

The Star-Ledger / **Eagleton-Rutgers Poll**

August 10, 2004
(Release 147-2)

CONTACT: PATRICK MURRAY
(732) 932-9384 ext. 243

A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo appears in the Tuesday, August 10, 2004 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll.*"

KERRY BESTS BUSH ON ALL FRONTS

Democrat seen as "Uniter;" President a "Divider"

With memories of the 2000 Florida ballot count still vivid for many, New Jersey voters tend to see President George W. Bush as someone who has divided the country during his term in office. In contrast, most feel challenger John Kerry would be more of a "uniter" were he elected. And while the war in Iraq and concerns about terrorism continue to be dominant issues, the policy advantage does not necessarily go to the Republican.

These are some of the findings of the latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* which was conducted with 624 registered voters interviewed by telephone between July 30 and August 4, immediately after the Democratic party's nominating convention. The poll has a sampling error of ± 4 percentage points.

The 2004 presidential race is generating an unprecedented amount of interest. Four-in-five Garden State voters (79%) report having a lot of interest in the upcoming presidential election. The current level is between 15 and 31 percentage points higher at this stage of the campaign than in any election since 1980, when the poll started asking this question.

When Bill Clinton ran for re-election in 1996, partisans – 68 percent of Republicans and 65 percent of Democrats – were more interested than independents (53%) in the campaign. In the 2000 race between George W. Bush and Al Gore, New Jersey's Republicans (73%) were more interested than either Democrats (57%) or independents (57%) in the outcome of the race. Today, interest is high among Democrats (83%), Republicans (81%) and independents (76%) alike.

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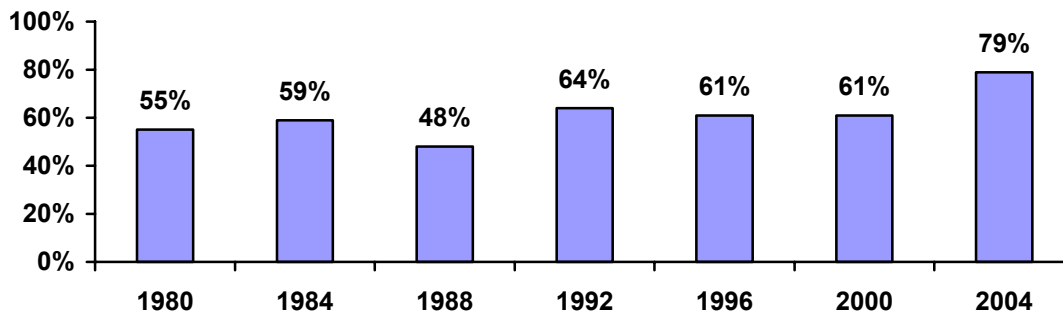
185 Ryders Lane, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901

Acting Director: Patrick Murray x243

Graduate Research Assistant: Allison Kopicki

Phone: 732-932-9384 - Website: <http://slerp.rutgers.edu> - Fax: 732-932-1551

Voters Having "A Lot" of Interest (August/September)



Candidate Dynamics

Currently, 6-in-10 voters (59%) who have already declared a choice for either Kerry or Bush say that they are casting their vote “for” their candidate, while 36 percent say their vote is “against” the other party’s nominee. This dynamic is similar to when Bill Clinton was running for re-election in 1996, with one important difference. Eight years ago, 33 percent of Clinton voters said that their decision was more a vote against challenger Bob Dole, while 47 percent of Dole voters said the same about Clinton. In the current race, a similar 49 percent of Kerry supporters say they are voting against the incumbent, but only 15 percent of the president’s base say they are voting to keep the Massachusetts senator out of the White House.

“Given the fact that the Democrat is enjoying a 20 point lead in New Jersey and Bush’s favorability ratings are not particularly high, it would appear that John Kerry is not the pariah that Republicans would like to portray him as,” observed Patrick Murray, acting director of the poll.

During the 2000 race, George W. Bush campaigned under the slogan that he was a “uniter, not a divider.” Nearly four years after that election, New Jersey voters disagree with the president’s self-assessment. By a more than 2-to-1 margin, they feel that the president has divided (63%) rather than united (23%) the country. By the same token, a majority in the Garden State believe that a Kerry administration would serve to unite (57%) rather than divide (25%) the nation.

A sizable number of Republican voters – 32 percent – feel that the actions of their party’s leader have divided the country over the past few years. In contrast, only 5 percent of Democrats believe their own nominee would do the same.

The Rutgers University-based poll also asked voters to assess how the 2000 election will effect their decision whether to vote in this year’s contest. While most – 69 percent – say the controversy over the Supreme Court’s decision to end the Florida recount has no bearing on their intention to turn out on November 2, a sizable minority of 1-in-3 voters report that that the 2000 election will have an impact on their decision to vote this year. Among those for whom the last presidential election is a factor, almost all – 29 percent of registered voters – say that they are more likely to vote in the current race. Only 2 percent of registered voters say they are less likely to vote this year because of what happened in 2000.

“To have one out of three voters reporting that a process issue from the last election will have an effect on their vote this time around is worth noting. The controversy over the 2000 election result could have either fed cynicism about the process or spurred people to get involved. Among those for whom this matters, the impact is clearly the latter,” Murray commented.

Issue Advantage: Kerry

Concerns about war and terrorism continue to dominate this campaign, but domestic issues are growing in importance to voters in New Jersey. Nearly 1-in-3 voters name the Iraqi conflict (21%) or the war on terror (11%) as the single most important issue in their vote. Another 1-in-4 identify a domestic issue such as the economy and jobs (12%), health care (4%), taxes (2%) and other concerns (9%). In the past few months, the Iraq war and has decreased in importance – from 27 percent in May to 21 percent today – while domestic issues have increased – from 19 percent to 27 percent.

Senator Kerry is seen as better able than President Bush to handle those domestic policy issues which are generally favorable to Democrats. These include health care (60%-25%), social security (54%-27%), education (55%-29%) and job creation (54%-30%). In the wake of the Democratic convention, Kerry has also been able to establish his credentials with New Jersey voters on issues which generally fall in the Republican domain. These include taxes (48%-38%) and terrorism and national security (45%-41%),

although the latter advantage is within the poll's margin of error. The challenger is also thought to be able to do better than the incumbent handling the war in Iraq (50%-38%).

Who Would Do A Better Job?			
<u>ISSUE</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Kerry</u>	<u>Kerry Advantage</u>
Health Care	25%	60%	+35
Social Security	27%	54%	+27
Education	29%	55%	+26
Creating Jobs	30%	54%	+24
War in Iraq	38%	50%	+12
Taxes	38%	48%	+10
Terrorism/Security	41%	45%	+4

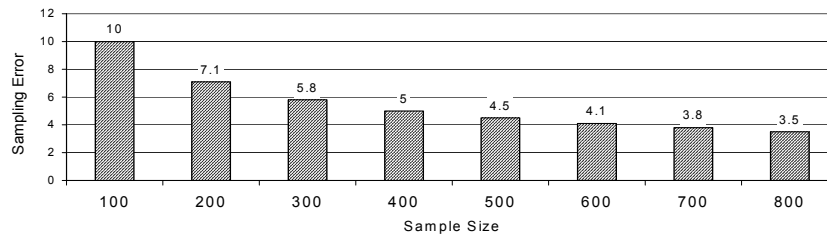
A national poll conducted at the same time by ABC News shows Kerry with a double digit advantage over Bush on health care (55-36%), education (52-39%) and the economy (52-41%). It also has the two candidates basically even on Iraq (48-46% Kerry advantage) and terrorism (48-45% Bush advantage). Among those in New Jersey who are still undecided about their vote, Kerry leads Bush on all the domestic issues. However, these yet-to-decide voters feel the current president would do a better job fighting terrorism (35%-24%) and are split on who would better handle the war in Iraq (30%-30%).

“The Democratic convention played heavily on Kerry’s Vietnam service record and this message seems to have rubbed off on many New Jersey voters,” remarked Murray. “The ‘band of brothers’ imagery helped many voters here feel more comfortable about the senator as commander-in-chief.”

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP147-2) AUGUST 10, 2004

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll was conducted from July 30 to August 4 with a scientifically selected random sample of 800 New Jersey adult residents interviewed by telephone. This sampling yielded a total of 624 respondents who reported being registered to vote. The figures in this release are based on this sample size. All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for registered voters is ± 4 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey registered voters were found to have a favorable opinion of a presidential candidate, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46 and 54 percent (50 ± 4) had all New Jersey registered voters been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported for Republicans, Independents or Democrats, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error.

Sample Size and Sampling Error



Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. The verbatim wording of all questions asked is reproduced in this background memo. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

“As you know, there will be an election for president this fall. How much interest do you have in the coming presidential election – a lot, some, a little, or none at all” [W1]

	<u>A Lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>A Little/ None</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
August 2004 Registered Voters	79%	13%	8%	--	100%	(624)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	83	11	6	--	100	(216)
--Independent	76	12	10	--	98	(201)
--Republican	81	15	4	--	100	(150)
<u>Vote Intention</u>						
--Bush	82	14	5	--	101	(193)
--Undecided	69	17	14	--	100	(71)
--Kerry	84	11	5	--	100	(316)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>						
May 2004 Registered Voters	75%	13%	11%	1%	100%	(643)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	77	13	9	1	100	(209)
--Independent	77	12	10	--	99	(203)
--Republican	82	10	7	1	100	(163)
<u>Vote Intention</u>						
--Bush	83	9	6	1	99	(227)
--Undecided	63	20	13	3	99	(117)
--Kerry	80	13	7	--	100	(264)

W1. Interest – (continued)

	<u>A Lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>A Little/ None</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<u>PAST ELECTIONS</u>						
September 2000 Registered Voters	61%	25%	13%	--	99%	(707)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	57	26	16	1	100	(268)
--Independent	57	28	15	--	100	(194)
--Republican	73	20	7	--	100	(169)
June 2000 Registered Voters	52%	30%	16%	2%	100%	(618)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	45	29	24	2	100	(272)
--Independent	41	35	23	1	100	(235)
--Republican	56	28	15	1	100	(194)
September 1996 Registered Voters	61%	28%	10%	1%	100%	(627)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	65	24	10	1	100	(217)
--Independent	53	35	11	1	100	(228)
--Republican	68	22	10	1	101	(167)
June 1996 Registered Voters	53%	35%	12%	1%	101%	(646)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	57	31	11	1	100	(212)
--Independent	50	39	9	--	98	(204)
--Republican	56	32	12	--	100	(176)
September 1992 Registered Voters	64%	22%	13%	1%	100%	(663)
September 1988 Registered Voters	48%	33%	18%	1%	100%	(505)
August 1984 Registered Voters	59%	25%	14%	2%	100%	(638)
September 1980 Registered Voters	55%	28%	18%	--	101%	(971)

“Is your vote more for [CANDIDATE NAMED] or more against [OTHER CANDIDATE]?” [W6]

	<u>“For” my candidate</u>	<u>“Against” other candidate</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
August 2004	59%	36%	5%	100%	(551)
All Voters					
BUSH VOTERS	83	15	3	101	(193)
KERRY VOTERS	46	49	5	100	(316)
<u>PAST ELECTIONS</u>					
September 1996 Registered Voters	58%	38%	4%	100%	(598)
--Clinton voters	64	33	4	101	(357)
--Dole voters	49	47	4	100	(181)
September 1992 Registered Voters	49%	46%	4%	99%	(627)
--Bush 41 voters	62	35	3	100	(267)
--Clinton voters	39	57	4	100	(340)

“Is there any one issue that stands out as the most important in determining who to vote for in this election, or not?” “What is most important for you?” [W8]

	<u>War in Iraq</u>	<u>Terrorism / Security</u>	<u>Economy / Jobs</u>	<u>Taxes</u>	<u>Health Care</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Other domestic issues</u>	<u>Personal qualities</u>	<u>Other issues</u>	<u>No issue Stands out / not sure</u>	<u>(n)</u>
August 2004	21%	11%	12%	2%	4%	1%	8%	4%	1%	36%	(624)
Registered Voters											
<u>Vote Intention</u>											
--Bush	14	25	9	2	1	1	9	4	1	35	(193)
--Undecided	17	10	10	3	4	1	4	1	3	46	(71)
--Kerry	27	3	14	2	5	1	7	5	2	34	(316)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>											
May 2004 Registered Voters	27%	8%	11%	1%	1%	1%	5%	6%	3%	38%	(643)
<u>Vote Intention</u>											
--Bush	22	19	8	3	1	--	4	9	3	30	(227)
--Undecided	25	4	15	--	3	--	2	4	3	46	(117)
--Kerry	34	--	14	1	1	1	6	4	3	36	(264)

“Regardless of which presidential candidate you support, please tell me if you think George W. Bush or John Kerry would better handle each of the following issues. How about (RANDOMIZE - READ ITEM) - Bush or Kerry?” [W9]

August 2004 Registered Voters	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Kerry</u>	<u>Both/ Same</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
CREATING JOBS	30%	54%	4%	13%	101%	(624)
<u>Vote Intention</u>						
--Bush	79	8	5	8	100	(193)
--Undecided	20	35	6	39	100	(71)
--Kerry	4	87	2	7	100	(316)
TAXES	38%	48%	2%	11%	99%	(624)
<u>Vote Intention</u>						
--Bush	89	6	1	4	100	(193)
--Undecided	24	35	7	34	100	(71)
--Kerry	11	78	2	9	100	(316)
SOCIAL SECURITY	27%	54%	3%	16%	100%	(624)
<u>Vote Intention</u>						
--Bush	70	12	4	13	99	(193)
--Undecided	20	32	4	44	100	(71)
--Kerry	5	84	2	9	100	(316)
HEALTH CARE	25%	60%	3%	13%	101%	(624)
<u>Vote Intention</u>						
--Bush	68	14	6	12	100	(193)
--Undecided	10	46	4	39	99	(71)
--Kerry	3	92	--	5	100	(316)
TERRORISM AND NATIONAL SECURITY	41%	45%	3%	11%	100%	(624)
<u>Vote Intention</u>						
--Bush	95	2	1	3	101	(193)
--Undecided	35	24	3	38	100	(71)
--Kerry	11	77	4	8	100	(316)
WAR IN IRAQ	38%	50%	2%	11%	101%	(624)
<u>Vote Intention</u>						
--Bush	92	4	1	4	101	(193)
--Undecided	30	30	3	38	101	(71)
--Kerry	9	83	2	7	101	(316)
EDUCATION	29%	55%	4%	12%	100%	(624)
<u>Vote Intention</u>						
--Bush	77	11	3	9	100	(193)
--Undecided	14	42	6	38	100	(71)
--Kerry	5	87	3	5	100	(316)

“As you may recall, the winner of the 2000 presidential election was not decided until the U.S. Supreme Court determined that the Florida ballot count should be accepted. Does what happened in 2000 make you more likely or less likely to go out and vote in this year’s election, or does it make no difference in your intention to vote this year?” [W10]

	<u>More likely</u>	<u>Less likely</u>	<u>No difference</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
August 2004 Registered Voters	29%	2%	69%	1%	101%	(624)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	41	1	58	--	100	(216)
--Independent	24	5	70	1	100	(201)
--Republican	17	1	83	--	101	(150)
<u>Vote Intention</u>						
--Bush	16	1	84	--	101	(193)
--Undecided	30	3	63	4	100	(71)
--Kerry	37	2	61	--	100	(316)

“When George W. Bush campaigned in 2000, he said that he wanted to be known as the president who united the country. Based on his time in office, do you think Bush has united the country or do you think Bush has divided the country?” [W11]

	<u>United</u>	<u>Divided</u>	<u>(VOL) Neither</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
August 2004 Registered Voters	23%	63%	9%	6%	101%	(624)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	5	87	6	3	101	(216)
--Independent	21	65	8	5	99	(201)
--Republican	49	32	13	6	100	(150)
<u>Vote Intention</u>						
--Bush	56	22	16	5	99	(193)
--Undecided	20	52	8	20	100	(71)
--Kerry	4	89	4	3	100	(316)

NATIONAL SURVEYS

Los Angeles Times July 17-21, 2004	26%	58%	--	16%	100%	(1529)
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“If John Kerry were elected president do you think he would be more of a “uniter” or more of a “divider” for the country?” [W12]

	<u>Uniter</u>	<u>Divider</u>	<u>(VOL) Neither</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
August 2004 Registered Voters	57%	25%	3%	15%	100%	(624)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	86	5	1	8	100	(216)
--Independent	55	23	6	16	100	(201)
--Republican	26	55	3	16	100	(150)
<u>Vote Intention</u>						
--Bush	16	64	4	16	100	(193)
--Undecided	42	15	3	39	99	(71)
--Kerry	88	4	2	7	101	(316)