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Overall Impressions of Bush and Kerry Hardly Change Despite Early TV Blitz, Annenberg Polling Shows

The first salvoes of Bush and Kerry television advertisements appears to have produced few important changes in public attitudes toward the two candidates, the University of Pennsylvania's National Annenberg Election Survey shows.

A comparison of national public attitudes toward the two candidates in the first half of March with those in the second half, shows that 40 percent had a favorable view of Senator John F. Kerry in the first half of the month, while 24 percent had an unfavorable view. In the second half of the month, 39 percent had a favorable opinion and 28 percent an unfavorable view. The four-point increase in unfavorable opinions was statistically significant, but not the one-point decrease in favorable opinions.

But in the 18 states where television commercials have been shown, many of them Bush attacks on Kerry, the changes were even slighter, and statistically insignificant. Favorable opinions of Kerry went from 41 to 39 percent, and unfavorables from 28 to 29 percent

For President Bush, the target of attacks not only from Kerry but from outside groups, the changes were also statistically insignificant. In the first half of the month, 50 percent of the public nationally had a favorable attitude toward President Bush in the first half of the month, while 37 percent had an unfavorable attitude. In the second half, 47 percent had a favorable view and 38 percent an unfavorable view.

In the 18 states considered close enough to warrant the expense of television advertising, Bush went from a 49 percent favorable, 39 percent unfavorable standing, to a 48 percent favorable, 40 percent unfavorable rating.

The findings are based on 2,575 interviews conducted between March 1 and 1,670 between March 16 and 31. The margins of sampling error for both groups were plus or minus two percentage points.

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The Annenberg survey also asked respondents to rate the candidates on fifteen different traits, and detected only three statistically significant changes between the first and second halves of March in the 18 states where ads have been broadcast: Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

Only one factor changed significantly for Kerry in those 18 states. When respondents in those states were asked to rate him on a zero to ten scale on being “knowledgeable,” he was rated an average of 6.51 in the first half of the month. But he dropped to 5.87 in the second half.

At the same time, Bush was becoming perceived as increasingly knowledgeable. In the first half of the month, he was ranked almost a full point below Kerry, at 5.53. But he rose to 5.92 in the second half – or to the same level as Kerry.

But with much of the news in the second half of the month dominated by attacks on Bush’s role in combating terrorism and waging war in Iraq, more Americans in those 18 states said the description of him as “reckless” was accurate in late March. In the first half of the month, his rating on that scale was 4.10; it got worse in the second half, going to 4.77.

Bush’s problem was underscored by another difference between early and late March. In the first half of the month, 58 percent of the public nationally said they approved of his handling of the war on terrorism, while 38 percent disapproved. In the second half, just 53 percent approved and 44 percent disapproved.

Bush’s campaign advertising began on March 5, and his first ads attacking Kerry began to be broadcast on March 12. Kerry and his outside group allies counterattacked almost immediately.

The National Annenberg Election Survey, the largest academic election poll, is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania (www.appcpenn.org). It has been tracking the presidential campaign since October 7, and interviewing will continue until after Election Day. Dr. Kathleen Hall Jamieson is the director of the survey. Ken Winnege is the managing director of the survey. Adam Clymer is the political director of the survey.

Another major election project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center is FactCheck.org, a project that tries to hold politicians accountable by exposing false or misleading campaign statements. It is available online at www.FactCheck.org.

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Question

A. Please tell me if your opinion is favorable or unfavorable, using a scale from zero to ten. Zero means very unfavorable, and ten means very favorable. Five means you do not feel favorable or unfavorable toward that person. Of course you can use any number between zero and ten. The person is George W. Bush/John Kerry. On a scale of zero to ten, how would you rate George W. Bush/John Kerry?

	Bush			Kerry		
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral
March 16-31	47%	38%	13%	39%	28%	21%
March 1-15	50%	37%	12%	40%	24%	23%
February 16-29	49%	38%	11%	39%	23%	22%
February 1-15	52%	36%	11%	38%	20%	24%
January 16-31	52%	35%	12%	34%	17%	26%
January 1-15	55%	33%	11%	19%	21%	28%

Those with no opinion are not shown.

Bush						
	Non-TV States			TV States		
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral
March 16-31	47%	37%	14%	48%	40%	11%
March 1-15	50%	36%	12%	49%	39%	11%
Kerry						
	Non-TV States			TV States		
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral
March 16-31	39%	27%	21%	39%	29%	22%
March 1-15	40%	22%	24%	41%	28%	21%

"TV STATES" are the 18 states the campaigns consider closely contested, where they show television commercials. The states are: Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

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	Bush			Kerry		
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral
Total	47%	38%	13%	39%	28%	21%
Republicans	88%	7%	5%	12%	62%	20%
Democrats	21%	63%	15%	64%	6%	18%
Independents	46%	37%	17%	38%	25%	26%
Men	47%	39%	13%	39%	30%	21%
Women	48%	38%	13%	39%	25%	22%
Whites	53%	34%	12%	37%	32%	22%
African-Americans	14%	69%	16%	48%	10%	23%
Latinos	44%	32%	16%	41%	9%	20%
High school graduate or less	47%	36%	15%	37%	26%	21%
Some college	52%	35%	13%	35%	29%	24%
College degree or more	43%	47%	9%	47%	30%	20%
18-29 years old	49%	38%	12%	39%	18%	25%
30-44	53%	34%	11%	40%	28%	22%
45-64	45%	39%	14%	36%	32%	21%
65 and over	39%	45%	14%	44%	31%	17%
Household income below \$35,000	41%	42%	15%	41%	23%	20%
\$35,000 to less than \$75,000	52%	34%	13%	36%	29%	25%
\$75,000 and over	53%	39%	7%	41%	35%	20%
Union household	33%	46%	19%	45%	21%	26%
Conservatives	68%	20%	10%	21%	50%	19%
Moderates	44%	40%	15%	45%	18%	27%
Liberals	22%	63%	14%	58%	9%	18%
Northeast	41%	46%	13%	50%	22%	23%
Midwest	46%	38%	15%	37%	32%	23%
South	51%	35%	11%	35%	30%	20%
West	51%	36%	12%	37%	25%	20%

March 16-31

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Survey Methodology

The National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) is a survey conducted each presidential election by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

The 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey is based on telephone interviews which began October 7, 2003 and will continue past Election Day.

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. The interviewing is conducted by Schulman, Ronca, Bucuvalas, Inc.

The results have been weighted to take account of household size and number of telephone lines into the residence and to adjust for variation in the sample relating to geographic region, sex, race, age and education.

This report deals with interviewing conducted in six periods in 2004. The most recent was March 16 through 31, when 1,670 people were interviewed. Previous periods were March 1 through 15 (2,575 interviews), February 16 through 29 (2,700 interviews), February 1-15 (2,965 interviews), January 16 through 31 (2,611 interviews) and January 1 through 15 (2,421 interviews).

In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results for each of those periods will differ by no more than two percentage points, up or down, from what would have been obtained by interviewing all American adults. For smaller subgroups, the potential sampling error would be higher.

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.

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