

Latest Poll Results: 97% Oppose Bush's War

Lawrence Hagerty, December 19, 2001

Since we live in a country whose leaders value opinion polls more than they value the will of the democratic majority of voters, I thought it would be worthwhile to conduct my own survey of public opinion to see if I could add something of value to the national debate. Lacking the resources of the corporate media giants, I had to improvise a new polling technique. Instead of making phone calls to a thousand or so well-selected households, as the professional polling outfits do, I randomly polled some of my friends and associates. The results were strikingly different from those you hear about on television.

In crafting my poll I did my best to follow the guidelines set out in a recent survey that was conducted jointly by USA TODAY, CNN, and the Gallup organization. In that poll questions were asked of 1,019 adults and the pollsters reported they had 95% confidence in the results, within $\pm 3\%$. Based on the latest U.S. census data, this means that they collected information from 0.000004% of the population. I decided to take a somewhat larger sampling and so I polled approximately 3% of my friends and associates.

Like other polling professionals, I did not allow my respondents to elaborate on their answers. They were only allowed to answer "yes" or "no." Here are the questions I asked:

- Now that U.S. bombs have killed more innocent civilians in Afghanistan than were killed here in the September 11th attacks, should we shift from the "war-mode" to a "police-mode" in our quest to exterminate the "evildoers?"
- Should we now begin to bomb the other 60 countries that we suspect are harboring terrorists?
- Are you willing to surrender your personal privacy and freedom of speech for the rest of your life in order to support a war that we are told "will not end in our lifetimes?"

It should come as no surprise for you to learn that every person to whom I posed those questions answered "no" to all three. I have therefore concluded (with 95% confidence $\pm 3\%$) that 97% of my friends and associates oppose a continuation of this war.

Now if you think my headline for this story is misleading, you might want to look more closely at the headline USA TODAY used in reporting one of their recent polls.* The headline read, "Poll finds strong support for expanding terror war." While this poll asked 24 questions, I could only find two that even came close to addressing the issue of the war on terrorism. They were:

- How satisfied are you with the amount of progress made by the U.S. military in the war in Afghanistan? (92% satisfied)
- If the U.S. goes to war in Iraq, do you think it will be as successful as the efforts in Afghanistan have been, or not? (68% said "yes")

* Found at <http://www.usatoday.com/news/attack/2001/12/17/poll-story.htm>

From those two questions alone, USA TODAY appears to have concluded that there is “strong support” for expanding the “terror war.” The first three questions in that poll focused on the Bush presidency (in response to one of the questions, only 24% of those polled believe Bush won the election “fair and square”). The other 19 questions dealt mainly with various ways of bringing bin Laden to justice.

So what are we to make of all these polls? My suggestion is that you only trust the polls you conduct yourself. Ask your closest friends the questions I asked, or make up your own. But the next time you read or hear a headline about how many people are merrily riding along on the U.S. war wagon, you might want to take it with a grain of salt. As Arianna Huffington said in a recent editorial: “This willingness to treat the numbers with a reverence ancient Romans reserved for chicken entrails is standard operating procedure for both pundits and politicians — and it often has disastrous consequences.”**

Let us hope that Washington’s current strategy of believing the results of dubious opinion polls ends soon, before more innocent people are slaughtered.

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** “The Unbearable Ludicrousness of Polling” found at <http://www.alternet.org/story.html?StoryID=11753>