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Post-war Optimism May Not Translate Into Republican Gains

The gap between presidential approval and confidence in the country is narrowing, an Ipsos Public Affairs/Cook Political Report Poll finds

Between April 1-3, 2003, and April 15-17, 2003, Ipsos US Public Affairs interviewed for the Cook Political Report a representative sample of 2,003 adult Americans nationwide, including 1,559 registered voters. The margin of error for the combined surveys is $\pm 2.2\%$ for all adults, $\pm 2.5\%$ for registered voters.

WASHINGTON, D.C., (April 21, 2003) — In interviews with 1,559 registered voters conducted April 1-3, 2003, and April 15-17, 2003, the Ipsos Public Affairs/*Cook Political Report* Poll finds a narrowing gap between Presidential approval and overall approval of the direction of the country.

- Consistently, a President's job approval rating tends to ride about 15-20 percentage points above the number who say the country is headed in the right direction.
- For Bush, Republicans were much more likely to say Bush is doing well than to say the country's on the right track, Independents were only somewhat more likely to endorse Bush performance than they were to endorse the direction the country was taking, and Democrats were not particularly more likely to praise Bush performance than to endorse the country's direction.
- Once the shooting war started in Iraq on March 19, and especially since the successful conclusion of that war, feelings that the country is headed right have boomed, while feelings Bush handles his job well rose more slowly. As a result, the gap between job approval and right track has been cut in half in the most recent polls.

	Presidential Approval (% approve)	Direction of Country (% right direction)	Difference
January 2002	80 %	68 %	+12
February 2002	78 %	62 %	+16
March 2002	74 %	60 %	+14
April 2002	73 %	54 %	+19
May 2002	71 %	54 %	+17
June 2002	73 %	54 %	+19
July 2002	67 %	45 %	+22
August 2002	64 %	46 %	+18
Early September 2002	63 %	44 %	+19
Mid September 2002	65 %	47 %	+18
Early October 2002	64 %	47 %	+17
Mid October 2002	63 %	44 %	+19
Early November 2002	61 %	43 %	+18
Mid November 2002	63 %	43 %	+20
Early December 2002	65 %	44 %	+21
Mid December 2002	62 %	42 %	+20
Early January 2003	59 %	42 %	+17
Mid January 2003	56 %	39 %	+17
Early February 2003	56 %	37 %	+19
Mid February 2003	56 %	39 %	+17
Early March 2003	53 %	37 %	+16
Mid March 2003	56 %	44 %	+12
Early April 2003	63 %	54 %	+9
Mid April 2003	65 %	58 %	+7

In the months leading up to last year's mid-term congressional elections, Democrats believed that presidential approval was inflated. As confidence in the country dipped below 50%, Democrats believed this would translate into electoral success. This scenario obviously did not play out for the Democrats.

Pre-Election 2002 Midterm Survey (10/15-17 & 10/25-27)				
	Direction of the Country		Overall Job Rating	
	Right Direction	Wrong Track	Approve	Disapprove
Republicans	63%	30%	92%	7%
Independents	33%	57%	59%	34%
Democrats	31%	63%	37%	61%
Registered Voters	45%	48%	63%	35%

In the 26-point gap between the number of swing Independent voters who felt the country was headed right (33%) and who felt Bush was doing his job well (59%), there were enough votes to give Republicans control of the House and the Senate.

Current Survey (4/1-3 & 4/15-17)				
	Direction of the Country		Overall Job Rating	
	Right Direction	Wrong Track	Approve	Disapprove
Republicans	82%	12%	93%	6%
Independents	48%	43%	61%	32%
Democrats	34%	60%	35%	62%
Registered Voters	58%	36%	65%	32%

Today, more Republicans and Independents feel the country is headed in the right direction, but the number giving Bush positive job ratings have not increased (in the case of Republicans, Bush approval ratings could hardly go any higher). As a result, the gap between job approval and right track has narrowed from +26 at the midterms to +13 today among Independents, and from +18 to +7 among all voters.

For more information on this release, please contact:

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About Ipsos US Public Affairs

The survey was conducted by Ipsos US Public Affairs, the Washington, D.C.-based division of Ipsos, which is the world's fourth largest polling and market research organization, based in Paris. Ipsos US Public Affairs is a non-partisan, objective public affairs research organization made up of Democratic and Republican campaign and political polling veterans. It was established in Washington in August 2001, and it is led by Thomas Riehle, who has more than 15 years of experience as a political pollster in Washington. The Ipsos/Cook Political Report poll and the Ipsos Consumer Attitudes and Spending by Household (CASH) Index poll are usually conducted the first and third week of every month, as part of Ipsos US Public Affairs weekly omnibus polling service.

The political survey is designed in conjunction with Charlie Cook of the Cook Political Report. Founded in 1984, The Cook Political Report is an independent, non-partisan newsletter that analyzes elections for the U.S. House, Senate, governor and President as well as domestic American political trends. The New York Times has called the publication, "a newsletter that both parties consider authoritative" while the dean of the Washington political press corps, the Washington Post's David Broder has called Charlie Cook, its editor and publisher, "perhaps the best political handicapper in the nation." Cook also writes two weekly columns that appear in National Journal magazine and CongressDaily/AM and on nationaljournal.com, and serves as a political analyst for Cable News Network's show "Inside Politics." Researched and written by a staff of five based in Washington, D.C., the Cook Political Report's subscribers are primarily the lobbyists and managers for the political action committees of the nation's major corporations, trade associations and labor unions as well as by news organizations, foreign governments and others with an interest in detailed, impartial information and analysis of Congressional, gubernatorial and presidential elections.