

Annenberg Year 2000 Survey No. 1

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Annenberg survey: Americans familiar with some of candidates' issue stands and backgrounds, fuzzy on others

While on certain issues people appreciate the distinctions between candidates, there are a number of areas in which the electorate has more to learn.

Annenberg School for Communication
of the University of Pennsylvania
Annenberg Public Policy Center

About the survey

The Annenberg 2000 Survey will be the largest survey of the American electorate ever conducted. By the end of 2000, over 100,000 interviews will have been conducted on Americans' political knowledge, media use, and opinions about candidates and issues. The survey uses a rolling cross-sectional design, continuously interviewing Americans throughout the campaign season. Reports will be released regularly.

For more information

Please direct questions to Deborah Stinnett at (215) 898-7041. More information on the Annenberg Public Policy Center and its studies can be found at <http://www.appcpenn.org>

About the researchers

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The Annenberg Public Policy Center commissioned a survey that asked a national random sample of 1,667 Americans questions about their knowledge of the presidential candidates. The survey, which has a margin of error of ± 2.4 points, was conducted by Princeton Survey Research from October 25 – November 7.

Factual Knowledge

Respondents were asked a series of multiple-choice questions testing their knowledge of facts relating to prominent policy issues. Results indicate that while knowledge is high on some topics, there are important gaps in voter knowledge. Correct answers are in bold

	Percent answering correctly
Is the minimum wage per hour...(\$4.50, \$5.15 , \$6.35, \$7.10)	71
What federal tax rate do most people pay? (15%, 28% , 32%, 39.6%)	40
How many Americans do not have health insurance? (about 1 in 50, 1 in 20, 1 in 10, more than 1 in 10)	39
Is the US trade deficit in the first half of 1999 higher, lower, or the same as last year? (higher)	34
How many pregnancies end in abortion each year in the US? (fewer than 10%, between 10% and 25% , more than 25%)	32
How many legal immigrants come to the US each year? (fewer than 200K, 400K, 600,000 , more than a million)	20
Over the first eight months of 1999, what was the inflation rate? (1.6%, 2%, 2.6% , 3.2%)	17
How much do tax breaks for ethanol cost? (\$100 million, \$275 million, \$425 million, \$600 million a year)	12

Biographical Knowledge – Democratic Candidates

Familiarity with the candidates' backgrounds is reasonably good on some topics but less so on others.

Now I have a few questions about just the Democratic candidates for president, Bill Bradley and Al Gore. To the best of your knowledge, who...

	Percent answering correctly
was a professional basketball player (Bradley)	41
is the son of a former U.S. Senator (Gore)	30
voted for the Reagan tax cuts in 1981 (Bradley)	21
has been endorsed by the NEA and AFT (Gore)	16
was a U.S. Senator (both)	15
served in the military during the Vietnam War (both)	4

Biographical Knowledge – Republican Candidates

Now I would like to ask you about the Republican candidates. To the best of your knowledge, which of the following is the current job of...

	Percent answering correctly
George W. Bush (Governor)	53
Steve Forbes (businessman)	45
Orrin Hatch (Senator)	29
John McCain (Senator)	24
Gary Bauer (fmr. head of pol. org.)	6
Alan Keyes (talk show host)	4

Policy Positions

While knowledge of Gore and Bradley's policy positions seems fairly low, in many cases the distinctions between the two candidates are subtle. On issues on which the candidates agree, between ten and twenty percent of respondents knew that one candidate holds the position, but did not know that the other does.

Now I have a few questions about just the Democratic candidates for president, Bill Bradley and Al Gore. To the best of your knowledge, who favors...

	Percent answering correctly
the US signing the treaty banning underground testing of nuclear weapons (both)	24
allowing a woman to choose to have an abortion (both)	24
legalizing same-sex marriage (neither)	20
banning guns known as Saturday Night Specials (both)	19
giving tax credits or vouchers to people who send their children to private schools (neither)	18
tax-free savings accounts to pay for a college education (Gore)	15
public financing of Congressional campaigns (Bradley)	7