	11	11	11	23	8	1	6	13	13	10
SUPPORT POLICIES ONLY	2	2	2	2	3	2	--	2	2	2
OPPOSE POLICIES ONLY	1	1	2	2	2	--	1	--	3	2
LIKE PERSON ONLY	1	1	1	1	*	1	--	*	*	3
DISLIKE PERSON ONLY	*	--	1	1	--	--	1	--	--	1
DON'T KNOW	3	1	5	4	3	1	2	3	2	4
REFUSED	2	1	3	*	*	1	1	2	2	1

BUSH01X: (CONSTRUCTED ITEM from BUSH01) Attitude to policies, ignoring person

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
Like Bush	73%	73%	73%	55%	74%	95%	83%	74%	68%	73%
Dislike Bush	19	22	17	37	18	2	14	20	22	18
DK/Ref Like	8	5	11	8	8	3	4	7	9	9

BUSH01Y: (CONSTRUCTED ITEM from BUSH01) Attitude to policies, ignoring person

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
Support Policies	69%	71%	66%	46%	72%	95%	72%	70%	67%	70%
Oppose Policies	25	26	25	47	24	3	24	25	29	21
DK/Ref Policies	6	3	9	7	4	2	4	5	5	9

BUSH02: Overall, do you think the Bush Administration's policies are helping the country, hurting it, or not making much difference?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
HELP	52%	55%	50%	26%	57%	84%	58%	55%	49%	50%
HURT	16	15	17	31	15	2	13	15	17	16
NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE	27	27	27	37	26	14	25	25	29	28
DON'T KNOW	4	3	4	6	2	--	4	3	3	4
REFUSED	2	1	2	1	*	1	--	1	2	2

BUSH03: And how about people like you? Are the Bush Administration's policies helping people like you, hurting them, or not making much difference?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
HELP	28%	32%	24%	17%	27%	48%	32%	32%	28%	21%
HURT	16	16	15	28	18	1	7	12	21	19
NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE	53	50	56	53	54	47	60	50	49	57
DON'T KNOW	3	2	4	2	1	4	1	5	2	3
REFUSED	1	*	1	--	--	1	--	1	1	--

BUSH04: In the 2000 presidential election, did you vote for Bush, Gore, Nader, Buchanan, someone else, or didn't you happen to vote in that election?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
BUSH	41%	45%	38%	13%	40%	80%	35%	43%	40%	48%
GORE	30	26	34	68	27	2	20	23	38	34
NADER	3	3	3	3	5	1	6	3	3	1
BUCHANAN	*	*	*	--	*	1	--	1	--	1
SOMEONE ELSE	2	2	1	1	4	*	--	3	1	1
DIDN'T HAPPEN TO VOTE	18	19	18	15	19	13	32	22	14	12
INELIGIBLE (VOL.)	1	2	1	--	1	1	4	1	1	--
DON'T KNOW	*	--	1	--	1	1	2	--	--	--
REFUSED	4	3	4	1	3	1	2	5	4	4

BUSH05: If you had it to do all over again, would you vote for Bush, Gore, Nader, Buchanan, someone else, or wouldn't you vote?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
BUSH	53%	57%	50%	25%	58%	90%	59%	56%	49%	56%
GORE	25	23	27	58	16	3	20	18	33	27
NADER	4	4	3	2	6	1	8	2	3	2
BUCHANAN	*	--	*	--	--	1	--	1	--	--
SOMEONE ELSE	5	5	5	6	7	1	1	8	4	5
WOULD NOT VOTE	6	6	6	4	5	2	7	9	6	3
INELIGIBLE (VOL.)	1	1	1	--	1	1	2	1	1	--
DON'T KNOW	3	1	5	4	2	1	3	3	1	4
REFUSED	3	2	4	--	4	1	1	3	3	3

BUSH05X: (CONSTRUCTED ITEM, from BUSH04, BUSH05) Comparison of reported vote, preference if had to do over again ("For" means for Bush, "against" means prefer other candidate, "other" means no vote, ineligible, DK, etc.)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
Both for Bush	39%	43%	35%	11%	38%	79%	34%	42%	37%	45%
Was against/now for	6	4	7	8	9	1	6	5	7	5
Was other/now for	8	10	7	6	11	9	19	9	5	6
Was for/now against	1	*	2	1	*	*	1	1	2	1
Both against	27	26	28	59	25	3	20	22	33	29
Was other/now against	6	6	5	6	5	3	8	6	5	4
Was for/now other	1	1	1	*	2	--	--	--	1	2
Was against/now other	2	1	3	4	3	--	--	3	1	4
Both other	10	8	12	5	8	5	13	13	9	5

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	32%	28%	35%	100%	--%	--%	26%	28%	36%	36%
Republican	28	31	26	--	--	100	32	33	23	31
Independent	22	23	21	--	100	--	22	18	27	20
Other	11	14	8	--	--	--	8	16	10	5
None	4	2	6	--	--	--	10	4	3	3
DON'T KNOW	1	*	2	--	--	--	2	1	1	*
REFUSED	2	1	3	--	--	--	1	2	2	3

QD11: In what year were you born? (ENTER FOUR-DIGIT YEAR)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
18-29	15%	16%	15%	12%	15%	17%	100%	--%	--%	--%
30-44	31	32	29	27	25	35	--	100	--	--
45-59	32	33	32	37	39	26	--	--	100	--
60 and over	20	17	22	23	18	22	--	--	--	100
DON'T KNOW	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
REFUSED	2	1	2	2	4	--	--	--	--	--

* denotes less than .5%

-- denotes 0%

HOW THE POLL WAS DONE

This inaugural 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 poll was sponsored in part by Wisconsin Public Broadcasting and the Capital Times newspaper of Madison. 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 597 randomly selected adult residents of Wisconsin were interviewed over the telephone from March 5-17, 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 about +/- 4%. This means that, had we asked every eligible adult 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".