

October 10, 2000

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## **Annenberg Survey: First Presidential Debate Stimulated and Educated**

*The first debate increased the public's attention to the campaign and taught many about the candidates' policy positions.*

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### **For more information**

Please direct questions to Kathleen Hall Jamieson at (215) 898-7041. More information on the Annenberg Public Policy Center and its studies can be found at <http://www.appcpenn.org>.

**Annenberg Public Policy Center  
Annenberg School for Communication  
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### **About the researchers**

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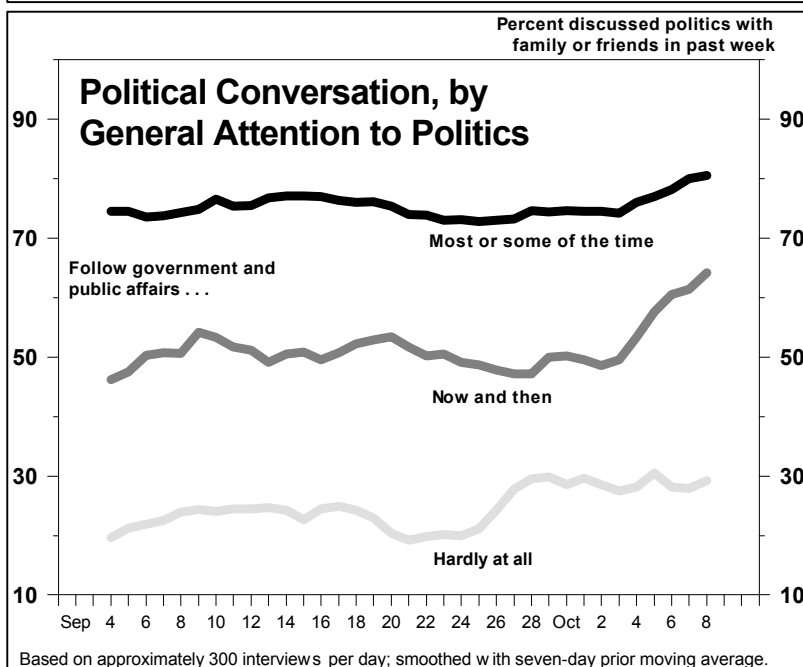
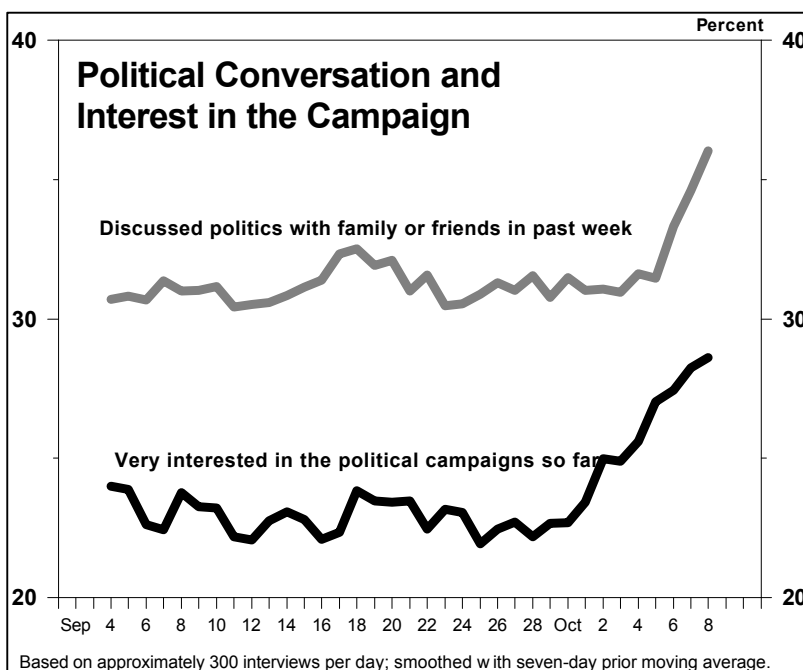
### **About the survey**

The Annenberg 2000 Election Study is a daily, year-long monitor of the electorate, comprised of national samples and oversamples of key states. To date, nearly 73,000 interviews have been conducted. The survey asks about turnout and vote intention, candidate recognition, knowledge, and evaluation, opinions on issues, media use and political discussion, candidate chances, and a wide range of demographics. Fieldwork is managed by Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA) and carried out by Schulman, Ronca & Bucavallas (SRBI) and Princeton Data Services (PDS). All interviews except post-election reinterviews are conducted as a "rolling cross-section" (RCS): the date of interview, like selection of the sample, is a product of random selection.

## The Debate as Stimulus

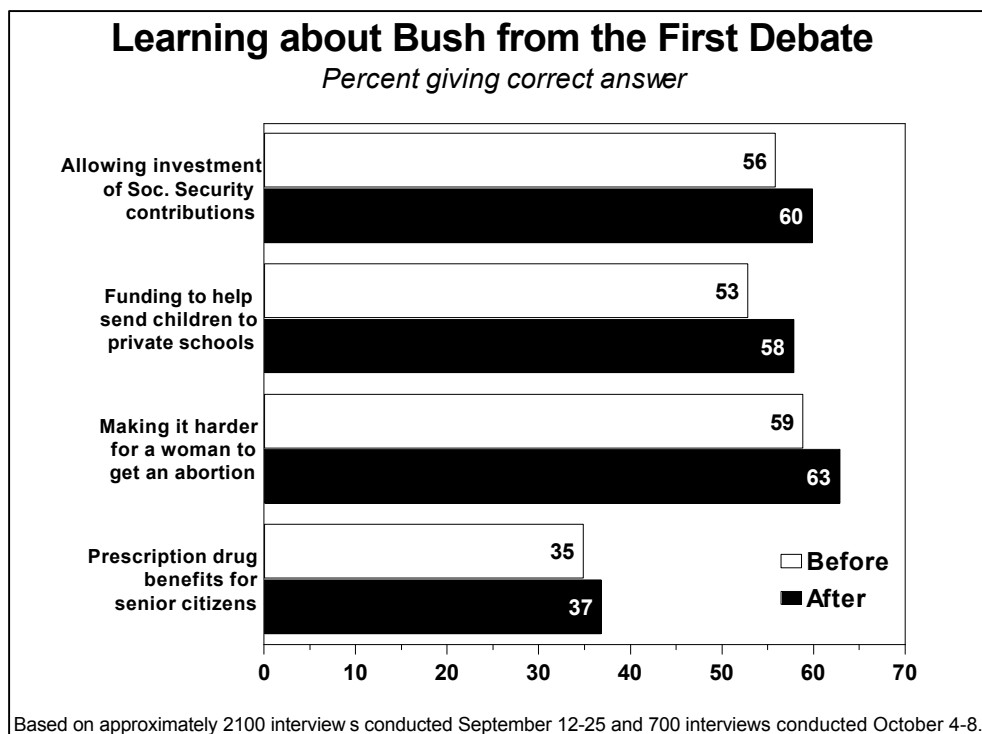
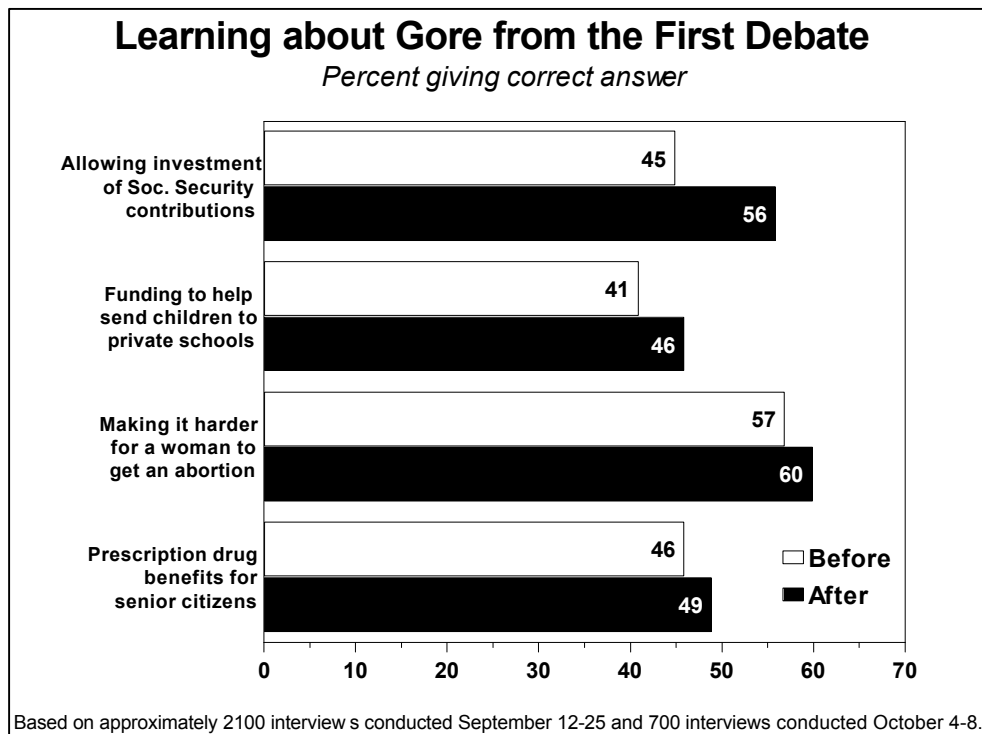
The October 3 presidential debate, and the vice-presidential debate that followed two days later, focused the attention of a substantial portion of the American public on politics. The percentage of people reporting that they have been very much interested in the political campaigns so far this year rose 7 points—from 22 to 29—between September 25 and October 8. The percentage that reports having discussed politics with family or friends in the past week has grown 5 points (31 to 36) since the debates (between October 5 and October 8).

Most of the growth in interest and conversation occurred among people ordinarily not much interested in politics. The percentage reporting political discussions with family or friends, for example, grew more than 15 points among those who follow government and public affairs only now and then, compared to 5 percentage points among those who follow some or most of the time. Even people who follow government and public affairs hardly at all are talking more about politics now than three weeks ago, although the increase appears to have preceded the debates.



## Learning the Candidates' Positions

The public also learned from the debate. In particular, significant numbers learned the positions of the candidates on the issues discussed most. Between the weeks before the debate and the days immediately after, 11 percent learned of Gore's opposition to the Republican plan to allow workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market. Four percent learned of Bush's support for the plan. Knowledge of each candidates' position on using government money to help some parents send their children to private schools grew 5 percentage points. Knowledge of which candidate favors and which opposes making it harder for a woman to get an abortion grew 3 to 4 points. And 2 to 3 percent of the public learned of the candidates' alternative plans for helping senior citizens pay for prescription drugs.



More people after the debate than before were able to identify Bush as the candidate favoring the biggest tax cut and the candidate proposing to use some of the Medicare surplus to cut taxes.

