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Latino Attitudes on the War in Iraq, the Economy and the 2004 Election

Latino support for the war in Iraq and for President George W. Bush has surged since the capture of Saddam Hussein, but Latinos remain concerned about the condition of the U.S. economy and the long-term consequences of the war.

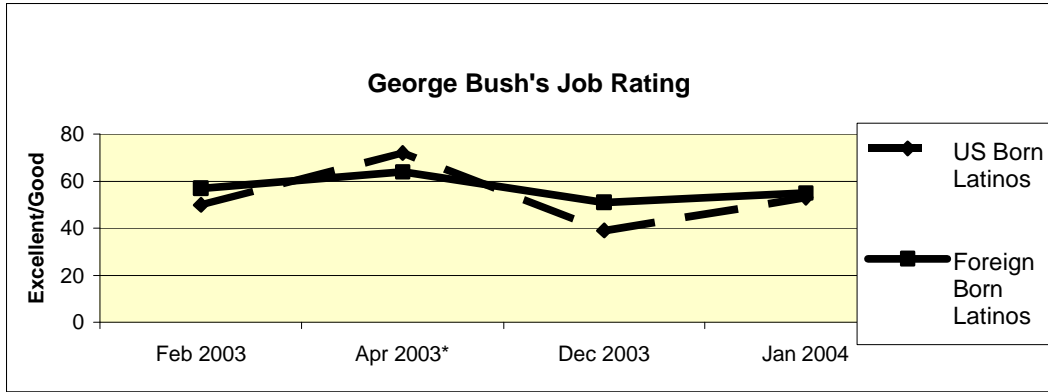
In order to probe Latino views of the war, the economy, and the upcoming presidential race, the Pew Hispanic Center (PHC) recently conducted two national surveys of Latino adults. One took place in December 2003, just before Hussein's capture, and the other in early January 2004. Comparing the two reveals dramatic swings towards more positive views on several questions regarding the decision to go to war and its conduct. Bush is the clear beneficiary with increased approval ratings and stronger support for his reelection bid.

The shift in Latino views following Hussein's capture generally mirrors the trend in public opinion surveys of the general public, although Hispanics are somewhat less supportive of the war and of Bush both as president and as a reelection candidate than the population as a whole.

The two PHC surveys show that most Latinos believe the economy should be a greater concern for Bush than the war on terrorism, and that a majority is concerned about personal finances. Latinos are evenly divided over whether they expect economic conditions nationally to improve.

Despite the impact of Hussein's capture on public opinion, Latinos are split on whether the Bush Administration deliberately misled the American public about the threat Iraq posed to the United States before the war began, on whether the war is worth the toll it has taken in American lives, and on whether the president has a clear plan to bring the situation in Iraq to a successful conclusion. On each of these issues, roughly half of the Latino population takes skeptical views.

The December and January PHC surveys each involved nationally representative samples of 500 Hispanic adults who could choose to be interviewed in English or Spanish. Both polls have a margin of error of four percentage points. Interviews were conducted December 8 to 11 and January 2 to 4. Fieldwork for both surveys was conducted by Bendixen & Associates, a public opinion research firm specializing in the Hispanic population.



[*April 2003 survey asked: "How would you rate the job George W. Bush is doing on the war with Iraq?" Others asked: "How would you rate the job George W. Bush is doing as president of the United States?"]

The War in Iraq

As with the general public, Latino views towards Bush and the war have been on a bit of a roller coaster ride in response to events in 2003. PHC surveys taken last February, during the United Nations debate in advance of the war, and in April, as U.S. troops were closing in on Baghdad, showed that support jumped after combat was underway. By December, after a period of mounting U.S. casualties and frustration over the fruitless search for Hussein and weapons of mass destruction, Latino views were much more negative. Following Hussein's capture, support for both the war and the president bounced back, but not to the high levels measured in April during the initial combat phase of the conflict.

Aside from this overall trend, there has been one notable shift within the Hispanic population: the difference in opinion between U.S.-born and foreign-born Latinos has narrowed. In February and to a greater extent in April 2003, U.S.-born Latinos were more supportive of the war than the foreign born. In February, for example, the foreign born were much more likely than the U.S. born (60% vs. 48%) to say that United Nations weapons inspectors should be given more time to work before the United States resorted to military action. In April, although backing for the war had increased across the board, a far higher share of U.S.-born Latinos than the foreign born (75% vs. 52%) said they supported the war.

In the December 2003 and January 2004 PHC surveys, responses by the foreign and native born were fairly similar on several different questions about Iraq. Interestingly, the gap persists on two points. First, the native born are still more supportive of the initial decision to go to war. And second, the native born are more doubtful that the Bush Administration has a clear plan to bring the war to a successful conclusion. On this point, another notable distinction emerges from the survey results: Latinos who get their broadcast news in English are far more likely than those who use Spanish-language media (57% vs. 39%) to answer "no" when asked whether Bush has a clear plan to end the war. No other characteristic yields such a large difference on this question.

Throughout the PHC surveys on Iraq, males have tended to be more supportive of the war than females, and this pattern continues to hold true. In the January 2004 survey, for example, 56 percent of Hispanic males said they approved of Bush's handling of the war compared to 39% of females. Similarly, in January, 63 percent of males said they believed the United States should leave troops in Iraq until a stable government is established there compared to 37 percent of females.

Evaluating results of the PHC surveys conducted before and after Hussein's capture reveals large and substantial swings in Latino public opinion towards more positive views, especially in regard to the war and the Bush presidency. On a broad question about the way things are going in the country, the share of Latinos who said they were satisfied jumped from 40 to 49 percent. The number who said they approved of Bush's handling of the situation in Iraq went from 32 percent to 47 percent. Asked about the decision to use military force against Iraq, the number of Latinos saying it was the right decision went from 45 to 54 percent. The number saying that the military effort in Iraq is going "very well" nearly doubled from 16 to 30 percent.

A similar swing in the views of the general public following Hussein's capture is evident in surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, which also receives support from the Pew Charitable Trusts but is not affiliated with the PHC. In October 2003, 60 percent of the public said using military force against Iraq was the right decision, while in a survey taken in December, shortly after Hussein's capture, that number jumped to 67 percent. A subsequent survey fielded from December 19 to January 4 showed the number dropping back to 62 percent. Similarly, 16 percent of the general public said the war was going "very well" in October compared to 28 percent immediately after Hussein's capture and 23 percent in the December-January survey.

The Bush Administration

Surveys by the Pew Research Center show that Bush's overall approval rating with the total population increased from 50 percent to 57 percent after Hussein's capture. The PHC surveys of Latinos show a similar gain with the share saying that Bush was doing an "excellent" or "good" job increasing from 46 percent to 54 percent. When asked whether they would prefer to see Bush reelected or a Democratic candidate—none was named—the number of Latinos saying they preferred Bush increased from 27 percent to 37 percent. Looking only at Latinos who are U.S. citizens and hence eligible to vote, Bush's gain is virtually identical, going from 27 percent to 36 percent.

Nonetheless, Latinos expressed a variety of concerns about Bush, both in regard to Iraq and the economy. Nearly half of Latinos (48%) say they think the Bush administration deliberately misled the American public about the threat posed by Iraq before the war began. Almost as many (46%) say they do not think Bush has a clear plan for bringing the war to an end. Similarly, about half say that the threat of terrorism against the United States has remained the same despite Hussein's capture (53%) and that the danger to U.S. troops in Iraq has remained the same (48%).

An even larger share (70%) says that it is more important for Bush to focus on the economy than the war on terrorism. Most Latinos (69% in January) say that their personal financial situation is in "fair" or "poor" shape, and nearly half (47%) say they expect economic conditions for the country as a whole to be the same or worse a year from now than such conditions are at present.

Nearly a year ago, when the Bush Administration was seeking international support for a possible armed intervention, Latinos clearly favored action through the United Nations or in concert with allies. That opinion still holds. In the December and January surveys, about half of Latinos (49% and 54%) said they considered it "very important" to involve the United Nations as well as countries like Spain, France, Russia and Germany in the rebuilding of Iraq. However,

when asked in the December survey specifically about the role Spain had played as an American ally, 69 percent of Latinos said they did not know enough to have an opinion. That survey was taken less than two weeks after seven Spanish intelligence officers were killed in an ambush in Iraq.

Results from the December 2003 and January 2004 Pew Hispanic Center surveys of Latino adults on the war in Iraq, the U.S. economy and the 2004 election follow.

All in all, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in this country today?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Satisfied	40	42	39	49	52	48
Dissatisfied	50	51	48	40	40	40
DK/NA	10	7	13	10	8	12

GEORGE BUSH'S LEADERSHIP

How would you rate the job that George W. Bush is doing as President of the United States - would you say he is doing an excellent, good mediocre or poor job?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Excellent	8	8	8	13	15	12
Good	38	31	43	41	38	43
Mediocre	29	34	25	27	28	26
Poor	20	25	17	16	18	16
DK/NA	5	1	7	3	1	4

Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the situation in Iraq?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Approve	32	32	33	47	48	46
Disapprove	57	61	54	41	43	40
DK/NA	11	7	14	12	8	14

Do you think the Bush Administration deliberately misled the American public about how big the threat Iraq was to the United States before the war began, or not?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Yes	53	59	49	48	49	47
No	38	35	40	42	45	40
DK/NA	9	5	11	10	6	13

Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the economy?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Approve	38	37	39	45	42	47
Disapprove	50	54	47	45	53	41
DK/NA	12	9	14	10	6	12

Right now, which is more important for President Bush to focus on, the economy or the war on terrorism?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Economy	70	63	75	70	62	75
War on Terrorism	22	28	18	23	31	17
DK/NA	8	9	7	8	8	8

IRAQ: US AND COALITION FORCES

Do you think the US made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force against Iraq?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Right Decision	45	52	40	54	62	48
Wrong Decision	47	42	51	38	33	42
DK/NA	8	5	9	8	5	10

How well is the US military effort in Iraq going?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Very Well	16	15	17	30	25	33
Fairly Well	26	33	21	32	46	23
Not Too Well	32	35	30	24	21	25
Not Well at All	17	14	19	9	6	11
DK/NA	9	4	13	5	2	8

Do you think the US should keep military troops in Iraq until a stable government is established there OR do you think the US should bring its troops home as soon as possible?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Keep military troops in Iraq	40	44	37	50	55	47
Bring military troops home	55	52	57	46	41	49
DK/NA	5	4	6	4	4	4

Do you think more coalition troops are needed in Iraq right now or do you think there are already enough troops there to do the job? <i>Only those who answered, "Keep military troops in Iraq"</i>						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
More coalition are needed in Iraq right now	49	50	49	37	42	34
There are already enough troops there to do the job	40	44	37	50	50	50
DK/NA	11	6	14	12	7	16

In your view, is the war in Iraq worth the toll it has taken in American lives and other kinds of costs OR is the war not worth these costs?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Worth the toll it has taken in American lives and other costs	31	32	30	40	43	37
Not worth these costs	60	64	58	50	45	53
DK/NA	9	5	12	10	11	10

In your opinion, how important is it for the effort to rebuild Iraq to involve the United Nations and countries like Spain, France, Russia, and Germany? Would you say it is very important, somewhat important, or not important at all?

	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Very important	49	47	50	54	55	53
Somewhat important	32	46	27	30	28	32
Not important	14	10	17	13	14	12
DK/NA	6	3	7	4	4	3

In regards to Spain specifically, how would you rate the role Spain had played as an American ally during the war in Iraq? Has Spain's role been important or not important or do you know enough to have an opinion?

	<i>December 2003 (not asked in January)</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Important	21	18	22
Not important	9	8	9
Do not know enough to have an opinion	69	72	67
DK/NA	2	2	2

THE CAPTURE OF SADDAM HUSSEIN

As a result of the capture of Saddam Hussein three weeks ago, do you think the threat of terrorism against the United States has increase, decreased, or remained about the same?

	<i>January 2004 (not asked in December)</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Increased	31	32	30
Decreased	13	11	15
Remained about the same	53	55	51
DK/NA	3	2	3

As a result of the capture of Saddam Hussein, do you think the danger for U.S. troops in Iraq has increased, decreased, or remained about the same?			
	<i>January 2004 (not asked in December)</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Increased	35	34	36
Decreased	13	9	16
Remained about the same	48	55	44
DK/NA	4	2	2

Do you think George W. Bush has a clear plan for bringing the situation in Iraq to a successful conclusion, or don't you think so?			
	<i>January 2004 (not asked in December)</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Yes	43	40	45
No	46	53	41
DK/NA	11	7	13

MEDIA COVERAGE OF IRAQ

In general, do you think news reports are making the situation in Iraq seem worse than it really is or better than it really is, or are reports showing the situation about the way it really is?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Worse	32	35	29	27	27	27
Better	18	22	16	18	18	18
The way it really is	34	30	37	44	45	44
DK/NA	15	12	18	11	10	12

In what language are the news programs you usually watch on TV or listen to on the radio? Only Spanish, more Spanish than English, both equally, more English than Spanish, or only English?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Only Spanish	25	8	36	25	11	35
More Spanish than English	19	10	25	16	6	22
Both Equally	28	27	28	28	28	28
More English than Spanish	13	23	5	14	21	9
Only English	15	31	4	16	33	5
DK/NA	1	1	1	1	1	1

THE ECONOMY

Now, thinking about your own personal finances, how would you rate your own personal financial situation? Would you say you are in excellent shape, good shape, only fair shape or poor shape?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Excellent shape	3	5	1	4	6	2
Good shape	29	34	24	27	34	23
Fair shape	40	40	39	45	43	45
Poor shape	28	19	34	24	17	28
DK/NA	1	1	1	1	1	1

Over the course of the next year, do you think the financial situation of you and your family will improve a lot, improve some, get a little worse or get a lot worse?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Improve a lot	12	16	9	17	15	18
Improve some	56	58	55	59	64	56
Get a little worse	11	13	10	10	9	10
Get a lot worse	5	4	6	3	2	3
DK/NA	15	10	19	11	10	13

A year from now, do you expect that economic conditions in the country as a whole will be better than they are at present, or worse, or just about the same as now?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Better than they are at present	45	38	50	50	44	55
Worse than they are at present	15	15	15	11	12	11
Just about the same as now	37	44	32	36	40	32
DK/NA	3	3	3	3	4	2

ELECTION 2004

Looking ahead, would you like to see George W. Bush re-elected president in 2004 or would you prefer that a Democratic candidate win the election?						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
George W. Bush	27	25	28	37	38	36
Democratic Candidate	56	64	50	47	47	46
DK/NA	17	11	22	17	15	18

Have you pretty much made up your mind that you are going to support George W. Bush or is there a chance you might support a Democratic Candidate? <i>Only those who said, "George Bush"</i>						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Made up my mind about supporting George W. Bush	69	63	72	74	69	78
Might Support a Democratic candidate	22	27	19	13	17	9
DK/NA	9	10	8	13	13	13

Have you pretty much made up your mind that you are going to support a Democratic candidate or is there a chance you might support George W. Bush? <i>Only those who said, "Democratic candidate"</i>						
	<i>December 2003</i>			<i>January 2004</i>		
	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born	Total Latino	US Born	Foreign Born
Made up my mind about supporting a Democratic candidate	73	83	65	64	66	63
Might support George W. Bush	13	11	14	15	18	14
DK/NA	14	6	21	21	16	24

Pew Hispanic Center
 Surveys on Latino Attitudes on the War in Iraq, the Economy and the 2004 Election
 December 2003/ January 2004

Sample Characteristics

Total Samples 500 Hispanic adults, 18 years of age or older

	December 2003	January 2004
Gender		
Female	51	50
Male	49	50
Age		
18 to 29	29	30
30 to 39	28	30
40 to 49	20	19
50 to 59	15	12
60 to 64	4	3
65+	4	6
DK/NA	-	-
Education		
Less than high school diploma	27	24
High school diploma	32	36
some college/technical school	11	15
2 year college degree	11	9
4 year college degree	13	11
graduate degree or more	4	5
DK/NA	1	1
Country of Birth		
United States	41	40
Mexico	34	34
Puerto Rico	5	5
Cuba	2	3
Dominican Republic	3	3
South America	5	6
Central America	9	9
Spain	-	1
Other	-	-
DK/NA	-	1
Citizenship		
Yes	34	34
No	65	65
DK/NA	-	-
Region		
Northeast	17	17
West	8	8
Midwest	36	36