

## Annenberg 2000 Survey

September 29, 2000

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### Annenberg Survey: Gaps Remain in Voter Knowledge

*The upcoming debates should play a key role in informing voters about the candidates for president.*

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#### For more information

Please direct questions to Michael Hagen 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  
University of Pennsylvania**

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#### About the researchers

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON

is Professor and Dean at the Annenberg School for Communication of the University of Pennsylvania and Director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center.

RICHARD JOHNSTON

is a Visiting Scholar at the Annenberg School for Communication.

MICHAEL G. HAGEN

is a Senior Researcher at the Annenberg Public Policy Center.

PAUL WALDMAN

is a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Annenberg Public Policy Center.

KATE KENSKI

is a doctoral student at the Annenberg School for Communication.

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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, over 70,000 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 & Bucavals (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.

## What Voters Don't Yet Know

As the presidential debates approach, only half of all Americans say they have learned enough about the presidential candidates and issues to make an informed choice, according to recent interviewing for the Annenberg 2000 Election Study. If George W. Bush and Al Gore use the upcoming debates to talk about policy issues, viewers could learn a lot. For as the campaign enters its tenth month, many Americans still fail to grasp Bush's and Gore's basic issue positions.

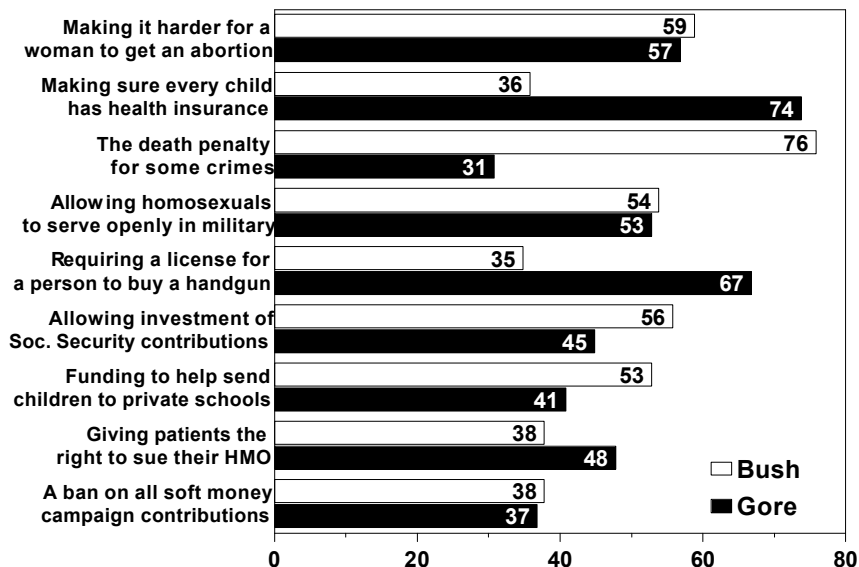
**Economics.** Half of Americans can distinguish the major features of the two candidates' economic proposals. Half know Gore's plan provides for a bigger increase in spending on Social Security and allocates more money for paying down the national debt. But half either don't know or erroneously say Bush's plan spends more on Social Security and debt reduction. Six in 10 know Bush has proposed the larger tax cut, but four in 10 incorrectly believe Gore has or don't know. As many correctly think Bush would double the per-child tax credit as erroneously attribute this position to Gore.

**Health care.** On health care, just half know Gore would allow patients to sue their HMOs. Three fourths know Gore wants to expand government health insurance programs to make sure every child is covered, but just a third know Bush does not. Only four in 10 know Gore has proposed a \$3000 tax credit for long-term health care expenses.

**Education.** Although both candidates have emphasized education on the stump and in ads, just half know Bush favors school vouchers, that is, using government money to help some parents send their children to private schools. Four in 10 know Gore opposes vouchers, the same number who think he supports them.

## Knowledge of Candidates' Policies

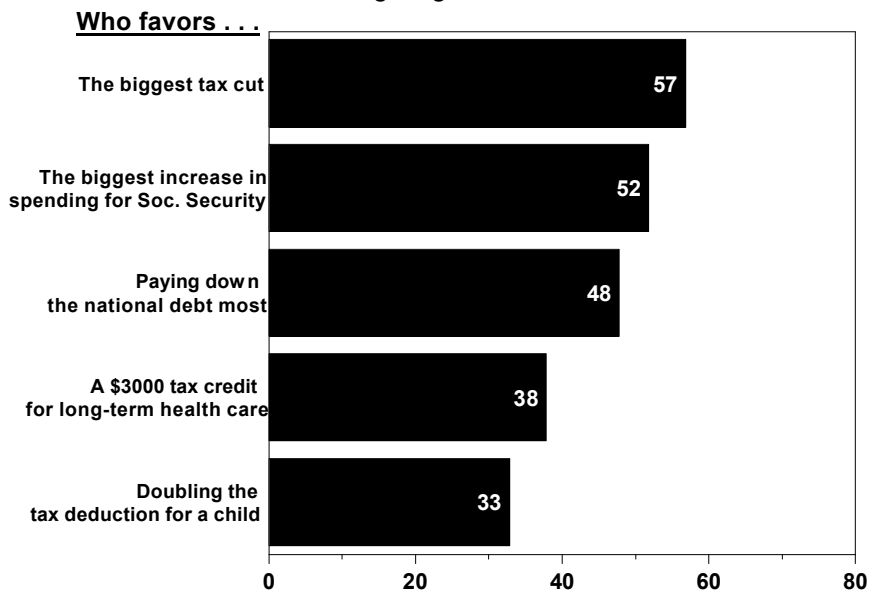
*Percent giving correct answer*



Based on approximately 2100 interviews conducted September 12-25.

## Knowledge of Contrasts between Candidates' Policies

*Percent giving correct answer*



Based on 4282 interviews conducted September 12-25.

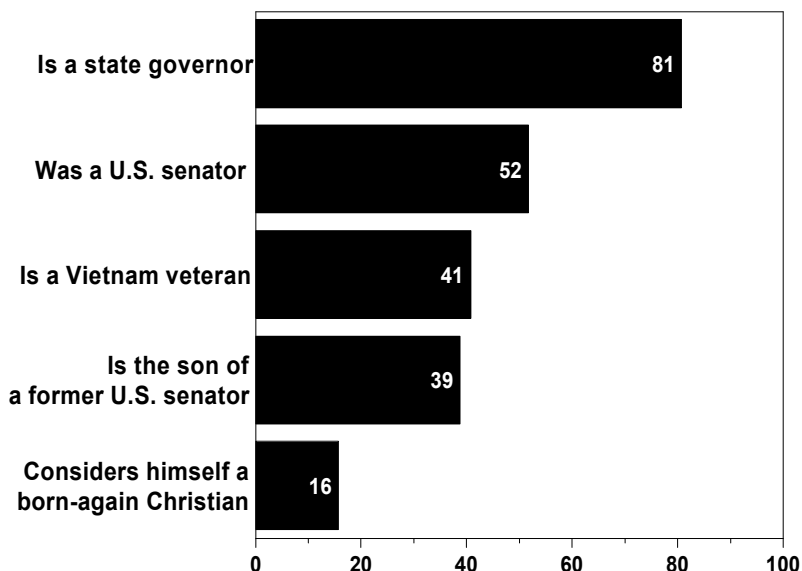
**Law and order.** Knowledge of the candidates' positions on law and order issues is lopsided. Although two thirds know Gore favors licensing handgun owners, two thirds don't know Bush does not—in fact, nearly half believe he favors handgun licensing. Three fourths know Bush believes the death penalty should be allowed for some crimes, but just three in 10 know Gore shares the same position. Four in ten believe Gore opposes the death penalty.

**Social issues.** Six in 10 know Bush favors making it harder for a woman to get an abortion, and six in 10 know Gore opposes additional restrictions on abortion. Still, on this hot-button issue, four in 10 think Bush opposes abortion restrictions or don't know, and four in 10 believe Gore favors restrictions or don't know. Half know Gore favors allowing gays to serve openly in the military, and half know Bush opposes this.

**Campaign finance.** Just a third know Gore wants to ban soft money contributions to political parties.

## Knowledge of Candidates' Biographies

*Percent giving correct answer*



Based on 4133 interviews conducted September 12-25.

## Undecided Voters Less Knowledgeable

Among registered voters in our surveying the second half of September, roughly a quarter are somewhat or wholly undecided about the presidential race. This is, a quarter of registered voters, when asked who they would vote for if the election were held today, either say they don't know or indicate they are open to changing their mind.

Information gleaned from the debates could be particularly useful for Americans who have not yet made up their mind who to vote for. Undecided registered voters are less knowledgeable about where Bush and Gore stand on the issues than registered voters who say they have made up their mind; on any given question, approximately 5% fewer undecided voters know the correct answer than decided voters.

## Debates Could Boost Stagnant or Slipping Knowledge

Although both the Bush and Gore campaigns have been in high gear for all of September, Americans' knowledge has not increased much during the month. In fact, in some cases it has slipped since the conventions in August, particularly knowledge of Gore's positions.

Compared with the end of August, slightly more today know Bush favors and Gore opposes school vouchers. And slightly more know Bush favors and Gore opposes abortion restrictions. But slightly fewer know Gore favors allowing HMO suits and licensing handgun owners. Slightly fewer know Gore wants to develop a government health insurance program to make sure all children are covered. And slightly fewer know Gore favors the death penalty.