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**Public Gives Increased Credit to Bush on Economy,
But Support Remains Soft, Annenberg Poll Shows**

Public perceptions of the nation's economy and the Bush Administration's handling of it have been improving in recent weeks but are still less than robust, the University of Pennsylvania's National Annenberg Election Survey shows.

Traditionally, attitudes about the economy have been major factors in whether an incumbent president wins re-election or not. In polling conducted since mid-December, 71 percent of registered voters said the economy would be more important to their vote than the situation in Iraq, which was cited by 14 percent. That had not really changed much all fall. In early November, when the question was first asked, 71 percent said the economy and 19 percent said Iraq.

Increasingly positive attitudes about the economy and the Administration were reflected by a variety of questions. In October, 34 percent of the public said the state of the economy was poor. But that dropped to 25 percent in polling since mid-December.

When asked in October how they expected the economy to be a year hence – a measure that has often weighed heavily in voting decisions – 52 percent said it would be better and 21 percent said worse. In the latest polling, the upbeat margin was bigger; 58 percent said it would be better and only 12 percent said it would be worse.

The margin of sampling error for results from the 1,536 people polled in October was plus or minus two percentage points, and it was the same for the polling of 3,243 people conducted from December 16 through January 5.

The president himself is not yet getting resounding approval on the economy, but the trend is favorable. In October, 46 percent approved of his handling of the economy and 50 percent disapproved. In the more recent polling, since mid-December, 51 percent approved and 45 percent disapproved.

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Further, a plurality of the public now says the Bush Administration's policies are making the economy better, a view held by 34 percent. Thirty percent said they were making things worse, and another 30 percent said they were having no effect. In October a plurality said Administration policies were making the economy worse. Forty percent held that view, 26 percent said the Administration's policies were making the economy better, and another 28 percent said they had no effect.

Political independents were still unimpressed with the effects of administration policies. In the latest polling, 28 percent said Administration policies were making the economy better and 31 percent said worse.

Some other measures have not really changed in three months. In October, 43 percent said their own economic situation was either excellent or good. In the latest polling, 44 percent said that. And when respondents were asked whether they or someone they know had lost a job because of economic conditions in the previous six months, 47 percent said yes in the latest polling. In November, when the question was first asked, 44 percent said yes. In the most recent polling, Republicans were least likely to answer yes. Thirty-one percent of them said they or someone they knew had lost a job, while 52 percent of independents and 57 percent of Democrats said they had.

Another finding where there was no statistically significant change came on the question of whether respondents said there were "plenty of jobs available" in their community or whether jobs were "difficult to find." In October, 23 percent said "plenty" and 68 percent said "difficult." In the latest polling, 26 percent said "plenty" and 66 percent said "difficult."

In general, there was little partisan impact in the changes. Republicans started and ended the most upbeat and Democrats the least optimistic. But on some questions, Republicans seemed particularly encouraged. For example, asked what the economic condition of the country was, 37 percent of Republicans polled in October said it was excellent or good. That rose to 52 percent in the latest polling. Democrats went from 12 to 16 percent and independents from 17 to 23 percent.

While all regions of the country gave the economy higher ratings now than in October, the most dramatic change in opinion about whether the Administration's policies mattered came in the Northeast. In October, that region's view of Bush was especially severe, with 51 percent saying administration policies were making things worse, and just 22 percent said worse. In the latest polling they broke even, with 31 percent said better and 31 percent said worse.

In the battleground Midwest, Bush Administration's policies also got new credit. Among Midwesterners, the percent saying Administration policies were making things better went from 23 to 36 percent, while the percent saying "worse" dropped from 38 to 30 percent.

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That National Annenberg Election Survey is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania (www.appcpenn.org). It has been tracking the presidential campaign since October, and interviewing will continue until after Election Day. Dr. Kathleen Hall Jamieson is the director of the survey. Ken Winnege is the managing director of the survey. Adam Clymer is the political director of the survey.

Questions

A. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the nation's economy?

Period	October 7-31	Nov. 1-15	Nov. 16-30	Dec. 1-15	Dec. 16-Jan. 5
Approve	46	47	48	51	51
Disapprove	50	50	49	45	45

B. Would you say that the economic policies of the Bush administration are making the economy better, worse, or are having no effect one way or the other?

Period	October 7-31	Nov. 1-15	Nov. 16-30	Dec. 1-15	Dec. 16-Jan. 5
Better	26	27	29	30	34
Worse	40	39	37	32	30
No Effect	28	28	29	31	30

C. Now I'd like to talk to you about the state of the economy. How would you rate economic conditions in this country today? Would you say they are?

Period	October 7-31	Nov. 1-15	Nov. 16-30	Dec. 1-15	Dec. 16-Jan. 5
Excellent	1	1	1	2	2
Good	20	20	21	24	27
Fair	44	43	47	46	45
Poor	34	35	30	27	25

D. How would you rate your own personal economic situation today? Is it?

Period	October 7-31	Nov. 1-15	Nov. 16-30	Dec. 1-15	Dec. 16-Jan. 5
Excellent	6	5	5	7	6
Good	38	37	38	38	37
Fair	42	39	41	39	40
Poor	14	18	16	16	16

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E. Thinking about one year from now, do you think economic conditions in the country will be much better than they are right now, somewhat better, the same, somewhat worse, or much worse?

Period	October 7-31	Nov. 1-15	Nov. 16-30	Dec. 1-15	Dec. 16-Jan. 5
Better	52	53	53	55	58
Same	24	28	27	27	26
Worse	21	15	17	14	12

F. Thinking about job opportunities where you live, would you say there are plenty jobs available in your community or are jobs difficult to find?

Period	October 7-31	Nov. 1-15	Nov. 16-30	Dec. 1-15	Dec. 16-Jan. 5
Plenty	23	25	26	27	26
Difficult	68	66	65	65	66

G. In the last six months, have you, or anyone you know personally lost his or her job because of economic conditions?

Period	October 7-31	Nov. 1-15	Nov. 16-30	Dec. 1-15	Dec. 16-Jan. 5
Respondent	NA	6	5	5	5
Other	NA	35	37	36	41
Both	NA	6	1	3	1
No	NA	52	56	55	52

For the Period December 16 – January 5

A. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the nation's economy?

Region	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Approve	49	49	54	49
Disapprove	48	46	42	47

Party ID	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Approve	84	27	49
Disapprove	13	70	49

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B. Would you say that the economic policies of the Bush administration are making the economy better, worse, or are having no effect one way or the other?

Region	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Better	31	36	36	32
Worse	31	30	27	32
No Effect	33	29	30	29

Party ID	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Better	63	14	28
Worse	7	48	31
No Effect	24	33	34

C. Now I'd like to talk to you about the state of the economy. How would you rate economic conditions in this country today? Would you say they are?

Region	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Excellent	2	1	2	2
Good	25	26	32	23
Fair	48	47	40	45
Poor	25	25	24	28

Party ID	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Excellent	3	1	1
Good	49	15	22
Fair	38	44	51
Poor	9	39	26

D. How would you rate your own personal economic situation today? Is it?

Region	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Excellent	6	6	9	5
Good	39	36	38	36
Fair	40	41	39	41
Poor	15	17	15	18

Party ID	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Excellent	10	4	6
Good	52	31	33
Fair	30	44	45
Poor	8	20	16

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E. Thinking about one year from now, do you think economic conditions in the country will be much better than they are right now, somewhat better, the same, somewhat worse, or much worse?

Region	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Better	58	56	59	57
Same	25	28	23	27
Worse	13	12	13	12

Party ID	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Better	75	46	56
Same	17	33	28
Worse	5	18	12

F. Thinking about job opportunities where you live, would you say there are plenty jobs available in your community or are jobs difficult to find?

Region	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Plenty	22	24	31	27
Difficult	71	68	63	65

Party ID	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Plenty	35	19	27
Difficult	55	76	65

G. In the last six months, have you, or anyone you know personally lost his or her job because of economic conditions?

Region	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Respondent	8	5	6	3
Other	43	41	36	45
Both	2	0	2	0
No	47	54	54	52

Party ID	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Respondent	3	8	4
Other	27	48	46
Both	1	1	1
No	69	41	48

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Survey Methodology

The National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) is a survey conducted each presidential election by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. The 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey is based on telephone interviews which began October 7, 2003 and will continue past Election Day.

The sample of telephone exchanges called was randomly selected by a computer from a complete list of thousands of active residential exchanges across the country. Within each exchange, random digits were added to form a complete telephone number, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers. Within each household, one adult was designated by a random procedure to be the respondent for the survey. The interviewing is conducted by Schulman, Ronca, Bucuvalas, Inc.

The results have been weighted to take account of household size and number of telephone lines into the residence and to adjust for variation in the sample relating to geographic region, sex, race, age and education.

This report deals with five periods since the interviewing began. From Oct. 7 through Oct. 31, there were 1,537 people interviewed. From Nov. 1 through Nov. 15, there were 1,940 people interviewed. From Nov. 16 through 30, there were 2,742 people interviewed. From Dec. 1 through Dec. 15, there were 3,046 people interviewed. From Dec. 16 through January 5, 2004, there were 3,243 people interviewed.

In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results for the each of these interviewing periods will differ by no more than two percentage points, up or down, from what would have been obtained by interviewing all American adults. For references to the 5,788 people polled in the complete month of November, it would be plus or minus one percentage point. For smaller subgroups, the margin of sampling error would be higher. Moreover, some questions were not asked of all respondents, which would lead to a larger potential sampling error.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.

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