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APPROVAL OF BUSH DECLINES DURING JANUARY, ANNENBERG ELECTION SURVEY SHOWS

Public approval of President Bush's handling of his job declined in January, as a small boost after the State of the Union address was followed by a sharp decline following negative reports from Iraq, the University of Pennsylvania's National Annenberg Election Survey shows.

As the election year began, 60 percent of the public approved of how Bush was handling his job as president, a level that was maintained through January 20, when he gave the State of the Union address. Over the next five days approval rose to 64 percent, but from January 26 through 31 it fell to 54 percent. The margin of sampling error for the last two periods were plus or minus four and three percentage points respectively.

Short-term changes in such ratings are not unusual, and their duration is unpredictable. For example, Bush made marked gains following his Thanksgiving Day visit to Baghdad, but most of that rise had dissipated before Saddam Hussein's capture was announced on December 14 and Bush's approval ratings rose again.

The polling data does not offer evidence of why his ratings went up or went down, although State of the Union addresses are almost always followed by a boost for the President who gives them. But when his ratings began to fall, the news was dominated by stories about the conclusion of David A. Kay, the C.I.A.'s former chief weapons inspector, that Iraq lacked those weapons when war began. For months more Americans have said it was worth going to war in Iraq than said it was not worth it, but in those five days 49 percent said it was not worth it while 46 percent said it was.

Support for the war rebounded in the first five days of February, when 51 percent said the war was worth it, and 43 percent said it was not. Mr. Bush's overall approval rating also moved up slightly, to 56 percent, a statistically insignificant change from the 54 percent that preceded it.

Ratings for the president declined in January on a broad range of subjects including the economy. At the beginning of January, 50 percent approved of his handling of the economy, a figure that dropped to 44 percent at the end of the month. The rating on his handling of the economy fluctuated – though not as sharply – as ratings for his handling of both his job as president overall and of the situation in Iraq specifically.

There was less overall change in the public’s ratings of both the economic situation nationally and their own economic circumstances. The percent saying the country’s economy was fair or poor started at 72 percent and ended up at 74 percent. The share who said their own circumstances were fair or poor began at 56 percent and ended at 54 percent. Neither of those changes was statistically significant.

One politically intriguing change was in the level of Republican approval of Bush’s handling of his job as president. For the first fifteen days of January, it stood at 93 percent. But by the end of the month, it had fallen to 87 percent. The economy, with projections of a budget deficit exceeding half a trillion dollars and new cost estimates for a Medicare drug program – two issues many Republicans complained about -- may have been significant factors in the G.O.P. decline. Their support for Bush’s handling of the economy went from 88 to 81 percent. But their backing for his handling of Iraq also fell, from 89 to 81 percent.

For Democrats, approval of Bush’s handling of his job as President began at 35 percent and ended at 28 percent. For independents, it began at 56 percent and ended at 57 percent.

That National Annenberg Election Survey, the largest academic election poll, 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 7, and interviewing will continue until after Election Day. Dr. Kathleen Hall Jamieson is the director of the survey. Ken Winneg is the managing director of the survey. Adam Clymer is the political director of the survey.

Another major election project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center is FactCheck.org, a project that tries to hold politicians accountable by exposing false or misleading campaign statements. It is available online at www.FactCheck.Org.

Questions

A. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president?

Bush’s handing of his job as presidency (%)	Jan 1-15	Jan 16-20	Jan 21-25	Jan 26-31	Feb 1-5
Approve	60	59	64	54	56
Disapprove	38	38	34	43	41

B. All in all, do you think the situation in Iraq was worth going to war over, or not?

Was Iraq worth going to war over (%)	Jan 1-15	Jan 16-20	Jan 21-25	Jan 26-31	Feb 1-5
Yes	53	51	53	46	51
No	41	42	42	49	43

C. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is currently handling the situation in Iraq?

Bush's handling of Iraq (%)	Jan 1-15	Jan 16-20	Jan 21-25	Jan 26-31	Feb 1-5
Approve	54	49	57	46	49
Disapprove	42	46	40	51	46

D. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the war on terrorism?

Bush's handling of war on terrorism (%)	Jan 1-15	Jan 16-20	Jan 21-25	Jan 26-31	Feb 1-5
Approve	64	64	64	56	60
Disapprove	31	31	33	40	36

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

Bush's handling of economy (%)	Jan 1-15	Jan 16-20	Jan 21-25	Jan 26-31	Feb 1-5
Approve	50	47	52	44	47
Disapprove	46	48	45	52	48

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

Rate economic conditions today (%)	Jan 1-15	Jan 16-20	Jan 21-25	Jan 26-31	Feb 1-5
Good or excellent	28	27	31	26	22
Fair or poor	72	73	68	74	77

G. How would you rate your own personal economic situation today?

Rate own economic situation today	Jan 1-15	Jan 16-20	Jan 21-25	Jan 26-31	Feb 1-5
Good or excellent	44	42	48	45	42
Fair or poor	56	58	51	54	57

H. How much have you benefited from the tax cuts proposed by George W. Bush and passed by Congress last spring?

Respondent benefited from tax cuts (%)	Jan 1-15	Jan 16-20	Jan 21-25	Jan 26-31	Feb 1-5
A great deal or some	34	28	31	34	33
Not much	26	32	27	22	28
Not at all	38	37	40	40	35

I. 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?

U.S. Economy in one year (%)	Jan 1-15	Jan 16-20	Jan 21-25	Jan 26-31	Feb 1-5
Better	56	54	53	53	52
Same	27	27	27	30	30
Worse	12	13	15	14	13

J. Now I'd like to ask you how you feel about George W. Bush, as a person, as opposed to how you feel about the job he is doing. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of him as a person?

Opinion of Bush as a person (%)	Jan 1-15	Jan 16-20	Jan 21-25	Jan 26-31	Feb 1-5
Favorable	69	67	73	62	69
Unfavorable	20	19	18	26	22

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 first of January. From then until January 15, 2,421 people were interviewed. From Jan. 16 through Jan. 20, 855 people were interviewed. From Jan. 21 through Jan. 25, 724 people were interviewed. From Jan. 26 through Jan. 31, 1,032 people were interviewed. From Feb. 1 through Feb.5, 986 people were interviewed.

In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results for the people interviewed through Jan. 15 will differ by no more than two percentage points, up or down, from what would have been obtained by interviewing all American adults. For the Jan. 25 period, the margin is plus or minus four percentage points. For the other three time periods, it is plus or minus three percentage points. For smaller subgroups, such as Republicans, 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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