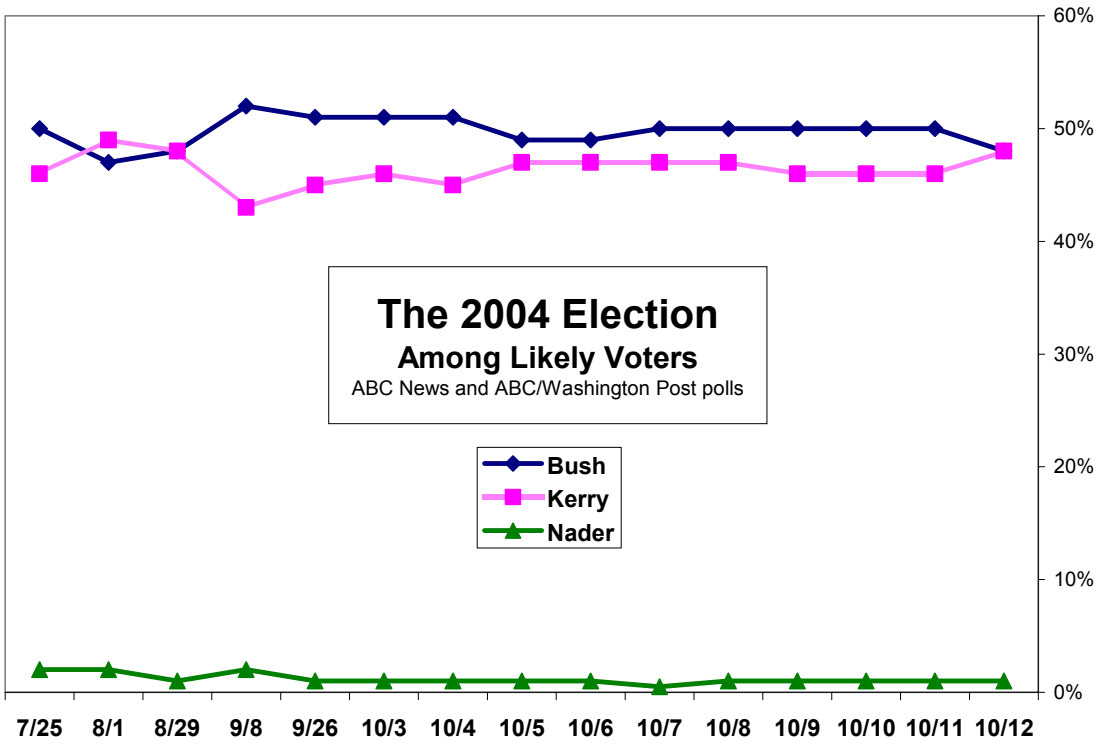
**ABC NEWS POLL: CAMPAIGN TRACKING #9 – 10/12/04**
**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE AFTER 5 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2004**

# Dead Heat in Presidential Race on Eve of the Final Debate

The presidential contest narrowed to an absolute dead heat in the latest ABC News tracking poll, further raising the stakes for the third and final debate tonight in Arizona.

Heading into the candidates' final face-off, 48 percent of likely voters support George W. Bush, 48 percent John Kerry and one percent Ralph Nader. The race has been close since tracking began after the first presidential debate Sept. 30 – but hasn't been dead even since before the Republican convention.




Interest in the election – and the debates – remains extraordinarily high. Sixty percent of likely voters are following the race "very closely," compared with 40 percent at about this point in 2000. Eight in 10 say they plan to watch tonight's debate.

This poll is based on interviews Sunday through Tuesday night; results Tuesday were Kerry's best in any single night since ABC News tracking began Oct. 1.

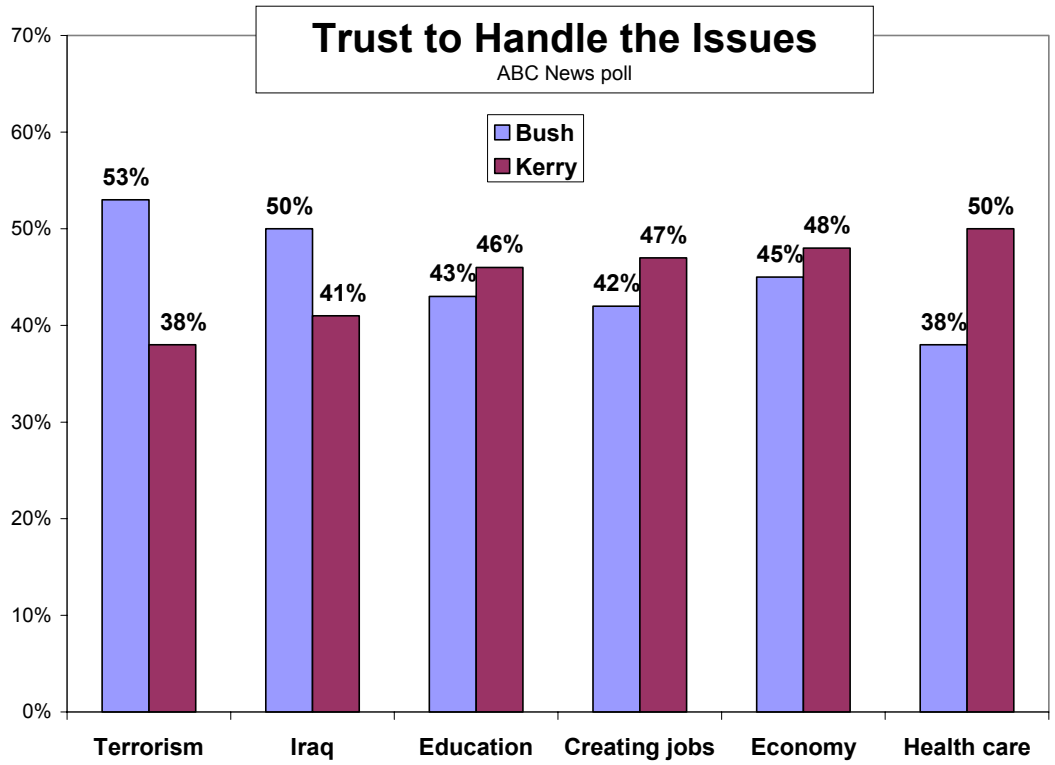
ISSUES and MOVEABLES – Kerry is more competitive with Bush on domestic issues, the sole focus of tonight's debate – and especially on health care, a particular focus of "moveable" voters, the 15 percent who haven't definitely made up their minds.

Among likely voters, Kerry leads Bush by 50-38 percent in trust to handle health care, up from an even split in early September. Among moveables, Kerry's lead on health care is wider still, 59-17 percent, with the rest undecided or distrustful of both.

Another result suggests why Kerry may try to turn tonight's conversation to health care: While one in 10 likely voters call health care the top issue in their vote, that jumps to two in 10 moveable voters.

On other domestic issues, likely voters trust Kerry over Bush to create jobs by a narrower 47-42 percent, and they're essentially even in trust to handle the economy (48-45 percent) and education (46-43 percent). Those are gains for Kerry; in polls last month, Bush led in trust to handle the economy and education alike.

Bush, meanwhile, maintains his customarily big lead in trust to handle terrorism, 53-38 percent, as well as a nine-point lead in trust to handle Iraq. To the extent that the election is about the nation's response to terrorism, Bush benefits.




| Trust to handle: | Bush-Kerry | Gap | Pre-debates |
|---|---|---|---|
| Terrorism | 53-38% | Bush +15 | Bush +15 (9/26) |
| Iraq | 50-41 | Bush +9 | Bush +12 (9/26) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Health care | 38-50 | Kerry +12 | Bush +1 (9/8) |
| Creating jobs | 42-47 | Kerry +5 | Kerry +1 (9/26) |
| | | | |
| Education | 43-46 | Kerry +3 | Bush +7 (9/8) |
| Economy | 45-48 | Kerry +3 | Bush +6 (9/26) |

IMPORTANCE – The candidates will talk tonight to their base supporters as well as to moveable voters. About three in 10 Democrats and independents pick the economy as their top issue; only 13 percent of Republicans do.

Women are somewhat less likely than men to choose terrorism, and somewhat more likely to choose health care, as the top issue in their vote. For moveables, the economy is far and away the No. 1 issue, with health care and Iraq tied for second.

| | No. 1 Issue in Presidential Vote (among likely voters) | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | Men | Women | Dem | Rep | Ind | Moveable | Definite |
| Economy | 24% | 25 | 23 | 31 | 13 | 30 | 33 | 23 |
| Iraq | 24 | 22 | 26 | 31 | 18 | 23 | 20 | 24 |
| Terrorism | 22 | 26 | 18 | 6 | 39 | 22 | 15 | 23 |
| Health care | 11 | 8 | 14 | 17 | 8 | 8 | 20 | 10 |
| Education | 4 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Other | 13 | 16 | 11 | 8 | 18 | 13 | 7 | 14 |

The top three issues – the economy, Iraq and terrorism – have run about even for the past week. But issue priorities can be influenced to some extent by the candidates' focus; after the first presidential debate, there was a six-point rise in the number of likely voters who cited Iraq as their No. 1 issue. A shift to domestic issues after tonight's debate, if it were to occur, could accrue to Kerry's benefit.

The question remains open, though, as to what the election will most fundamentally be about. Until the second presidential debate last week, the dialogue had been largely focused on Iraq and terrorism and related issues of leadership – issues and attributes that have been reliable Bush strongholds. It remains to be seen to what extent domestic issues will share the spotlight with terror and Iraq, and how perceptions of the candidates' leadership, clarity and trustworthiness will play out.

In a close race, secondary issues also can play a role. In terms of its importance to voters, stem-cell research is unlikely to even approach issues such as terrorism, Iraq or the economy. But Kerry has held an 18-point lead over Bush in trust to handle stem-cell research, and as he looks for any advantage, that is one.

HORSE RACE – The race has shifted within several important groups since the ABC News tracking poll began. Moveables split evenly then; now, they divide 47-39 percent between Kerry and Bush, with four percent for Nader and 10 percent undecided.

Kerry has gained ground among women; they split by 48-49 percent, Kerry-Bush, at the start of the month, but now favor Kerry by 12 points, 54-42 percent; most of that

movement has been among married women. (Bush's support among men has remained stable over the same period.)

The partisan makeup in this poll is about even between Democrats and Republicans, 37-36 percent, with 24 percent independents. Kerry had been a bit weaker in his base, but he and Bush now take equally from the other's side – Bush is winning support from 11 percent of Democrats, Kerry from 11 percent of Republicans.

Independents, key swing voters, divide about evenly, 47 percent for Kerry, 46 percent for Bush. White Catholics, another key swing group, split 47-50 percent, Bush-Kerry. Past elections are not predictive, but since 1980, the candidate who's won independents and white Catholics has been elected president.

METHODOLOGY – This poll was conducted by telephone Oct. 10-12, 2004 among a random national sample of 1,806 adults, including 1,560 registered voters and 1,203 likely voters. The results have a three-point error margin for the likely voter sample. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, PA.

Analysis by Cheryl Arnedt.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html.

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934, or Lisa Finkel, (212) 456-6190.

Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

3. (and 3a) If the 2004 presidential election were being held today, would you vote for (George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, the Republicans), (John Kerry and John Edwards, the Democrats), or Ralph Nader and Peter Camejo, the independents? Which candidate are you leaning toward?

Net Leaned Vote, Likely Voters:

| | Bush | Kerry | Nader | Other (vol.) | Neither (vol.) | Would not vote | No op. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10/12/04 | 48 | 48 | 1 | * | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 10/11/04 | 50 | 46 | 1 | * | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 10/10/04 | 50 | 46 | 1 | * | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 10/9/04 | 50 | 46 | 1 | * | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 10/8/04 | 50 | 47 | 1 | * | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 10/7/04 | 50 | 47 | * | * | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 10/6/04 | 49 | 47 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 10/5/04 | 49 | 47 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 10/4/04 | 51 | 45 | 1 | * | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 10/3/04 | 51 | 46 | 1 | * | 1 | * | 1 |
| 9/26/04 | 51 | 45 | 1 | * | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 9/8/04 | 52 | 43 | 2 | * | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 8/29/04 | 48 | 48 | 1 | * | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 8/1/04 | 47 | 49 | 2 | * | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 7/25/04 | 50 | 46 | 2 | * | 1 | * | 1 |

Net Leaned Vote, Registered Voters:

| | Bush | Kerry | Nader | Other (vol.) | Neither (vol.) | Would not vote | No op. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10/12/04 | 47 | 47 | 2 | * | 2 | * | 2 |
| 10/11/04 | 48 | 46 | 2 | * | 1 | * | 2 |
| 10/10/04 | 48 | 46 | 1 | * | 1 | * | 3 |
| 10/9/04 | 48 | 47 | 1 | * | 2 | * | 3 |
| 10/8/04 | 48 | 46 | 1 | * | 2 | * | 3 |
| 10/7/04 | 48 | 47 | 1 | * | 2 | * | 2 |
| 10/6/04 | 49 | 46 | 1 | 1 | 2 | * | 2 |
| 10/5/04 | 50 | 45 | 2 | * | 1 | * | 2 |
| 10/4/04 | 52 | 43 | 2 | * | 1 | * | 2 |
| 10/3/04 | 50 | 45 | 2 | * | 1 | * | 2 |
| 9/26/04 | 51 | 44 | 2 | 1 | 1 | * | 2 |
| 9/8/04 | 50 | 44 | 2 | * | 2 | * | 2 |
| 8/29/04 | 48 | 47 | 2 | * | 1 | * | 2 |
| 8/1/04 | 44 | 50 | 2 | * | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 7/25/04 | 48 | 46 | 3 | * | 1 | * | 1 |
| 7/11/04 | 46 | 46 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 6/20/04 | 44 | 48 | 6 | * | 1 | * | 1 |
| 5/23/04 | 46 | 46 | 4 | * | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 4/18/04 | 48 | 43 | 6 | * | 2 | 1 | * |
| 3/7/04 | 44 | 48 | 3 | * | 1 | 2 | 2 |

4. (IF NAMED CANDIDATE) Will you definitely vote for (CANDIDATE), or is there a chance you could change your mind and vote for someone else? (IF CHANCE CHANGE MIND) Is there a good chance you'll change your mind, or would you say it's pretty unlikely?

| | Definitely vote | ---Chance change mind---- NET | Good | Unlikely | No opin. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Likely voters: | | | | | |
| 10/12/04 All | 86 | 13 | 5 | 7 | 1 |
| Bush | 88 | 11 | 5 | 6 | 1 |
| Kerry | 86 | 13 | 5 | 8 | 1 |

Call for full trend.

5. What (was/will be) the single most important issue in your vote for president this year: (The U.S. campaign against terrorism), (the war in Iraq), (the economy and jobs), (education), (health care), or something else?

| | Terrorism | Iraq | Economy/ jobs | Educ- ation | Health care | Other | No op. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10/12/04 LV | 22 | 24 | 24 | 4 | 11 | 13 | 2 |
| 10/11/04 LV | 23 | 23 | 24 | 4 | 12 | 13 | 2 |
| 10/10/04 LV | 23 | 24 | 24 | 3 | 12 | 12 | 2 |
| 10/7/04 LV | 23 | 23 | 23 | 4 | 10 | 15 | 2 |
| 10/3/04 LV | 24 | 26 | 21 | 4 | 12 | 12 | 2 |
| 9/26/04 LV | 24 | 20 | 27 | 5 | 11 | 10 | 3 |
| RV | 21 | 19 | 28 | 6 | 13 | 10 | 3 |
| 9/8/04 RV | 25 | 18 | 27 | 6 | 13 | 8 | 2 |
| 8/29/04 RV | 19 | 19 | 31 | 6 | 12 | 11 | 2 |
| 8/1/04 RV | 20 | 23 | 25 | 7 | 11 | 12 | 2 |
| 7/25/04 RV | 20 | 21 | 27 | 7 | 12 | 12 | 1 |

6. Who do you trust to do a better job handling (ITEM), (Bush) or (Kerry)?

10/12/04 - Summary Table - Likely Voters

| | Bush | Kerry | Both (vol.) | Neither (vol.) | No op. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. The situation in Iraq | 50 | 41 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| b. The US campaign against terrorism | 53 | 38 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| f. The economy | 45 | 48 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| g. Education | 43 | 46 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| h. Health care | 38 | 50 | 1 | 6 | 5 |
| i. Creating jobs | 42 | 47 | 1 | 6 | 4 |

Trend:

a. The situation in Iraq

| | Bush | Kerry | Both (vol.) | Neither (vol.) | No opin. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10/12/04 LV | 50 | 41 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 10/11/04 LV | 52 | 40 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 10/10/04 LV | 54 | 39 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 10/7/04 LV | 53 | 43 | * | 2 | 2 |
| 10/3/04 LV | 52 | 41 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 9/26/04 LV | 53 | 41 | * | 3 | 4 |
| RV | 53 | 40 | * | 3 | 4 |
| 9/8/04 RV | 53 | 37 | 1 | 4 | 6 |
| 8/29/04 RV | 52 | 44 | * | 2 | 2 |
| 8/1/04 RV | 46 | 48 | * | 2 | 4 |
| 7/25/04 RV | 52 | 40 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 7/11/04 RV | 47 | 47 | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| All | 47 | 47 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| 6/20/04 RV | 49 | 47 | * | 3 | 1 |
| All | 50 | 45 | * | 4 | 1 |
| 5/23/04 | 48 | 42 | * | 6 | 3 |
| 4/18/04 | 52 | 41 | * | 4 | 2 |
| 3/7/04 | 47 | 48 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| 2/11/04 | 48 | 41 | 1 | 6 | 5 |

b. The U.S. campaign against terrorism

| | Bush | Kerry | Both (vol.) | Neither (vol.) | No opin. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10/12/04 LV | 53 | 38 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 10/11/04 LV | 55 | 37 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 10/10/04 LV | 56 | 37 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 10/7/04 LV | 55 | 40 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 10/3/04 LV | 54 | 38 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| 9/26/04 LV | 53 | 38 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| RV | 54 | 37 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| 9/8/04 RV | 57 | 35 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 8/29/04 RV | 56 | 38 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8/1/04 RV | 48 | 45 | * | 1 | 5 |
| 7/25/04 RV | 55 | 37 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| 7/11/04 RV | 51 | 43 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| All | 51 | 42 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 6/20/04 RV | 48 | 47 | * | 3 | 2 |
| All | 47 | 48 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| 5/23/04 | 52 | 39 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| 4/18/04 | 58 | 37 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| 3/7/04 | 57 | 36 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| 2/11/04 | 53 | 37 | 1 | 4 | 5 |

f. The economy

| | Bush | Kerry | Both (vol.) | Neither (vol.) | No opin. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10/12/04 LV | 45 | 48 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| 10/11/04 LV | 47 | 46 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 10/10/04 LV | 47 | 45 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 10/7/04 LV | 47 | 48 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9/26/04 RV | 48 | 43 | * | 4 | 5 |
| 9/8/04 RV | 47 | 43 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| 8/29/04 RV | 48 | 47 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| 8/1/04 RV | 41 | 52 | * | 3 | 4 |
| 7/25/04 RV | 47 | 46 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 7/11/04 RV | 44 | 50 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| 7/11/04 | 43 | 51 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 6/20/04 RV | 45 | 50 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| 6/20/04 | 45 | 50 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| 5/23/04 | 43 | 48 | * | 5 | 3 |
| 4/18/04 | 47 | 47 | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| 3/7/04 | 41 | 53 | * | 4 | 2 |
| 2/11/04 | 41 | 49 | 1 | 4 | 5 |

g. Education

| | Bush | Kerry | Both (vol.) | Neither (vol.) | No opin. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10/12/04 LV | 43 | 46 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| 10/11/04 LV | 45 | 44 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| 10/10/04 LV | 47 | 43 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| 10/7/04 LV | 48 | 46 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9/8/04 RV | 46 | 42 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| 8/29/04 RV | 47 | 47 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8/1/04 RV | 39 | 52 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| 7/25/04 RV | 44 | 45 | 1 | 4 | 6 |
| 7/11/04 RV | 40 | 50 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| 7/11/04 | 40 | 50 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| 6/20/04 RV | 43 | 52 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| 6/20/04 | 42 | 52 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| 4/18/04 | 47 | 44 | 1 | 6 | 2 |
| 3/7/04 | 40 | 52 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 2/11/04 | 40 | 49 | 1 | 6 | 5 |

h. Health care

| | Bush | Kerry | Both (vol.) | Neither (vol.) | No opin. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10/12/04 LV | 38 | 50 | 1 | 6 | 5 |
| 10/11/04 LV | 40 | 48 | 2 | 5 | 5 |
| 10/10/04 LV | 41 | 48 | 1 | 5 | 5 |
| 10/7/04 LV | 44 | 49 | * | 3 | 3 |
| 9/8/04 RV | 42 | 45 | 1 | 5 | 8 |
| 8/29/04 RV | 43 | 50 | * | 3 | 4 |
| 8/1/04 RV | 36 | 55 | * | 3 | 5 |
| 7/25/04 RV | 44 | 47 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| 6/20/04 RV | 38 | 56 | * | 3 | 2 |
| 6/20/04 | 37 | 58 | * | 4 | 2 |

Compare to: The cost, availability, and coverage of health insurance

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4/18/04 | 42 | 48 | 1 | 6 | 3 |
| 3/7/04 | 36 | 56 | 0 | 5 | 2 |
| 2/11/04 | 34 | 52 | 1 | 7 | 6 |

i. Creating jobs

| | Bush | Kerry | Both (vol.) | Neither (vol.) | No opin. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10/12/04 LV | 42 | 47 | 1 | 6 | 4 |
| 10/11/04 LV | 44 | 46 | 1 | 5 | 4 |
| 10/10/04 LV | 45 | 46 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| 10/7/04 LV | 44 | 49 | * | 3 | 4 |
| 9/26/04 RV | 44 | 46 | 1 | 5 | 5 |
| 9/8/04 RV | 43 | 45 | 1 | 6 | 6 |
| 4/18/04 | 46 | 48 | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| 3/7/04 | 43 | 51 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| 2/11/04 | 37 | 51 | 1 | 5 | 6 |

***END***