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**For The People & The Press**

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**But News Coverage Gets Lukewarm Ratings**  
**VOTERS IMPRESSED WITH CAMPAIGN**

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## **But News Coverage Gets Lukewarm Ratings** **VOTERS IMPRESSED WITH CAMPAIGN**

Voters express increasingly positive opinions of the 2004 presidential campaign. Virtually all voters – 96% – believe the campaign is important, while a growing number also view the campaign as interesting. Fully two-thirds of voters (66%) describe the campaign as interesting, up from 50% in early September and just 35% in June.

Moreover, increasing numbers of voters also perceive the campaign as informative and easy to follow. Nearly three-quarters (73%) say the election has been informative, up from 63% last month. By seven-to-one (84%-12%), voters say the race has been easy to follow, rather than hard to follow.

The generally favorable assessments of the campaign do not extend to the news media's coverage of the race. A narrow majority (54%) rates the coverage as good or excellent, up a bit from the 47% who gave campaign coverage a positive rating in June. But larger numbers of voters than four years ago think that coverage has been unfair to both campaigns. Further, as in recent presidential campaigns, many voters believe that journalists hope the Democratic nominee will win, and that they often let their own political preferences influence the way they cover the news.

### **Campaign Ratings Soar**

<i>Election is...</i>	Early Mid		
	<u>June</u>	<u>Sept</u>	<u>Oct</u>
	%	%	%
Interesting	35	50	66
Dull	56	42	28
Informative	48	63	73
Not informative	47	33	22
Easy to follow	66	75	84
Hard to follow	30	21	12
Important	82	90	96
Unimportant	16	9	3
Too long	53	53	51
Not too long	42	42	43
Too negative	46	62	57
Not too negative	46	32	38

Half of voters (50%) say most newspaper and TV reporters would prefer to see John Kerry win the election, compared with just 22% who think that most journalists are pulling for George Bush. That is comparable to findings at about this stage in previous campaigns; in October 2000, 47% of voters felt that journalists wanted to see Al Gore win. In addition, a majority of voters (58%) continue to think that members of the news media often let their own political preferences influence their reporting.

While most voters rate the press coverage of the Bush and Kerry campaigns as fair, an increasing number view the coverage of both campaigns as unfair. Nearly four-in-ten voters (37%) think news coverage of Bush's campaign has been unfair, compared with 25% in October 2000. Similarly, 27% think coverage of Kerry's campaign is unfair, nearly double the number who said that about news coverage of Gore's campaign four years ago (15%).

The latest Pew Research Center survey of 1,307 registered voters, conducted Oct. 15-19, shows that there also is a pervasive belief that news organizations wield too much influence on the election's outcome. Nearly six-in-ten (62%) say news organizations have too much influence in determining the election's outcome; only about half that number (32%) feel that the media's influence is appropriate.

**Swing Voters Unhappy With Choices**

A solid majority of voters (66%) say they are very or fairly satisfied with their choice of candidates this year, but swing voters are less enthusiastic over the choices. Just 35% of swing voters say they are satisfied with the field of presidential candidates. By contrast, 77% of committed Bush voters, and nearly as many certain Kerry voters (69%), express satisfaction with the candidates.

Similarly, swing voters give both candidates the same middling grades for their persuasive abilities. Roughly four-in-ten swing voters (39%) give Bush a grade of A or B for convincing them to vote for him; about the same number (38%) give Kerry a grade of A or B. Committed Bush and Kerry voters give their own candidates high marks, while giving low marks to the opponent.

For the most part, however, swing voters express the same generally positive opinions of the campaign as voters who have already committed to a candidate. But far more swing voters than committed voters view the campaign as dull. Only about half of swing voters (51%) believe the campaign is interesting while almost as many (42%) think it is dull. By wide margins, certain Bush and Kerry voters find the campaign interesting.

**More See Campaign Coverage as Unfair**

Overall, 37% of voters believe press coverage of Bush has been unfair, up from 25% at about this stage four years ago. Far more Republicans than Democrats say Bush coverage has been unfair, but the perception that the press has not been fair to Bush has increased across the board,

	Oct <u>2000</u>	Oct <u>2004</u>
<i>Coverage of Bush</i>	%	%
Fair	65	56
Unfair	25	37
Don't know	<u>10</u>	<u>7</u>
	100	100
<i>Coverage of Kerry*</i>		
Fair	74	64
Unfair	15	27
Don't know	<u>11</u>	<u>9</u>
	100	100

\* Asked about coverage of Gore in 2000  
Based on registered voters

<i>Opinion of candidates</i>	Certain <u>Bush</u>	Certain <u>Kerry</u>	Swing <u>voter</u>
	%	%	%
Satisfied	77	69	35
Not Satisfied	20	29	60
Don't know	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>
	100	100	100
<i>'A' or 'B' Grade for campaign</i>			
Bush's campaign	81	9	39
Kerry's campaign	12	81	38

Based on registered voters

particularly among independents. Fully 40% of independent voters view coverage of Bush's campaign as unfair, about twice the number who expressed that view in October 2000 (19%).

Somewhat fewer voters (27%) think news organizations have been unfair to Kerry's campaign than say that about Bush. But that is nearly double the number who thought Al Gore's campaign was not treated fairly in October 2000 (15%). As is the case with assessments of coverage of Bush, the perception that the press has not treated the Democratic nominee fairly has grown among Democrats, Republicans and independents.

### *News Audiences Differ Over Coverage*

Opinions of campaign news coverage have long been divided along partisan lines, with Republicans generally expressing a more critical view of the coverage. With the increasing politicization of news audiences – as seen in several recent Pew Research Center surveys – attitudes toward the coverage also differ markedly depending on where voters get their news.

<i>Press is Unfair to...</i>	Oct 2000 %	Oct 2004 %
<i>Bush campaign</i>		
All RVs	25	37
Republican	43	52
Democrat	14	23
Independent	19	40
<i>Kerry campaign*</i>		
All RVs	15	27
Republican	20	30
Democrat	14	26
Independent	12	27

\*Asked about Gore campaign in October 2000.

While a narrow majority of all voters (54%) have a positive view of campaign coverage, voters who get most of their election news from the Fox News Channel are more critical of the coverage than are voters who rely on other sources for news about the election. Fewer than half of voters who get most of their election news from Fox (46%) rate the overall media coverage as good or excellent; that compares with 64% of voters who go to CNN for election news and comparable proportions of those who rely on network news (63%), newspapers (61%) or local TV (58%).

In addition, about seven-in-ten voters who get most of their election news from Fox (72%) say news organizations have too much influence over which candidate becomes

	Fox News %	CNN %	Network News* %	Local TV %	News-Paper %
<i>Media coverage of campaign</i>					
Excellent	12	22	18	16	19
Good	34	42	45	42	42
Only fair	26	24	24	30	25
Poor	26	11	10	8	13
Don't know	2	1	2	4	1
	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Media influence on outcome</i>					
Too much	72	57	54	53	58
Too little	4	3	4	3	3
About right	23	38	39	43	35
Don't know	1	2	3	1	4
	100	100	100	100	100
Number of cases	(230)	(149)	(325)	(168)	(305)

Based on registered voters.  
\* List ABC, CBS or NBC network news as main source.

president. Smaller majorities of voters who turn to other sources for election news believe that news organizations have too much influence over the election outcome.

***Different Sources, Different Choices***

Earlier this month, Pew found that the voting intentions of the election news audience were deeply divided according to where voters got their news. The current survey shows that gap remains substantial, with a large majority of the Fox News audience supporting President Bush and a comparable share of the CNN audience favoring Sen. Kerry.

Seven-in-ten voters who get most of their election news from Fox News support Bush, while just 21% back Kerry. By contrast, voters who get most of their election news from CNN favor Kerry over Bush, by 67%-26%.

Other news audiences are more closely divided. Kerry has a modest advantage among voters who mostly rely on network news and newspapers. Voters who get most of their election news from local TV are split, with 46% supporting Kerry and 42% Bush.

<b>Cable's Political Divide</b>						
--- Main Source of Election News---						
	All <u>RVs</u>	Fox <u>News</u>	Network <u>CNN</u>	Local <u>News*</u>	TV <u>TV</u>	News- <u>Paper</u>
<i>Vote preference</i>	%	%	%	%	%	%
Bush	45	70	26	40	42	40
Kerry	45	21	67	51	46	50
Nader	1	1	*	1	1	1
Other/DK	<u>9</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>9</u>
	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of cases	(1,307)	(230)	(149)	(325)	(168)	(305)

\* List ABC, CBS or NBC network news as main source.

**ABOUT THE SURVEY**

Results for the Mid-October 2004 political survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 1,568 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period October 15-19, 2004. For results based on registered voters (N=1,307) the sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. If based on Form 1 or Form 2 registered voters only (Form 1 N=633 or Form 2 N=674), the sampling error is plus or minus 4.5 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 AND THE PRESS  
MID-OCTOBER 2004 POLITICAL SURVEY  
FINAL TOPLINE  
October 15-19, 2004  
General Public N=1568  
Registered Voter N=1307**

**NOTE: ALL NUMBERS IN SURVEY, INCLUDING TREND FIGURES, ARE BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS EXCEPT WHERE NOTED**

**ASK ALL GENERAL PUBLIC:**

Q.1 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]**

**BASED ON GENERAL PUBLIC: [N=1568]:**

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

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

**Q.1a. IF NOT, SKIP TO REGIST.**

Q.1a 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 GENERAL PUBLIC [N=1568]:**

		Early Sept 2004	Early Jan 2004
16	Local news programming	16	17
9	ABC Network news	11	15
7	CBS Network news	8	11
10	NBC Network news	13	14
11	CNN Cable news	18	22
2	MSNBC Cable news	5	7
15	The Fox News Cable Channel	19	20
2	CNBC Cable news	2	3
4	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	5	3

**QUESTIONS 2 THROUGH 11 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

**ASK FORM 1 REGISTERED VOTERS ONLY [N=633]:**

Q.12F1 What's your opinion of the presidential candidates this year? Would you say that you are very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not too satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the choices?

		June <u>2004</u>	June <u>2000</u>	March <u>2000</u>	July <u>1999</u>	Late Oct <u>1996</u>	Late Sept <u>1996</u>	June <u>1996</u>	Oct <u>1992</u>	Aug <u>1992</u>	June <u>1992</u>
23	Very satisfied	17	14	13	13	11	11	10	10	11	6
43	Fairly satisfied	48	50	47	40	48	50	37	41	42	29
22	Not too satisfied	19	22	27	25	27	26	31	33	31	36
9	Not at all satisfied	12	11	11	12	11	10	18	14	15	27
<u>3</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

**QUESTIONS 13 THROUGH 16 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

**ASK FORM 1 REGISTERED VOTERS ONLY [N=633]:**

**ROTATE ORDER OF Q.17 AND Q.18**

Q.17F1 What grade would you give John Kerry as to how good a job he is doing in convincing you to vote for him? Would you grade his election campaign: A, B, C, D, or F?

		June <u>2004</u>	<i>Gore</i> June 2000	<i>Clinton</i>		
				Sept 1996	July 1996	Sept 1992
15	A	6	9	18	9	21
31	B	25	26	32	28	37
21	C	30	31	23	30	24
12	D	16	13	8	12	7
18	F	18	16	16	18	7
<u>3</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100

Q.18F1 What grade would you give George W. Bush as to how good a job he is doing in convincing you to vote for him? Would you grade his election campaign: A, B, C, D, or F?

		June <u>2004</u>	<i>Bush</i> June 2000	<i>Dole</i>		<i>Bush, Sr.</i>
				Sept 1996	July 1996	Sept 1992
16	A	13	10	8	3	14
26	B	26	30	21	19	24
22	C	23	29	30	36	27
12	D	12	13	18	19	15
20	F	23	13	19	20	16
<u>2</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100

**NO QUESTIONS 19 THROUGH 22**

**ASK FORM 2 REGISTERED VOTERS ONLY [N=674]:**

Q.23F2 How would you describe the presidential election campaign so far – is it interesting to you, or would you say it is dull?

		Early Sept <u>2004</u>	June <u>2004</u>	June <u>2000</u>	July <u>1996</u>
66	Interesting	50	35	31	21
28	Dull	42	56	63	73
5	Neither (VOL.)	6	4	4	3
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>2</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
100		100	100	100	100

Q.24F2 And thus far, is the presidential election .... **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

		Early Sept <u>2004</u>	June <u>2004</u>	Mid-March <u>2004</u>
a.F2	96	90	82	83
	3	9	16	16
	1	*	1	*
	<u>*</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100	100	100
b.F2	73	63	48	54
	22	33	47	42
	3	1	2	2
	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100	100	100
c.F2	51	53	53	53
	43	42	42	43
	3	2	2	1
	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>
	100	100	100	100
d.F2	57	62	46	49
	38	32	46	46
	3	1	2	1
	<u>2</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>
	100	100	100	100
e.F2	12	21	30	25
	84	75	66	72
	3	2	2	1
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100	100	100



**ASK ALL REGISTERED VOTERS:**

Q.25 All in all, how would you rate the job the press has done in covering the presidential campaign so far — excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

		Early				Early							
		June	Feb	June	Mar	Feb	Sept	July	Feb	Sept	May	Mar	Feb
		<u>2004</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1992</u>
15	Excellent	9	10	8	9	14	12	7	17	11	10	13	12
39	Good	38	44	41	46	48	44	34	44	44	45	51	44
28	Only fair	34	31	38	33	26	30	40	26	29	32	28	33
16	Poor	17	13	10	10	8	12	17	11	12	11	6	7
<u>2</u>	Don't know/Ref.	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Q.26 How much influence do you think news organizations have on which candidate becomes the president: too much, too little or about the right amount?

		(GP)											
		Feb	Sept	Oct	Sept	Sept	Feb	Jan	Oct	Aug	May	Jan	
		<u>2004<sup>1</sup></u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1988</u>	
62	Too much	65	68	67	64	54	59	53	58	54	49	52	
4	Too little	4	4	4	4	4	6	4	3	1	4	4	
32	About the right amount	27	26	25	30	37	32	40	36	41	41	36	
<u>2</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>	
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	

**ASK FORM 1 REGISTERED VOTERS ONLY [N=633]:**

**ROTATE Q.27 AND Q.28**

Q.27F1 Would you say the press has been fair or unfair in the way it has covered George W. Bush's election campaign?

		<i>Dole</i>		<i>Bush, Sr.</i>
		Early Oct	Early Sept	Sept
		<u>2000</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1992</u>
56	Fair	65	65	71
37	Unfair	25	25	22
<u>7</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>7</u>
100		100	100	100

<sup>1</sup> In February 2004, September 1999, February and January 1992, May and January 1988, the question asked about: "presidential nominees."

Q.28F1 Would you say the press has been fair or unfair in the way it has covered John Kerry's election campaign?

		<i>Gore</i>	<i>---- Clinton ----</i>	
		Early Oct	Early Sept	Sept
		<u>2000</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1992</u>
64	Fair	74	67	74
27	Unfair	15	24	21
<u>9</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>11</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>5</u>
100		100	100	100

**ASK FORM 2 REGISTERED VOTERS ONLY [N=674]:**

Q.29F2 Who do you think most newspaper reporters and TV journalists want to see win the presidential election — John Kerry or George W. Bush?

		Early Oct	Early Sept	Sept
		<u>2000</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1992</u>
50	Kerry	47 <i>Gore</i>	59 <i>Clinton</i>	52 <i>Clinton</i>
22	Bush	23 <i>Bush</i>	17 <i>Dole</i>	17 <i>Bush</i>
n/a	Other	n/a	1 <i>Perot</i>	-- <i>Perot</i>
6	Neither (VOL.)	6	2	5
<u>22</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>24</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>26</u>
100		100	100	100

Q.30F2 How often do you think members of the news media let their own political preferences influence the way they report the news... often, sometimes, seldom or never?

		Early Oct	Sept
		<u>2000</u>	<u>1992</u>
58	Often	57	49
32	Sometimes	32	35
7	Seldom	8	12
1	Never	1	2
<u>2</u>	Can't say/Don't know/Refused	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>
100		100	100

**QUESTIONS 31 THROUGH 45 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**