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## **Voters Have Much to Learn From Debates, National Annenberg Election Survey Shows**

Many adults in the U.S. misjudge where the presidential candidates stand on important public policy issues, according to recent data collected by the University of Pennsylvania's National Annenberg Election Survey. A majority of adults still do not know which presidential candidate favors allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market, which candidate favors eliminating tax breaks for overseas profits of American corporations, or which candidate favors completely eliminating the estate tax.

Polling conducted from September 21 through 26 among 1,189 adults showed 64 percent of respondents were able to correctly identify George W. Bush, rather than John Kerry, as favoring laws making it more difficult for a woman to get an abortion. Sixty percent recognized that Bush, not Kerry, favors making the recent tax cuts permanent. But only 33 percent knew that Bush (and not Kerry) favors eliminating the estate tax; 23 percent of respondents incorrectly said that it was Kerry who favors eliminating the estate tax. When asked to name which presidential candidates favor a given policy position, respondents named the correct candidate a little more than half of the time.

"Many American voters have not learned the candidates' issue positions because the candidates have not stressed them and journalists have focused on the horse race. In the absence of good information, voters guess and often guess incorrectly," said Kate Kenski, a senior research analyst at the Annenberg Public Policy Center. "The presidential debates may fix that."

Respondents in the survey were asked whether they personally favored or opposed several issue positions. They were then asked whether "Bush, Kerry, both, or neither" favored those same issues. For this report, eight issue positions were analyzed ranging from making the recent tax cuts permanent to federal funding for human embryonic stem cell research (see Tables for a complete list of issues).

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Because many respondents did not know the candidates' issue positions, they often did not know when they actually agreed with the presidential candidates on issue positions. Out of eight policy positions, respondents actually agreed with Bush more than they thought they did on three issues (allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market, eliminating the estate tax, and making the recent tax cuts permanent). They actually agreed with Kerry more than they realized on five issues (eliminating tax breaks for overseas profits of American corporations, changing the recently passed Medicare prescription drug law to allow re-importing drugs from Canada, making it easier for labor unions to organize, federal funding of stem cell research on human embryos, and abortion rights).

Perceived agreement was calculated by matching where the respondents stood on an issue and where they said a candidate stood on an issue regardless of the candidate's actual stance. If a respondent favored a given position and said that a candidate also favored it, he or she was said to agree. If a respondent opposed a position and did not name a candidate as supporting it, then he or she perceived himself or herself to be in agreement with the candidate.

Actual agreement was calculated by matching where the respondents stood on an issue and where a candidate actually stood on that same issue.

While 66 percent of survey participants said that they favored eliminating the estate tax -- the tax on property left by people who die (the Bush position), a smaller 40 percent of respondents perceived that they agreed with Bush on this issue. That is a 26 percent difference between people actually agreeing with Bush and realizing that they agree with Bush.

When asked if they favored or opposed changing the recently passed Medicare prescription drug law to allow re-importing drugs from Canada, 74 percent of respondents favored this position (one held by Kerry). A smaller 52 percent of survey participants thought that they agreed with Kerry on this issue -- a difference of 22 percent between actual and perceived agreement with Kerry.

"The presidential debates provide a unique opportunity for the electorate to compare the candidates side by side," Kenski said. "Past research shows that debates help voters figure out where the candidates stand on the issues."

Kate Kenski, a senior research analyst 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, 2003 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.

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## A. Candidate Issue Positions Placement

<b>Understanding of the Presidential Candidate Issue Positions</b>	
Who favors allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither? (CORRECT: Bush)	
<b>George W. Bush</b>	47%
<b>John Kerry</b>	19%
<b>Both</b>	8%
<b>Neither</b>	12%
<b>Don't Know</b>	14%
<b>Refused</b>	1%
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? (CORRECT: Kerry)	
<b>George W. Bush</b>	19%
<b>John Kerry</b>	49%
<b>Both</b>	9%
<b>Neither</b>	9%
<b>Don't Know</b>	13%
Who favors completely eliminating the estate tax, that is the tax on property left by people who die – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither? (CORRECT: Bush)	
<b>George W. Bush</b>	33%
<b>John Kerry</b>	23%
<b>Both</b>	8%
<b>Neither</b>	17%
<b>Don't Know</b>	19%
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? (CORRECT: Kerry)	
<b>George W. Bush</b>	12%
<b>John Kerry</b>	51%
<b>Both</b>	7%
<b>Neither</b>	16%
<b>Don't Know</b>	13%
Who favors making the recent tax cuts permanent – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither? (CORRECT: Bush)	
<b>George W. Bush</b>	60%
<b>John Kerry</b>	16%
<b>Both</b>	5%
<b>Neither</b>	9%
<b>Don't Know</b>	10%
Who wants to make it easier for labor unions to organize – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither? (CORRECT: Kerry)	
<b>George W. Bush</b>	10%
<b>John Kerry</b>	57%
<b>Both</b>	6%
<b>Neither</b>	11%
<b>Don't Know</b>	16%
Who favors federal funding of research on diseases like Parkinsons using stem cells taken from human embryos – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither? (CORRECT: Kerry)	
<b>George W. Bush</b>	15%
<b>John Kerry</b>	54%
<b>Both</b>	10%
<b>Neither</b>	11%
<b>Don't Know</b>	10%

<b>Understanding of the Presidential Candidate Issue Positions</b>	
Who favors laws making it more difficult for a woman to get an abortion – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither? (CORRECT: Bush)	
<b>George W. Bush</b>	64%
<b>John Kerry</b>	11%
<b>Both</b>	5%
<b>Neither</b>	11%
<b>Don't Know</b>	8%

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## B. Survey participants' self-placement on issues positions

<b>Self-placement on issue positions</b>	
Allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market	
<b>Favor</b>	56%
<b>Oppose</b>	36%
<b>Neither favor nor oppose</b>	4%
<b>Don't know</b>	3%
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	
<b>Favor</b>	71%
<b>Oppose</b>	23%
<b>Neither favor nor oppose</b>	3%
<b>Don't know</b>	4%
Completely eliminating the estate tax, that is the tax on property left by people who die	
<b>Favor</b>	66%
<b>Oppose</b>	28%
<b>Neither favor nor oppose</b>	2%
<b>Don't know</b>	3%
Changing the recently passed Medicare prescription drug law to allow re-importing drugs from Canada	
<b>Favor</b>	74%
<b>Oppose</b>	17%
<b>Neither favor nor oppose</b>	4%
<b>Don't know</b>	5%
Making the recent tax cuts permanent	
<b>Favor</b>	58%
<b>Oppose</b>	33%
<b>Neither favor nor oppose</b>	3%
<b>Don't know</b>	7%
Wants to make it easier for labor unions to organize	
<b>Favor</b>	58%
<b>Oppose</b>	29%
<b>Neither favor nor oppose</b>	6%
<b>Don't know</b>	5%
<b>Refused</b>	1%
Federal funding of research on diseases like Parkinsons using stem cells taken from human embryos	
<b>Favor</b>	65%
<b>Oppose</b>	27%
<b>Neither favor nor oppose</b>	2%
<b>Don't know</b>	5%
Making it more difficult for a woman to get an abortion	
<b>Favor</b>	39%
<b>Oppose</b>	55%
<b>Neither favor nor oppose</b>	5%
<b>Don't know</b>	1%
<b>Refused</b>	1%

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### C. Perceived versus Actual Agreement with Positions of George W. Bush

George W. Bush			
	Perceived	Actual	Difference between Perceived and Actual
Allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market			
Agrees with Bush	37%	56%	-19%
Disagrees with Bush	43%	36%	7%
No opinion/DK/Refused	19%	8%	
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			
Agrees with Bush	34%	23%	12%
Disagrees with Bush	48%	71%	-23%
No opinion/DK/Refused	18%	7%	
Completely eliminating the estate tax, that is the tax on property left by people who die			
Agrees with Bush	40%	66%	-26%
Disagrees with Bush	37%	28%	9%
No opinion/DK/Refused	23%	6%	
Changing the recently passed Medicare prescription drug law to allow re-importing drugs from Canada			
Agrees with Bush	24%	17%	7%
Disagrees with Bush	57%	74%	-17%
No opinion/DK/Refused	19%	9%	
Making the recent tax cuts permanent			
Agrees with Bush	44%	58%	-14%
Disagrees with Bush	39%	33%	6%
No opinion/DK/Refused	17%	10%	
Wants to make it easier for labor unions to organize			
Agrees with Bush	31%	29%	2%
Disagrees with Bush	45%	58%	-13%
No opinion/DK/Refused	24%	12%	
Federal funding of research on diseases like Parkinsons using stem cells taken from human embryos			
Agrees with Bush	34%	28%	6%
Disagrees with Bush	50%	65%	-14%
No opinion/DK/Refused	16%	8%	
Making it more difficult for a woman to get an abortion			
Agrees with Bush	43%	39%	4%
Disagrees with Bush	44%	55%	-11%
No opinion/DK/Refused	13%	6%	

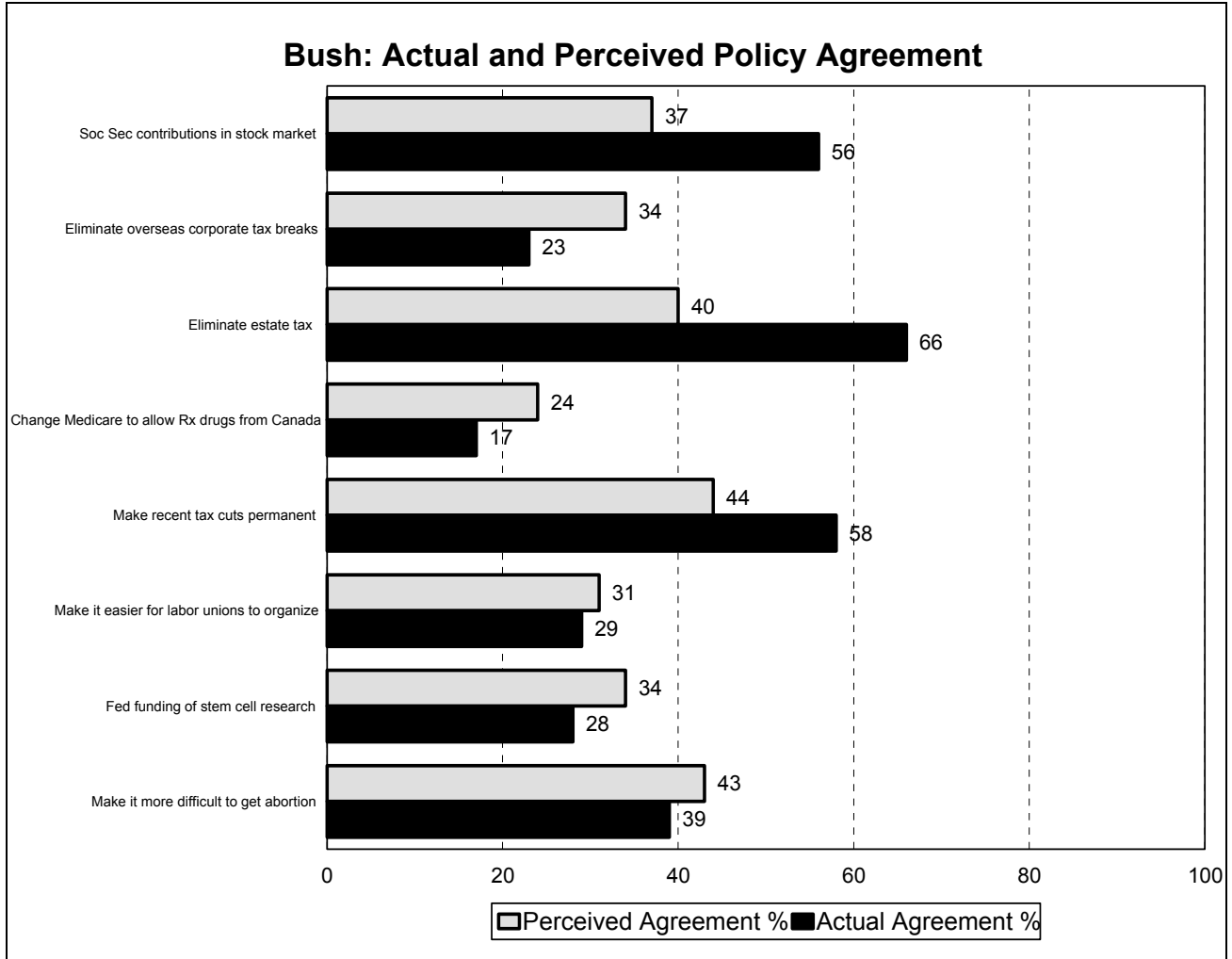
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#### D. Perceived versus Actual Agreement with Positions of John Kerry

<b>John Kerry</b>			
	<b>Perceived</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Difference between Perceived and Actual</b>
Allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market			
<b>Agrees with Kerry</b>	44%	36%	8%
<b>Disagrees with Kerry</b>	36%	56%	-20%
<b>No opinion/DK/Refused</b>	19%	8%	
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			
<b>Agrees with Kerry</b>	52%	71%	-19%
<b>Disagrees with Kerry</b>	30%	23%	8%
<b>No opinion/DK/Refused</b>	18%	7%	
Completely eliminating the estate tax, that is the tax on property left by people who die			
<b>Agrees with Kerry</b>	40%	28%	12%
<b>Disagrees with Kerry</b>	38%	66%	-29%
<b>No opinion/DK/Refused</b>	23%	6%	
Changing the recently passed Medicare prescription drug law to allow re-importing drugs from Canada			
<b>Agrees with Kerry</b>	52%	74%	-22%
<b>Disagrees with Kerry</b>	28%	17%	11%
<b>No opinion/DK/Refused</b>	19%	9%	
Making the recent tax cuts permanent			
<b>Agrees with Kerry</b>	39%	33%	6%
<b>Disagrees with Kerry</b>	44%	58%	-14%
<b>No opinion/DK/Refused</b>	17%	10%	
Wants to make it easier for labor unions to organize			
<b>Agrees with Kerry</b>	45%	58%	-13%
<b>Disagrees with Kerry</b>	31%	29%	2%
<b>No opinion/DK/Refused</b>	24%	12%	
Federal funding of research on diseases like Parkinsons using stem cells taken from human embryos			
<b>Agrees with Kerry</b>	51%	65%	-13%
<b>Disagrees with Kerry</b>	33%	28%	5%
<b>No opinion/DK/Refused</b>	16%	8%	
Making it more difficult for a woman to get an abortion			
<b>Agrees with Kerry</b>	49%	55%	-6%
<b>Disagrees with Kerry</b>	38%	39%	-1%
<b>No opinion/DK/Refused</b>	13%	6%	

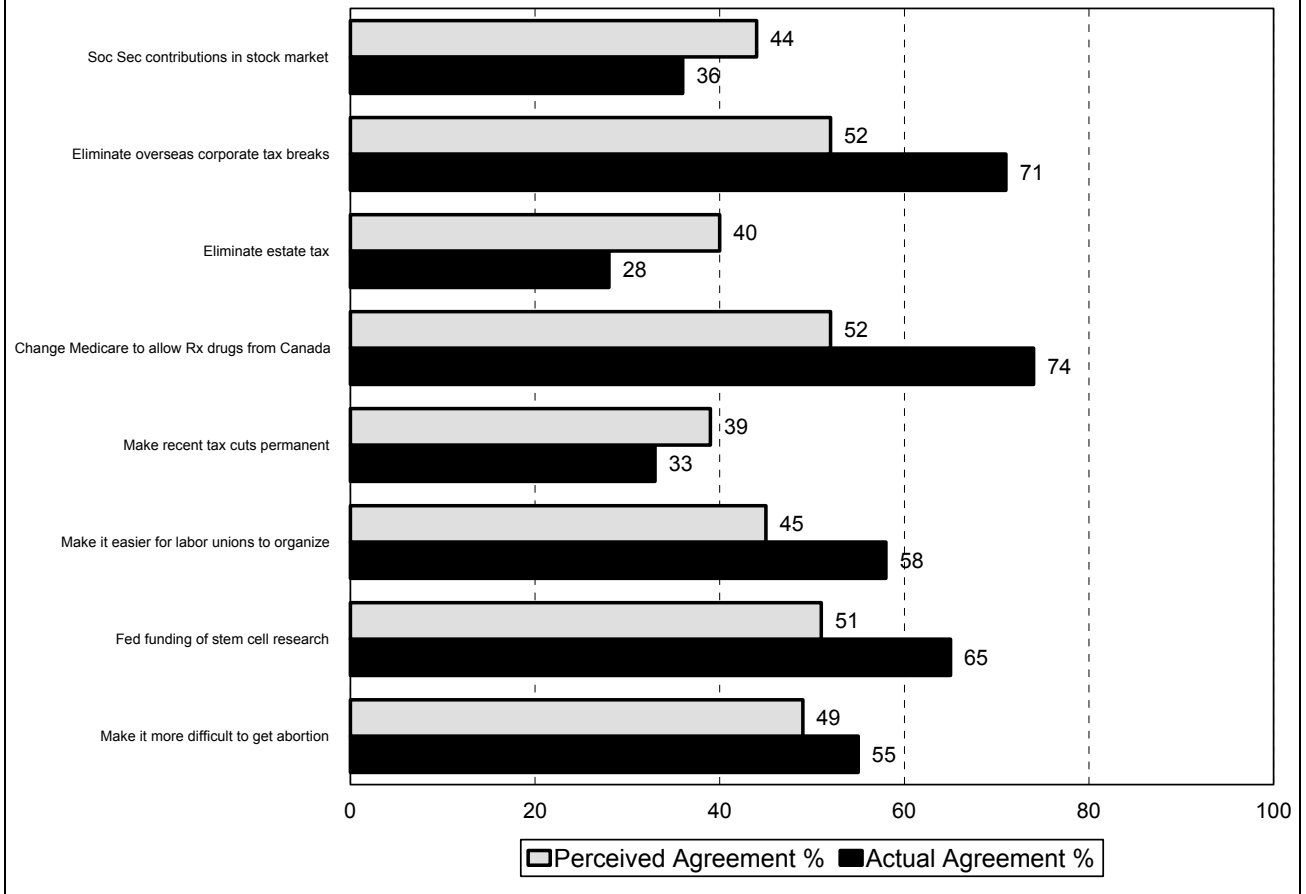
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**E. Charts: Percent of Adults Who Actually Agree with Candidates Versus Percent of Adults Who Think That They Agree with Candidates**



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### Kerry: Actual and Perceived Policy Agreement



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## 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 is based on interviews conducted from September 21 through 26, 2004. In that period, 1,189 adults used in this analysis were interviewed. In theory, in 19 out of 20 cases, results for all respondents will differ by no more than three percentage points, up or down, from what would have been obtained by interviewing all American adults.

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.

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