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Young People Watch More Late Night Television

For years political consultants have argued that late n night comedy shows play a central role in defining presidents and presidential candidates for the American public, but the biggest audience for those programs comes from those least likely to vote – Americans 18 to 29, the University of Pennsylvania’s National Annenberg Election Survey shows.

Interviews with 26,491 adults from October 30, 2003 through March 19, 2004, showed that people 18 to 29 were less likely to watch network news, cable news or read newspapers than their elders, but more likely to watch late-night comedy. They watched late-night programs an average of 1.2 days a week, compared to 0.7 for those 30-44, and 0.8 for those 45 to 64 or those 65 and older. (See table A.)

The David Letterman Show and the Tonight Show with Jay Leno, both of which regularly skewer politicians of both parties, have much bigger audiences than the Daily Show with Jon Stewart. But their audiences are similar: relatively young, ideologically moderate, slightly more likely to be Democrats than non-viewers and also large consumers of traditional news like network news and newspapers.

Watchers of the Daily Show, which targets President Bush more often than John Kerry, are even younger, generally liberal, rarely Republican and low users of traditional news.

That National Annenberg Election Survey, the largest academic election poll, is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania (www.AnnenbergPublicPolicyCenter.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 Winneg 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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Questions

A. Please tell me how many days in the past week you did each of the following. How many days in the past week did you (Insert)?

1. Watch the national network news on TV—by national network news, I mean Peter Jennings on ABC, Dan Rather on CBS, Tom Brokaw on NBC
2. Watch cable news, such as CNN, Fox News Channel or MSNBC
3. Read a daily newspaper
4. Watch a late-night talk show like “Late Night” with David Letterman or the “Tonight Show” with Jay Leno or the Daily Show with Jon Stewart

	Never Watch	Cable news	Newspapers	Late-night TV
18-29 years old	1.6	2.2	2.6	1.2
30-44	2.0	2.5	3.0	0.7
45-64	3.1	3.1	4.0	0.8
65 and older	4.2	3.6	5.0	0.8

Preferred late night program:

	No Preference	Leno	Letterman	Stewart
18-29 years old	62	15	12	8
30-44	74	11	11	3
45-64	75	12	10	2
65 and older	76	12	10	1
Men	69	13	11	5
Women	74	12	11	2
High school or less	76	11	10	3
Some college	68	14	12	4
College degree or more	68	13	12	4
Republican	73	13	12	2
Democrat	70	13	12	4
Independent	72	12	11	4
Conservative	75	12	10	2
Moderate	70	14	12	3
Liberal	68	12	12	7
Follow politics hardly at all	81	8	8	3
Now and then	76	11	9	3
Some of the time	71	13	12	3
Most of the time	68	14	13	4

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