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**Contact:** Adam Clymer at 202-879-6757

### **Annenberg Study Shows Elderly Voters, a Force in Iowa, Follow Politics More Closely Than Younger People**

Elderly Americans, an intensively courted swing voting force, are more attentive to politics than younger people and claim higher rates of voting, but are less enthusiastic about increased federal spending on schools or allowing younger workers to put some of their Social Security taxes into the stock market, the National Annenberg Election Survey shows. These attitudes were strong in 2000, and the first results from the 2004 survey show they have not changed.

Those findings are especially relevant in Iowa, where Democratic presidential candidates are stressing the issues of Medicare and Social Security. In 2000, people over 60 made up 25 percent of the voting age population but provided 39 percent of those who attended Democratic caucuses, according to a caucus night poll by the Voter News Service. Latest Census Bureau estimates have people over 60 at 25 percent of Iowa's voting age population again, fourth highest in the nation after Florida, West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

Seniors have a record going back to 1980 of backing the presidential candidate who gets the most votes on Election Day. In 2000, 51 percent of those 60 and over backed Al Gore to 47 percent for George W. Bush. But while those seniors also preferred Democratic House candidates in 2000, they shifted back to Republicans by a 51 to 49 percent margin in 2002, according to the just-released VNS exit poll of the 2002 elections.

The National Annenberg Election Survey found that in the fall of 2000 respondents 65 and older were much more likely to follow television and newspaper news about the election than younger voters, much more interested in the campaign and about twice as likely to say they watched the first Bush-Gore televised debate all the way through. And 73 percent of them said they always voted, compared to 42 percent of those 18 to 64.

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The survey of 58,373 adults between December 1999 and January 2001 also showed that while 70 percent of respondents 18 to 64 favored the Federal government spending more on schools, only 51 percent of those 65 and older did. While respondents 18 to 64 favored investment of Social Security funds in stocks by 60 to 31 percent, those 65 and older were opposed, 48 to 39 percent. The margin of sampling error for both groups was plus or minus one percentage point

Those differences marked in 2000 remain strong today. The first results of the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey, based on interviewing from October 7 through November 2, show 69 percent of respondents 18 to 64 favor more federal spending on schools, compared to 43 percent of those 65 and older. On investing some Social Security funds in the stock market, younger respondents favor the idea, 55 to 36 percent, while the elderly oppose it, 58 percent to 33 percent. Those early results also show that while interest in the campaign is still low nationally, the elderly are much more interested than are those 64 and younger.

The findings for 2000 are derived from the largest academic election poll ever conducted. A complete report is provided in *Capturing Campaign Dynamics: The National Annenberg Election Survey*, by Daniel Romer, Kate Kenski, Paul Waldman, Christopher Adasiewicz and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, just published by Oxford University Press, complete with a CD-Rom containing the data. The survey is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

The Social Security issue mattered in 2000, and Gore gained by emphasizing it in the final weeks before the election. On the other hand, 62 percent of the elderly favored increased military spending, a theme Bush emphasized, compared to 45 percent of younger voters.

But the most striking age differences in the Annenberg survey were not on policy issues but in the relative attention different generations paid to politics. Thirty-nine percent of the elderly said they had watched all of the first Bush-Gore debate, 35 percent said they watched all of the second, and 37 percent said they watched all of the third. Among respondents under 65, 20 percent watched all of the first, 17 percent all of the second and 15 percent all of the third.

Among the elderly, 53 percent said they were interested in government most of the time, compared to 32 percent of those under 65. For the presidential campaign itself, 47 percent of the elderly said they were "very interested," compared to 27 percent of those under 65. The elderly were also more likely to say they followed the campaign on television and in newspapers, and marginally more likely to listen to talk radio.

The elderly often voted early. In post-election interviews of people who said they had voted in 23 states that made early voting easy, a third of the elderly said they had voted before Election Day. Among people 65 and over, 34 percent said they had voted early, compared to 19 percent of younger people. In all, 21 percent of the voters in those states said they had voted early.

In Iowa, where early voting is not an option in the January caucuses, pre-caucus levels of interest sometimes approached pre-general election norms throughout the country. A separate Annenberg poll of 3,173 Iowans found that 57 percent of Iowa's elderly said they were interested in government "most of the time," compared to 32 percent of those under 65. And 40 percent said they were very interested in 2000's political campaigns, compared to 21 percent among younger people. Older Iowans were more aware of pre-caucus debates and watched more television and read more newspapers than younger people.

In New Hampshire, the first state with a primary, there were similar findings. An Annenberg poll of 3,814 adults showed that 29 percent of the elderly said they had watched a Jan. 26 Republican presidential debate, compared to 15 percent of younger respondents. Twenty-two percent said they watched the Democratic debate the same night, compared to 12 percent of younger people.

Fifty-nine percent of New Hampshire's elderly said they were interested in government most of the time, compared to 38 percent of younger people. Forty-six percent said they were very interested in 2000's political campaigns, compared to 32 percent of younger respondents. New Hampshire's elderly also watched more television and read more newspapers than younger people did.

The national poll found relatively few differences on issues between old and older voters. For example, those 65 and older opposed letting workers invest Social Security funds in the stock market by 48 to 39 percent. The 65-74 year-old respondents opposed the idea, 47 to 42 percent, while those 75 and over were only slightly more critical, by a 51 to 34 percent margin.

On another question where age mattered, those under 65 opposed school vouchers by a 51 to 45 percent margin, while those over 65 were more strongly opposed, 58 to 34 percent. Among the elderly, those 65 to 74 were opposed by 56 to 37 percent and those 75 and over by 60 to 31 percent. The most favorable age group was the 18-29 year-old contingent, which was split about evenly. Forty-eight percent favored federal vouchers and 49 percent opposed them, but the difference was not statistically significant.

When it came to voting, the differences were also not statistically significant, according to the 2002 VNS data, provided to the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut by four members of the now defunct Voter News Service -- the Associated Press, CNN, CBS News and NBC News. It showed that respondents 60-64 years old supported Republican House candidates by a 52 to 48 percent margin in the two-party vote, those 65-74 gave Republicans a 51 to 49 percent edge and those 75 or older were evenly split, with 50 percent for candidates of each major party.

For more information visit [www.appcpenn.org](http://www.appcpenn.org).

## Survey Methodology

The National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) is a survey conducted each presidential election year by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. The 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey is based on telephone interviews conducted from December 14, 1999 through January 19, 2001, with a cross-section of 58,373 adults throughout the contiguous 48 states of the United States and the District of Columbia.

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.

In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results based on such samples will differ by no more than four tenths of one percentage point, up or down, from what would have been obtained by interviewing all American adults. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger. For respondents 65 and older in the entire sample, it is plus or minus one percentage point. For respondents 65 and older interviewed between October 1, 2000 and Election Day, for example, it is plus or minus two percentage points. Some questions were not asked of all respondents, so the margin of sampling error on a particular question could be higher.

Interviewing for the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey began October 7. The sampling technique is similar to that used in 2000. For all 1,777 respondents to date, the margin of sampling error is plus or minus two percentage points, and for those 65 and older it is plus or minus six percentage points.

Other elements of the 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey included polls of particular groups, such as people who lived in a specific state. This report also cites telephone polls of 3,173 Iowa adults, conducted from December 14, 1999 through January 23, 2000, and of 3,814 New Hampshire adults, conducted from December 14, 1999 through January 31, 2000. For each of those polls, the margin of sampling error is plus or minus two percentage points, and for respondents 65 and older it is plus or minus four percentage points.

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.

**Table 1: Political Interest, Attention and Participation for Different Age Groups:  
October 1 to Election Day, 2000**

	65+	18-64	Total	76+	65-75	55-64	45-54	30-44	18-29
Always vote	73%	42	47	76	71	63	50	39	24
Certain that he is she is registered	90	77	79	89	91	89	86	76	59
Believe voting is one of most important responsibilities of being an American	38	27	28	36	39	35	31	26	16
Watched all of first Bush-Gore debate	39	20	23	36	40	32	22	17	12
Watched at least one Bush-Gore debate all the way through*	44	27	30	44	45	40	30	23	19
Paid a "great deal" of attention to network or cable television news of presidential campaign in past week	37	26	28	35	39	33	30	23	21
Paid a "great deal" of attention to newspaper news of presidential campaign in past week	30	19	21	27	32	25	21	17	15
Very interested in presidential campaign	51	31	34	46	53	45	36	28	20
Contacted by a presidential campaign in last week	10	5	6	10	11	8	6	4	4
Discussed politics with family of friends every day in past week	22	16	17	17	24	22	20	15	9
Gave money to presidential campaign	12	6	7	12	12	9	8	4	3
Displayed sign for presidential Campaign	7	7	7	6	7	7	6	6	10

\*Question asked only October 17, 2000- October 25, 2000.

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**Table 2: Political Attitudes of Different Age Groups, 2000 Campaign**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>65+</b>	<b>18-64</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>76+</b>	<b>65-75</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>30-44</b>	<b>18-29</b>
Believe federal government should spend more on military	62%	45	<b>47</b>	61	63	58	50	42	35
Believe federal government should spend more on public schools	51	70	<b>67</b>	49	51	57	63	73	81
Believe federal government should give private school vouchers	34	45	<b>43</b>	30	36	40	42	47	48
Believe federal government should let people invest some Social Security taxes in stock market	39	60	<b>57</b>	33	41	51	57	63	66
Believe federal government should try to reduce income differences between rich and poor	39	49	<b>48</b>	38	40	40	45	50	58
Believe federal government should do more to protect environment	58	67	<b>66</b>	58	58	59	63	68	76
Believe federal government should ban abortion	21	22	<b>22</b>	21	20	20	19	22	25
Believe federal government should allow school prayer	63	59	<b>59</b>	63	62	60	58	60	57
Believe federal government should do more to stop job discrimination against gays	33	41	<b>39</b>	30	34	36	38	40	48
Believe in death penalty	69	73	<b>73</b>	66	71	73	74	74	71
Job loss to foreign competition extremely serious	27	25	<b>25</b>	26	28	29	25	25	23

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**Table 3: How Voters 60 and Over Voted 1972-2002**

Year	Presidential Vote			House vote	
1972	Nixon 68	McGovern 31			
1976	Carter 47	Ford 52			
1980	Reagan 54	Carter 41	Anderson 4	Dem 51	Rep 49
1982				58	42
1984	Reagan 60	Mondale 39		Dem 48	Rep 52
1986				52	48
1988	Bush 50	Dukakis 49		Dem 55	Rep 45
1990				53	47
1992	Clinton 50	Bush 38	Perot 12	Dem 56	Rep 44
1994				49	51
1996	Clinton 48	Dole 44	Perot 7	Dem 49	Rep 51
1998				45	55
2000	Bush 47	Gore 51		Dem 52	Rep 48
2002				51	49

*Sources:* Polls of voters leaving polling places conducted by CBS News, The New York Times/CBS News Poll, and Voter News Service and analysis by The New York Times. House vote percentages are based on the total Democratic and Republican votes, excluding other parties and independents.

The Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) was established by publisher and philanthropist Walter Annenberg in 1994 to create a community of scholars within the University of Pennsylvania that would examine the role of communications in public policy issues at the local, state, and federal levels. The APPC, directed by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, supports research and sponsors lectures and conferences. Visit [www.APPCPENN.org](http://www.APPCPENN.org).