

August 13, 2000

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**Annenberg Survey:  
Despite Small Audience,  
Republican Convention  
Informed the Public**

*Increases in campaign news coverage and in the public's attention to it produced gains in knowledge about the candidates, even among people who ordinarily do not follow politics.*

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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  
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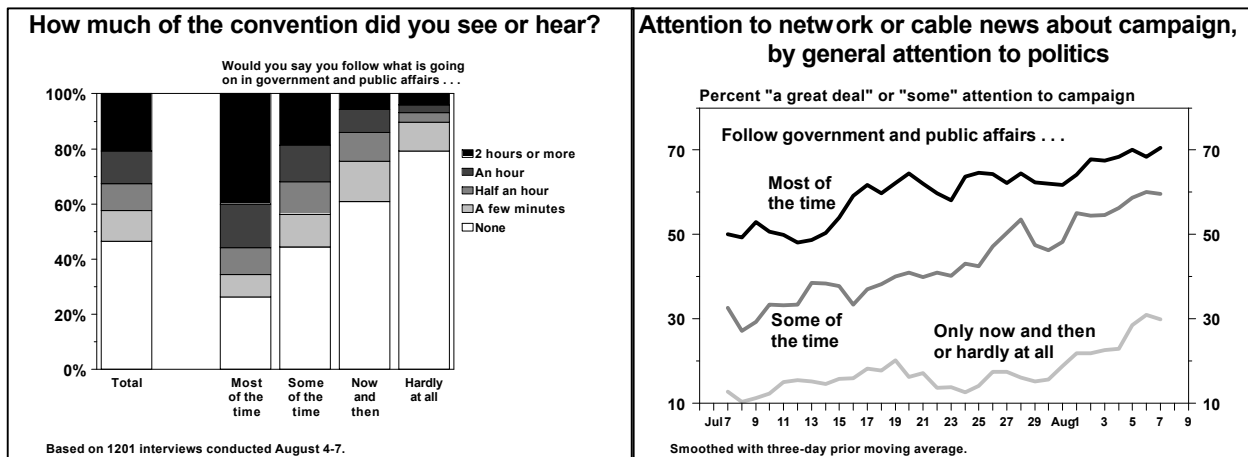
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**About the survey**

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 52,000 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.

## The Convention Audience and the News Audience

Few Americans watched the Republican National Convention. According to the Annenberg Survey, just 21 percent of people nationwide watched two hours or more of the convention broadcast over the four days; 57 percent watched a few minutes or none at all. Unsurprisingly, people who ordinarily follow government and public affairs more closely were much more likely to watch the convention. Only 11 percent of those who follow politics hardly at all and 25 percent of those who follow politics only now and then watched more than a few minutes of the convention. The direct impact of the convention was limited by the size of the audience and by the fact that the people who did tune in were those who follow politics

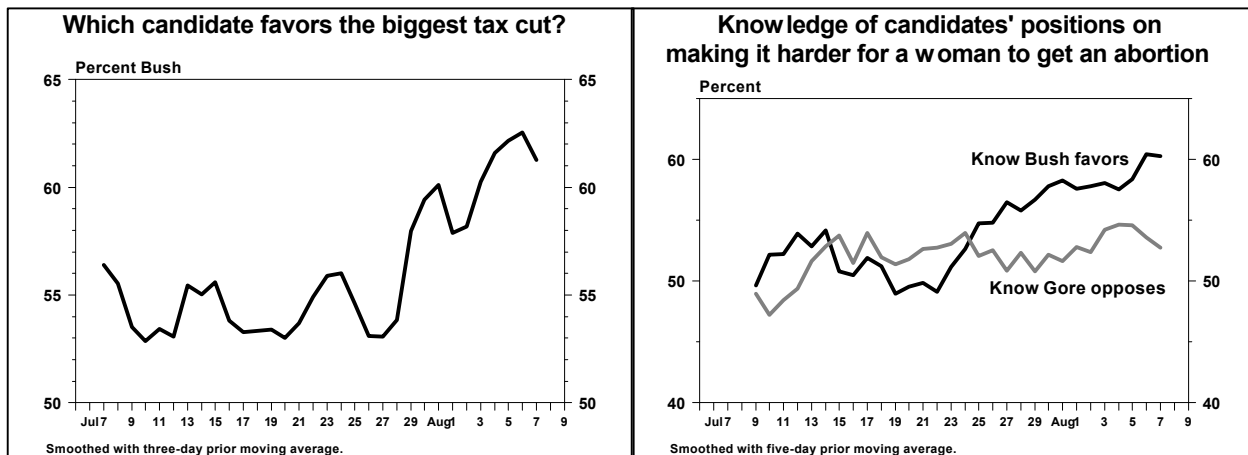


generally.

The convention did increase the amount of attention Americans are paying to news about the presidential campaign, however, even among those who rarely follow politics. Between mid-July and early August, among those who follow politics hardly at all or only now and then, the percentage that reported paying at least some attention to network or cable television news about the presidential campaign doubled, from 15 percent to 30 percent. Likewise the percentage among people who follow politics some of the time doubled, from 30 to 60 percent. The convention may not have reached many Americans directly, but the event did stimulate many to pay attention to the presidential campaign.

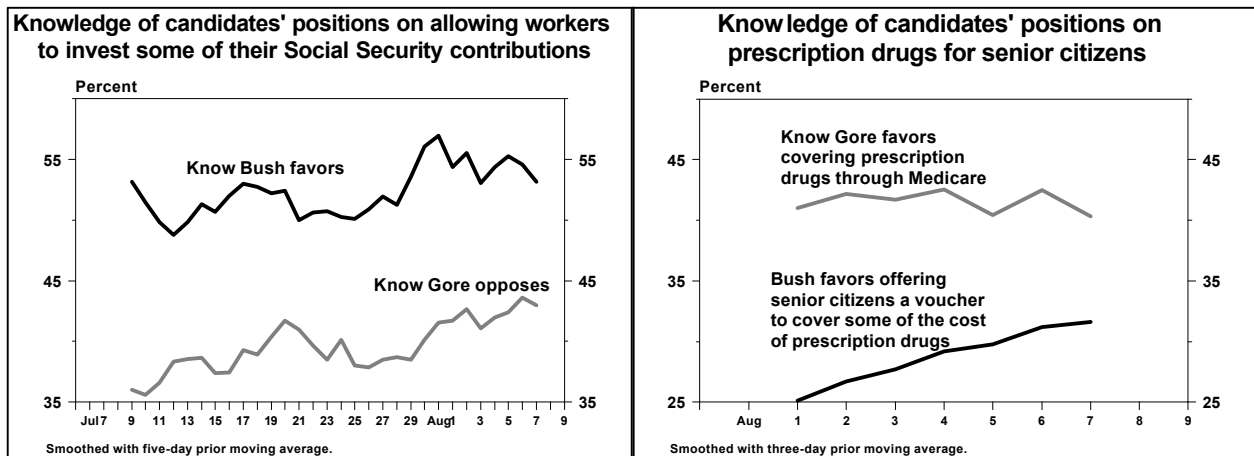
## Learning from Convention News Coverage

Substantial numbers of Americans learned about George W. Bush's policy positions from the Republican convention and the associated news coverage. Eight percent learned that Bush favors a larger tax cut than does Al Gore: the percentage naming Bush as the candidate who would cut taxes more rose from about 54 in the weeks leading up to the convention to 62 in the week after, while the percentage naming Gore fell from about 25 to 18. Nearly 10 percent learned that Bush supports measures that would make it harder for a woman to get an abortion. Knowledge about Gore's position on abortion remained roughly



flat over the month.

More Americans now than before the convention know that Bush has proposed allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market and, especially, that Gore opposes that policy. And in the first week of August more than 5 percent learned that Bush favors offering senior citi-

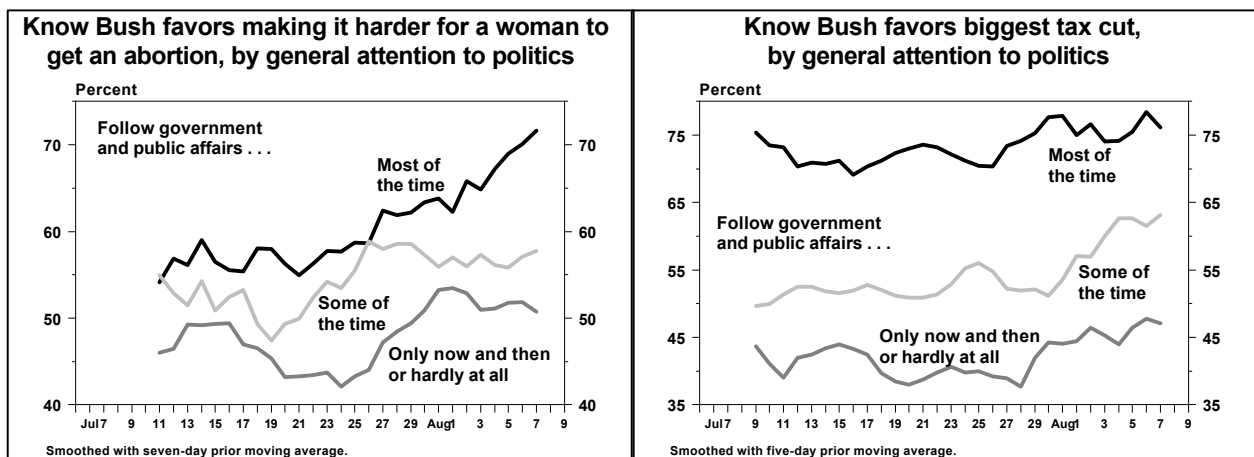


zens a voucher to cover some of the cost of prescription drugs.

The gains in knowledge about taxes, abortion, and Social Security all began several days *before* the convention began on July 31. This, too, suggests that much of the effect of the convention was indirect: much of what the public learned it learned from the surge in campaign news coverage anticipating the convention.

### Who learned?

Like the sharp rise in Americans' attention to the presidential campaign, learning about the candidates' policies extended to many people not ordinarily attentive to politics. Nearly 10 percent of those who follow politics just some of the time learned Bush's position on abortion over the past month—as did about 10 percent of those who follow politics only now and then or hardly at all. Knowledge that Bush favors a bigger tax cut than Gore grew more among Americans less attentive to politics than among those who



are most attentive.

Even when they do not attract large audiences, high-visibility events such as the party conventions increase news attention and motivate the public to focus on the presidential campaign. The conventions continue to play an important role in the process of informing the public about their choice between the candidates.