



**CONTACT:** Kate Kenski at 215-888-4477 (cell)  
Natalie Jomini Stroud at 215-806-2475 (cell)  
Adam Clymer at 202-879-6757 or 202 549-7161 (cell)

**VISIT:** [www.naes04.org](http://www.naes04.org)

### **Voters Learned Positions on Issues Since Presidential Debates; Kerry Improves Slightly On Traits, Annenberg Data Show**

The public's knowledge of the presidential candidates' positions on issues such as tax cuts and re-importation of drugs from Canada increased after the three presidential debates, the University of Pennsylvania's National Annenberg Election Survey shows.

There were smaller changes in perceptions of the individual traits of President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry. Kerry gained on such perceptions as being inspiring or a strong leader, but did not overtake Bush.

The most substantial amount of learning took place on Kerry's plan to roll back some recent tax cuts. Prior to the presidential debates which began September 30, polling data collected from September 21 through 26 showed that only 33 percent of registered voters knew that Kerry proposed to eliminate the tax cuts only for those making over \$200,000 a year. After the presidential debates, interviews with registered voters conducted between October 14 (the day after the last debate) and October 20 showed, 56 percent correctly identified the \$200,000 and over tax bracket as the target of the Kerry plan.

No change in perceptions of traits was nearly that big. Before the debates, 41 percent of respondents rated Kerry as more inspiring than Bush and 47 percent rated Bush as more inspiring than Kerry. After the debates, this changed to 45 percent for Kerry and 46 percent for Bush. Kerry also showed some improvement in the number of respondents rating him higher than Bush as a strong leader and as caring about people like themselves.

-More-

On the question of how well the term “strong leader” applied to either candidate, Bush’s pre-debate advantage of 50 to 37 percent narrowed slightly. After the debates, 49 percent preferred Bush and 41 percent rated Kerry higher.

Natalie Jomini Stroud, a senior analyst at the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, said, “Although the differences between the candidates on the trait ratings narrowed in some cases, there is no suggestion that the debates resulted in a reversal of voter perceptions of Bush and Kerry.”

But when it came to knowledge of candidates’ positions on issues, there were several substantial changes. One example was the question of who favored changing the recently passed Medicare prescription drug law to allow re-importation of drugs from Canada, a position which Kerry favors and Bush does not. Prior to the presidential debates, 53 percent correctly identified re-importing prescription drugs from Canada as the Kerry position. After the presidential debates, 68 percent of registered voters correctly identified Kerry as supporting this measure.

A modest 5 percentage point increase in knowledge levels was observed on the question of which candidate favors making the recent tax cuts permanent. Prior to the presidential debates, 64 percent of registered voters knew that Bush supported this position. Afterwards, 69 percent knew.

Seven candidate issue knowledge items were asked both before and after the presidential debates. Prior to the debates, 54 percent of all answers were correct. After the debates, 62 percent of all answers were correct.

“During the weeks of the presidential debates, voters learned where the presidential candidates stand on several important issues, whether from debates themselves, news coverage or ads” said Kate Kenski, a senior analyst at the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. “Traditionally, pundits and the public question the value of debates or say that they matter only in terms of image, but these results from the National Annenberg Election Survey suggest that voters learn when debates take place.”

Other knowledge questions (on which only post-debate responses were collected) show that some candidate issue positions are much clearer than others to the electorate. On the topic of making additional stem cell lines from human embryos available for federally funded research, 74 percent of voters correctly identified Kerry as supporting the position.

-More-

Just over half of registered voters, 53 percent, knew that neither presidential candidate has stated that he favors reinstating the military draft, although other questions indicated that whatever the candidates say, 33 percent of registered voters say Bush will re-impose a draft and 23 percent say Kerry will. Just less than half, 48 percent, knew that Bush is the candidate who favors placing limits on how much people can collect when a jury finds that a doctor has committed medical malpractice.

“Despite an emphasis in the media on who won the presidential debates,” Stroud commented, “the real story is not about changes in candidate traits.”

Kenski added, “Voter gains in political learning are more impressive than changes in assessments of candidate character.”

Kate Kenski and Natalie Jomini Stroud, senior research analysts at The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, developed the research for this report. The National Annenberg Election Survey, the largest academic election poll, is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center ([www.AnnenbergPublicPolicyCenter.org](http://www.AnnenbergPublicPolicyCenter.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](http://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](http://www.FactCheck.Org).

-More-

**A. Knowledge of presidential candidate issue positions before and after presidential debates**

	October 14 – 20	September 21 - 26
Who favors allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?		
Bush	52%	53%
Kerry	20%	16%
Both	4%	8%
Neither	10%	11%
Who favors eliminating tax breaks for overseas profits of American corporations and using the money to cut taxes for businesses that create jobs in the United States – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?		
Bush	17%	19%
Kerry	56%	51%
Both	8%	9%
Neither	7%	9%
Who favors changing the recently passed Medicare prescription drug law to allow re-importing drugs from Canada -- George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?		
Bush	9%	12%
Kerry	68%	53%
Both	5%	7%
Neither	8%	16%
Who favors a health insurance plan that would do both of the following: help to pay for health insurance for all children and help employers pay the cost of the workers' health insurance – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?		
Bush	13%	13%
Kerry	63%	55%
Both	10%	14%
Neither	5%	7%
John Kerry says that he would eliminate the Bush tax cuts on those making how much money: Over 50 thousand a year, Over 100 thousand a year, Over 200 thousand a year, Over 500,000 a year		
Over 50 thousand a year	7%	16%
Over 100 thousand a year	14%	26%
Over 200 thousand a year	56%	33%
Over 500,000 a year	8%	7%
Who favors making the recent tax cuts permanent – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?		
Bush	69%	64%
Kerry	14%	14%
Both	4%	5%
Neither	6%	8%
Who favors laws making it more difficult for a woman to get an abortion -- George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?		
Bush	72%	67%
Kerry	9%	11%
Both	6%	5%
Neither	8%	12%

\* Those with no opinion are not shown.

## B. Additional political knowledge questions asked after presidential debates

October 14 – 20	
Who favors completely eliminating the estate tax, that is the tax on property worth more than one and a half million dollars left by people who die – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?	
Bush	46%
Kerry	20%
Both	6%
Neither	10%
Don't know	18%
Which candidate wants to make additional stem cell lines from human embryos available for federally funded research on diseases like Parkinsons?	
Bush	9%
Kerry	74%
Both	5%
Neither	5%
Which candidate proposes moving sixty to seventy thousand troops stationed in Europe and South Korea to other locations, including the United States, in the next decade – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?	
Bush	40%
Kerry	31%
Both	9%
Neither	8%
Which candidate has stated he favors reinstating the military draft – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?	
Bush	22%
Kerry	14%
Both	4%
Neither	53%
Which candidate favors placing limits on how much people can collect when a jury finds that a doctor has committed medical malpractice – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?	
Bush	48%
Kerry	16%
Both	11%
Neither	10%
Which candidate favors allowing the federal government to negotiate with drug companies for lower prescription drug prices for senior citizens – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?	
Bush	17%
Kerry	55%
Both	14%
Neither	6%
Which candidate favors increasing the five dollar and fifteen cent minimum wage employers must pay their workers? – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?	
Bush	8%
Kerry	66%
Both	13%
Neither	4%

\* Those with no opinion are not shown.

### C. Candidate Traits

Respondents were asked to rate George W. Bush and John Kerry on each trait using a scale of zero to ten. The following data represents the percentage of people ranking Bush higher, Kerry higher, or both equal.

	Oct 14 – Oct 20	Sept 21 – Sept 26
<b>Cares about people like me</b>		
Bush higher	43%	41%
Kerry higher	48%	44%
Equal	7%	9%
<b>Inspiring</b>		
Bush higher	46%	47%
Kerry higher	45%	41%
Equal	7%	8%
<b>Strong leader</b>		
Bush higher	49%	50%
Kerry higher	41%	37%
Equal	8%	8%
<b>Trustworthy</b>		
Bush higher	45%	45%
Kerry higher	44%	42%
Equal	7%	7%
<b>Shares my values</b>		
Bush higher	46%	46%
Kerry higher	45%	42%
Equal	6%	6%
<b>Knowledgeable</b>		
Bush higher	37%	41%
Kerry higher	48%	46%
Equal	13%	10%
<b>Reckless</b>		
Bush higher	44%	46%
Kerry higher	36%	34%
Equal	13%	13%
<b>Says one thing, does another</b>		
Bush higher	34%	33%
Kerry higher	50%	49%
Equal	10%	11%
<b>Has the right kind of experience to be president</b>		
Bush higher	47%	50%
Kerry higher	43%	40%
Equal	8%	7%
<b>Easy to like as a person</b>		
Bush higher	46%	46%
Kerry higher	40%	36%
Equal	9%	11%

	Oct 14 – Oct 20	Sept 21 – Sept 26
Out of touch with people like me		
Bush higher	43%	41%
Kerry higher	41%	40%
Equal	14%	15%
Optimistic		
Bush higher	44%	47%
Kerry higher	36%	34%
Equal	17%	14%
Effective, gets things done		
Bush higher	49%	51%
Kerry higher	36%	32%
Equal	7%	7%
Decisive		
Bush higher	57%	57%
Kerry higher	30%	27%
Equal	10%	11%
Flip-flops		
Bush higher	31%	31%
Kerry higher	55%	52%
Equal	12%	12%

## 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 two interviewing periods. From September 21 through September 26, 1,756 adults were interviewed, of whom 1,005 said they were registered and were asked about candidate issue positions and of whom 978 were asked about candidate traits. From October 14 and October 20, 2,265 adults were interviewed, of whom 1,276 said they were registered voters and were asked about candidate issue positions and 1,319 were asked about candidate traits. In theory, in 19 out of 20 cases, results for these four sets of respondents will differ by no more than three percentage points, up or down, from what would have been obtained by interviewing all American citizens.

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.

###