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Jeffery Hanna
Illinois Wesleyan University

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February 28, 2003

CONTACT: Jeffery G. Hanna

Illinois Voters Oppose Unilateral War with Iraq, President's Approval Slips

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Illinois voters oppose unilateral military action against Iraq by the United States, according to a poll taken this week by the Survey Research Center of Illinois Wesleyan University's political science department.

The statewide survey of registered voters also found that support for President Bush on both foreign policy and economic issues has slipped since a previous Illinois Wesleyan poll in October.

On the question of going to war with Iraq, 46 percent of those surveyed believe the U.S. should first get a United Nations resolution before taking military action while 27 percent said the U.S. should take action with or without a supporting United Nations resolution. Another 18 percent said that the U.S. should not use military force against Iraq in either case, and 10 percent were undecided.

"It's hard to read these results in any other way than that the Bush administration has not done a great job of selling the war as a unilateral action," said Tari Renner, chair of the political science department at Illinois Wesleyan. "The national polls are a little more hawkish, but not much.

"It's also apparent that Bush's popularity continues to erode," he said. "On the question of trusting the president or the Democrats in Congress on foreign policy, the fact that we see the slide in support continuing from 49 percent saying Bush in October to 46 percent this time is significant. A sitting president ought to have a majority of support on foreign policy. If you don't have a trump card on foreign policy, what is your trump card?"

When asked who they trusted more to handle the main foreign policy problems facing the country, President Bush or the Democrats in Congress, 46 percent of voters polled this week said Bush, 37 percent said the Democrats in Congress, 9 percent said neither, and nine percent were undecided. The October poll showed that 49 percent trusted the president and 31 percent trusted the Democrats.

On economic issues, 48 percent indicated that they place more trust in the Democrats to tackle those problems compared with 37 percent for Bush while five percent said neither and nine percent were undecided. When the same question was asked in October, 41 percent of the respondents said they trusted Bush more while 40 percent trusted the Democrats.

As for perceived threats to United States security, 42 percent cited Al Qaeda as the biggest threat. Meanwhile, 18 percent said Iraq was the biggest threat and 18 percent named North Korea.

Other topics covered by the survey included capital punishment and abortion.

In the case of the former, 43 percent preferred the death penalty to life in prison without parole for individuals convicted of murder, 41 percent preferred life in prison, and 16 percent were undecided. Asked specifically about former Illinois Governor George Ryan's decision to change the sentence of every death-row inmate in Illinois to life in prison, a majority of those polled (55 percent) disagreed with Ryan's decision compared with 37 percent who agreed.

On the question of abortion, 58 percent favored the 1973 Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade ruling giving women the right to an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy while 35 percent opposed that ruling, and seven percent were undecided.

The poll of registered Illinois voters, stratified by county, has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.7 percent.

To discuss results of the poll with Renner, contact Jeffery G. Hanna or Ann Aubry at 309/556-3181.