



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

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News Audiences Differ on Horse Race
DEBATE COVERAGE VIEWED FAVORABLY

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News Audiences Differ on Horse Race **DEBATE COVERAGE VIEWED FAVORABLY**

Amid an increasingly divisive presidential campaign, voters largely agree in their positive assessments of news coverage of the first presidential debate. Solid majorities of certain Bush voters (55%), certain Kerry supporters (62%), and swing voters (60%) rate the coverage of the debate as good or excellent.

Voters also generally think that the coverage has focused more on the personal qualities of the candidates, rather than on their issue positions. Nearly identical majorities of Bush (58%) and Kerry voters (57%) believe the news coverage of the debate paid more attention to the personal qualities of the candidates rather than to their policy plans. However, even those voters who see the debate coverage as emphasizing the candidates' personalities give the media mostly positive ratings for its coverage of the debates.

Where differences emerge is in voter opinions on whether the news coverage treated both candidates equally, or was more favorable to either Bush or Kerry. Nearly half of Bush voters (47%) believe that news coverage of the debate was more favorable to Kerry, compared with 43% who say it treated both candidates equally. By contrast, most Kerry voters (60%) – and about as many swing voters (58%) – think both candidates were treated equally.

The latest Pew Research Center national survey, conducted among 1,002 registered voters in the three nights following the Sept. 30 debate, finds that the choice of news sources continues to be associated with voters' political preferences. Roughly three-in-ten committed Bush voters (29%) cite Fox News as their main source of

Views of Debate Coverage				
		----Vote Preference----		
	All	Certain	Certain	Swing
<i>Watched the debate</i>	<u>RVs</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Kerry</u>	<u>voters</u>
	%	%	%	%
Yes	69	72	70	60
No/DK	<u>31</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>40</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>Rating press coverage</i>				
Excellent/Good	58	55	62	60
Only fair/Poor	32	37	30	27
Don't know	<u>9</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>13</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>News coverage of debate...</i>				
Favorable to Kerry	26	47	6	16
Favorable to Bush	11	2	24	9
Treated both equally	52	43	60	58
Don't know	<u>11</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>17</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>News focused on...</i>				
Personal qualities	56	58	57	52
Issue positions	24	23	26	22
Both/neither	7	7	6	7
Don't know	<u>13</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>19</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>Main source of debate news</i>				
Television	76	79	75	75
Fox News	18	29	10	11
CNN	17	15	21	17
Local news	13	13	13	15
ABC News	13	10	16	16
NBC News	13	13	12	16
CBS News	9	8	9	10
MSNBC	5	5	8	2
CNBC	2	1	2	4
Newspapers	41	39	44	37
Radio	18	22	13	17
Internet	15	16	18	10
Number of cases	1002	440	345	212

debate news. That is three times the number of certain Kerry voters who cite Fox News as their main source of information about the debate. CNN is the top debate news source among Kerry voters (21%), followed by ABC News (16%).

Politicization of Election News Audiences

Pew’s biennial survey of news consumption found increasing politicization in the public’s overall news choices (See “News Audiences Increasingly Politicized,” June 8, 2004). And this is carrying over into major differences in the voting intentions of the election news audience.

In mid-September (Sept. 8-13), a pair of Pew surveys showed President Bush with an overall lead of 50%-42% among all registered voters. But among voters who get most of their election news from cable news outlets, Bush led by 59%-34%, while Kerry held a ten-point advantage among those who get most of their election news from network outlets (52%-42%).

The differences are more dramatic among the audiences for individual news sources. As Pew Research Center surveys have shown, the news audience for Fox News Channel has become increasingly conservative and Republican over the past four years. In the mid-September surveys, voters who said they get most of their election news from Fox supported Bush by more than four-to-one (76% Bush, 18% Kerry, including 61% who *strongly* favor Bush).

By contrast, CNN’s audience preferred Kerry by a margin of 53% to 39%. And solid majorities of voters who rely mostly on CBS News (57%) and ABC News (55%) also favored the Massachusetts Democrat.

Those who get most of their election news from local TV favored Bush (51%-39%), and the president holds a commanding advantage among voters who get most of their election news from radio (59%-33%) and the Internet (58%-36%). Voters who rely mostly on newspapers were almost

<i>Get most election news from...</i>	<u>Bush</u> %	<u>Kerry</u> %	<u>Nader</u> %	<u>Other</u> %	<u>(N)</u>
Total	50	42	1	7=100	(1580)
Cable (NET)	59	34	1	6=100	(653)
Fox News	76	18	*	6=100	(339)
CNN	39	53	1	7=100	(298)
Network (NET)	42	52	1	5=100	(464)
NBC	44	49	0	7=100	(215)
ABC	39	55	1	5=100	(170)
CBS	37	57	2	4=100	(138)
Local TV	51	39	2	8=100	(212)
Newspaper	46	45	1	8=100	(776)
Radio	59	33	2	6=100	(303)
Internet	58	36	2	4=100	(277)

*Based on Registered Voters - Sept. 8-13, 2004. CNBC and MSNBC included in Cable NET, but samples too small for individual analysis.

evenly divided in their presidential preference (46% Bush/45% Kerry).

A good deal of the differences in preferences among news audiences reflect the fact that each news source has a particular demographic appeal (for example, women and African Americans make up a relatively large share of the network evening news audience, while the cable news audience has a higher share of young men). Of all the news sources tested, Fox News viewership is most strongly correlated with presidential vote preference, even when age, ethnicity and gender are taken into account. Voters who get most of their election news from Fox decidedly favor reelecting President Bush.

ABOUT THE SURVEYS

Results for the early **October 2004** political survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 1,233 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period October 1-3, 2004. For results based on registered voters (N=1,002) one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

Results from the **September 2004** political survey are based on telephone interviews among a nationwide sample of 2,003 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period September 8-13, 2004. The error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. For results based on registered voters (N=1,580) the sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
EARLY OCTOBER 2004 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
October 1-3, 2004
General Public N=1233
Registered Voters N =1002

QUESTIONS 1 THROUGH 3 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

ASK ALL REGISTERED VOTERS:

Q.4 Did you happen to watch the presidential debate between John Kerry and George W. Bush (last night/this past Thursday night), or didn't you get a chance to see it? **IF YES, ASK:** How much of the debate did you watch: all of it, some of it, or only a little?

		<i>Gore/Bush</i>
		<u>Early Oct 2000</u>
69	Yes (NET)	63
41	Yes, all	32
22	Yes, some	24
6	Yes, a little	7
31	No, didn't watch	37
<u>*</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>*</u>
100		100

QUESTIONS 5 THROUGH 13 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

Q.14 Thinking about the news coverage about the presidential debate, do you think news organizations have been more favorable to George W. Bush in their coverage of the debate, more favorable to John Kerry, or have they treated both about equally?

11	More favorable to Bush
26	More favorable to Kerry
52	Treated both about equally
<u>11</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	

Q.15 All in all, how would you rate the job the press has done in covering the presidential debate? Excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

13	Excellent
45	Good
25	Only fair
8	Poor
<u>9</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	

Q.16 In reporting about the presidential debate, do you think news organizations paid **[READ AND ROTATE]**?

- 56 More attention to the personal qualities of the candidates
- 24 More attention to the issues and policy plans of the candidates
- 7 **[DO NOT READ] Both/Neither (VOL.)**
- 13 **[DO NOT READ] Don't know/Refused (VOL.)**
- 100

Q.17 How have you been getting most of your news about the presidential debate? From television, from newspapers, from radio, from magazines, or from the Internet? **[ACCEPT TWO ANSWERS: IF ONLY ONE RESPONSE IS GIVEN, PROBE FOR ONE ADDITIONAL RESPONSE]**

- 76 Television
- 41 Newspapers
- 18 Radio
- 2 Magazines
- 15 Internet
- 2 Other (VOL.)
- * Do not follow news about presidential debates (VOL.)
- * Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

IF RESPONDENT ANSWERED '1' TELEVISION AS EITHER 1ST OR 2ND RESPONSE IN Q.17 ASK:

Q.18 Did you get most of your news about the presidential debate from **[READ, RANDOMIZE ITEMS 2 THRU 4 AND 5 THRU 8 SEPARATELY, AND RANDOMIZE SETS OF ITEMS (LOCAL; NETWORK; CABLE). ACCEPT MULTIPLE ANSWERS BUT DO NOT PROBE FOR ADDITIONAL]**

BASED ON ALL REGISTERED VOTERS:

- 13 Local news programming
- 13 ABC Network news
- 9 CBS Network news
- 13 NBC Network news
- 17 CNN Cable news
- 5 MSNBC Cable news
- 18 The Fox News Cable Channel
- 2 CNBC Cable news
- 5 Don't know/Refused (VOL. DO NOT READ)

QUESTIONS 19 THROUGH 26 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE PRESS
 SEPTEMBER 2004 POLITICAL SURVEY
 FINAL TOPLINE
 September 8 - 13, 2004 Total N=2003; RV N=1580**

Q.3 How have you been getting most of your news about the presidential election campaign? From television, from newspapers, from radio, from magazines, or from the Internet? [ACCEPT TWO ANSWERS: IF ONLY ONE RESPONSE IS GIVEN, PROBE FOR ONE ADDITIONAL RESPONSE]

		Early Jan <u>2004</u>	June <u>2000</u>	Feb <u>2000</u>	Jan <u>2000</u>	Sept <u>1996</u>	April <u>1996</u>	Feb <u>1996</u>	Sept <u>1992</u>	Jun <u>1992</u>	May <u>1992</u>	March <u>1992</u>	Feb <u>1992</u>
80	Television	79	65	73	75	75	81	85	83	84	86	83	80
41	Newspapers	39	27	33	31	44	48	56	49	55	51	48	49
18	Radio	15	11	15	12	14	21	21	13	18	17	14	18
3	Magazines	2	2	2	3	5	6	5	5	7	6	4	4
17	Internet	13	5	7	6	2	2	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
3	Other	2	2	2	3	2	3	1	4	4	3	3	3
1	Don't know/Ref.	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	*	1	*	1

IF RESPONDENT ANSWERED '1' TELEVISION AS EITHER 1ST OR 2ND RESPONSE IN Q.3 ASK Q.3a. IF NOT, SKIP TO REGIST.

Q.3a Do you get most of your news about the presidential election campaign from [READ, RANDOMIZE ITEMS 2 THRU 4 AND 5 THRU 8 SEPARATELY, AND RANDOMIZE SETS OF ITEMS (LOCAL; NETWORK; CABLE). ACCEPT MULTIPLE ANSWERS BUT DO NOT PROBE FOR ADDITIONAL]

BASED ON TOTAL:		Early Jan <u>2004</u>
16	Local news programming	17
11	ABC Network news	15
8	CBS Network news	11
13	NBC Network news	14
18	CNN Cable news	22
5	MSNBC Cable news	7
19	The Fox News Cable Channel	20
2	CNBC Cable news	3
5	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	3