

August 1, 2000

**Annenberg Survey:
Many Americans
Still Have Much to Learn
about the Presidential
Candidates**

*At the start of the party conventions,
much of the public does not know the
candidates' backgrounds and
policies.*

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
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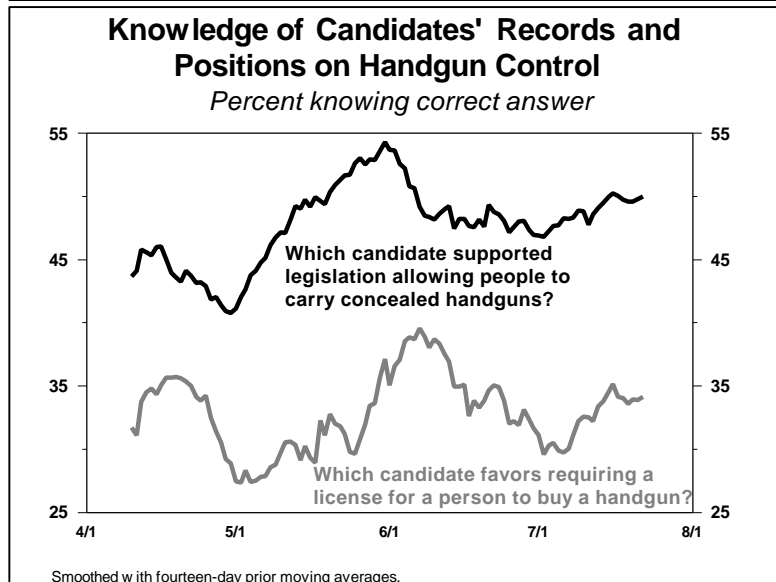
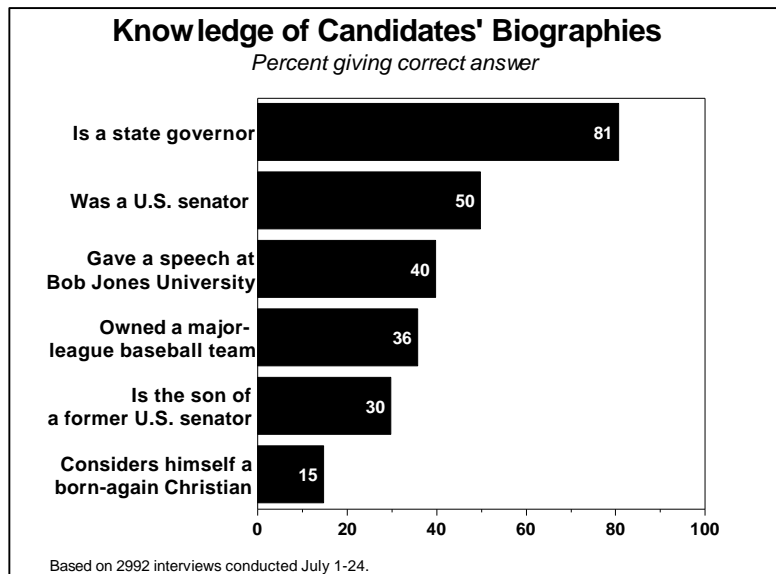
About the survey

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 48,000 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 & Bucavala (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.

Knowledge of the Candidates' Biographies

Much of the American public remains unfamiliar with basic information about the presidential candidates. Four in five respondents to the Annenberg 2000 Survey in July knew that George W. Bush is a governor. But only half knew that Al Gore served in the U.S. Senate, and less than one-third knew that Gore's father did. Only slightly more people knew that Bush gave a speech at Bob Jones University than knew that Bush once owned a major-league baseball team. Just 15 percent knew that both Bush and Gore consider themselves born-again Christians.

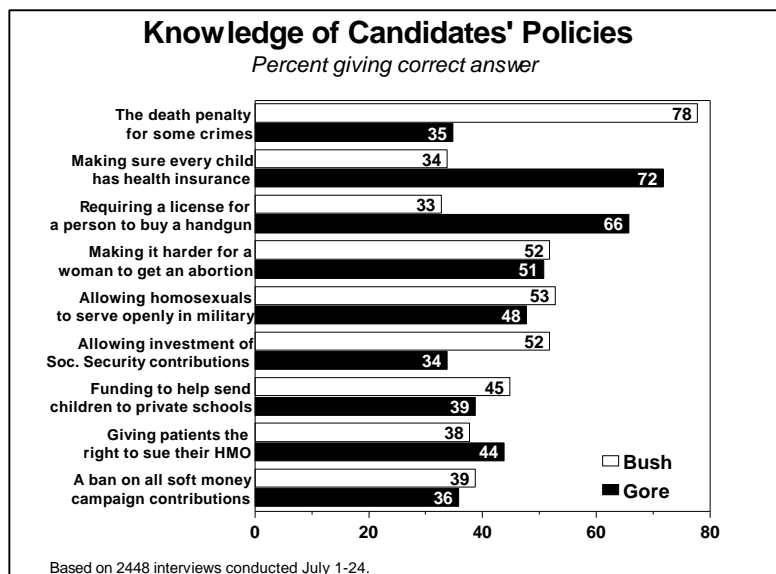
About only one of the biographical items we surveyed has the public become more knowledgeable in the past three months: more people now than in April know that Bush supported legislation allowing people to carry concealed weapons in Texas. The Gore campaign's May attack on Bush's gun control record evidently informed some potential voters, although some of the effect has worn off since.



Knowledge of the Candidates' Policies

Most people do not know the policy positions that distinguish the two major party candidates. Across nine issues we surveyed in July, 48 percent, on average, knew George Bush's position and 49 percent knew Al Gore's position.

Knowledge varies widely from issue to issue. Over three-fourths know that Bush favors the death penalty, but barely half know that he supports restricting abortion and fewer than one-third know that he opposes



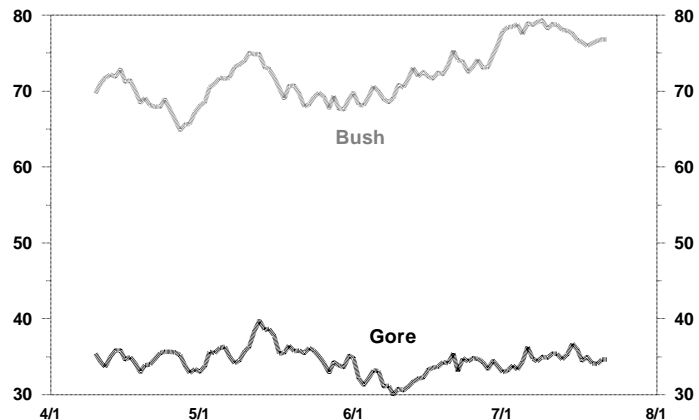
licensing of handguns. Nearly two-thirds know that Gore supports licensing for new handguns, but barely one-third know that he opposes school vouchers.

The issue of the death penalty is the only one on which knowledge has increased appreciably over the past three months. The heavy news coverage and commentary given to recent executions in Texas seems to have illustrated Bush's support for the death penalty for some. Knowledge of Gore's support for the death penalty has remained roughly steady.

Most Americans acknowledge that they have more to learn about the candidates. When we asked them if they felt they had learned enough about the candidates to make an informed choice, a majority replied that they had not. The number answering that they had learned enough climbed from the beginning of the year to the effective end of the primary period after Super Tuesday from 20 percent to 45 percent, where it has remained in the 4½ months since.

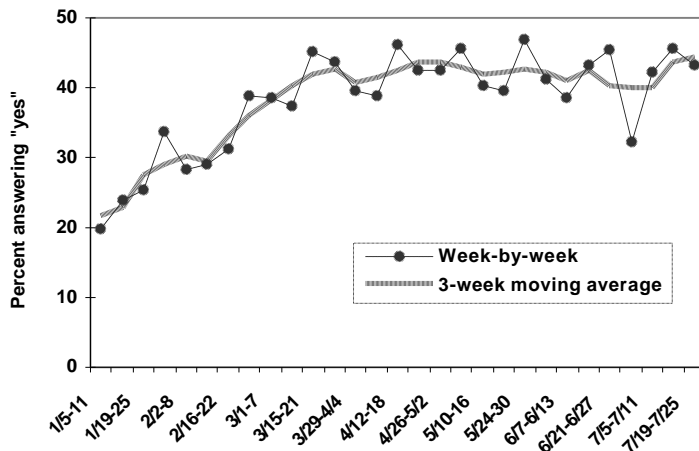
Knowledge of Candidates' Support for Death Penalty for Some Crimes

Percent knowing correct answer



Smoothed with fourteen-day prior moving averages.

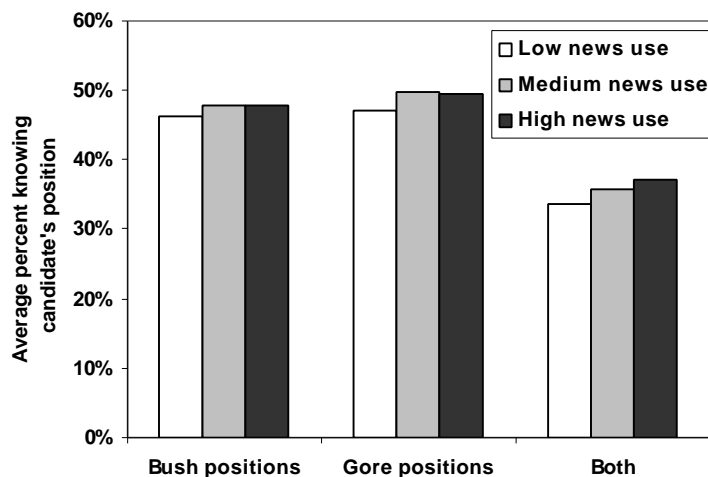
Have you learned enough about the candidates to make an informed choice?



Learning from Network News?

It does not appear that news reports are boosting knowledge for those who attend to them. While one would expect that those who watch network news every night would know a great deal more about the candidates than those who do not, this is not in fact the case. There was little difference between high, medium, and low consumers of television news on knowledge of the candidates' issue positions.

Knowledge of Candidate Issue Positions by Network News Watching

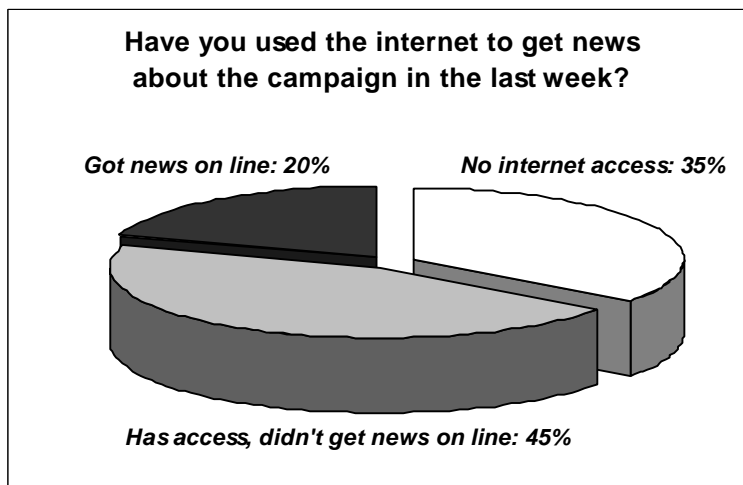


There were statistically significant but relatively small differences between respondents at different levels of newspaper and talk radio use, on the order of 5 – 10 percentage points between the number of people in high exposure group and the low exposure group who knew the candidate's position on an issue.

The lack of difference between people at different rates of news exposure would be unproblematic if most people knew a great deal about the candidates. But since most people's knowledge is actually fairly low, this indicates that the news media and candidates have a good deal of work left to do in informing the electorate.

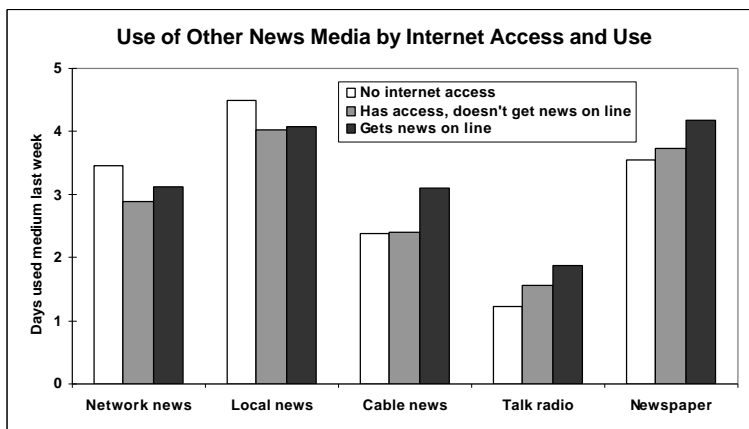
The Internet: A Significant Source of Campaign News, But Mostly for Those Who Need it Least

A substantial number of our respondents reported that they got news about the campaign on line in the week before being interviewed. When we examine this group, however, we see that while they are not restricted to the small number of people one would consider "political junkies," they are people who utilize other sources of political information.



Men were more likely than women to get campaign news on line. While 16 percent of the women in our sample said they had gotten news about the campaign on line, 24 percent of the men said they had. Overall, the group of people getting their news on line was 55 percent male and 45 percent female. We see a more striking disparity in the income of internet news receivers. The median income of those without internet access was \$30,000, while the median income of those with access was \$42,500. The median income of those who got campaign news on line was \$57,500.

Those who get campaign news on line are also heavy users of other news media. They differ from other respondents not in their use of every medium, but in those that concentrate more heavily on politics: newspapers, cable news, and talk radio. They watch local news less often than other respondents, and watch network news at about the same rate. It thus appears that the internet is functioning not as a substitute for political information from other media, but as a supplement for a relatively elite audience.



Perceptions of the Candidates' Traits

Despite media reports and late-night television banter about Bush's command of current events, Americans give the two candidates equally high marks for being knowledgeable. In fact, both Bush and Gore are rated higher on knowledge than on any other trait on which we have surveyed.

Americans also rank Bush and Gore equally when asked whether the candidate "cares about people like me."

Bush and Gore are not equally likely to be regarded as inspiring or honest. The common complaint that Gore is "boring" seems to be reflected in the fact that 34 percent say Gore is inspiring, compared to 47 percent for Bush. Perhaps more consequential is the fact that 50 percent say Gore is honest, compared to 57 percent for Bush.

The difference in perceptions of honesty is one that has emerged since the primaries, due in part perhaps to the revival of charges that Gore abused campaign finance regulations in 1996. In March, equal percentages regarded Gore and Bush as honest. But while the percentage who see Bush as honest has remained roughly steady since then, the percentage who see Gore as honest has declined.

One final note on traits: on honesty as on the other traits on which we surveyed, neither of the nominees-to-be is rated as positively as their major competitors for the nominations, Bill Bradley and John McCain.

