

**Humphrey Institute Survey:
Nader and Libertarian Play King Makers in Deadlocked Minnesotan Race**

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President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry remain deadlocked in Minnesota, with third party candidates drawing the support of 6 percent of likely voters. Kerry is most hurt by the support for Independent Ralph Nader and Libertarian Michael Badnarik, though some Bush backers are drawn to the third party candidates as well.

Other key findings include:

- **Kerry is most hurt by third party candidates and, specifically, Nader by erasing the Democrat's advantage among independents.**
- **Bush continues to win out over Senator Kerry for doing a better job handling terrorism but Bush's advantage on terrorism has declined sharply since the summer due to shifts by Democrats and independents. Neither candidate has a notable advantage on Iraq; Kerry has successfully neutralized Iraq.**
- **The critical swing group of independents gives Kerry decidedly higher marks than Bush on the highest profile domestic issues – jobs and the economy and health care.**
- **Gay Marriage, which the President has promoted aggressively, has been received coolly by independents and, most surprisingly, by a fifth of Republicans.**
- **Independents are split over the President's job performance (47% approving and 48% disapproving), a slight decline since the summer.**
- **Both campaigns have effectively tarnished the perception of likely voters regarding each candidate's personal traits. But independents also appear increasingly uncertain and distrustful of the attacks, with a growing number indicating that they are unable to evaluate prominent characteristics to either candidate.**
- **Kerry continues to struggle to establish a gender gap in Minnesota.**

The Humphrey Institute survey was conducted of 690 likely voters from October 21, 2004 to October 26, 2004. An earlier survey was conducted of 509 likely voters from June 21 to July 12, 2004.

The Third Party King Makers

According to the latest Humphrey Institute survey, Bush's 1 point lead (48% to 47%) widens to a 3 point lead when Nader and the Libertarian Badnarik are offered as options. The President's lead is within the margin of error (plus or minus 4 points), and his contest with Kerry is a toss up in statistical terms. Nonetheless, the showing by third party candidates indicates that they are poised to tilt the race in the President's favor.

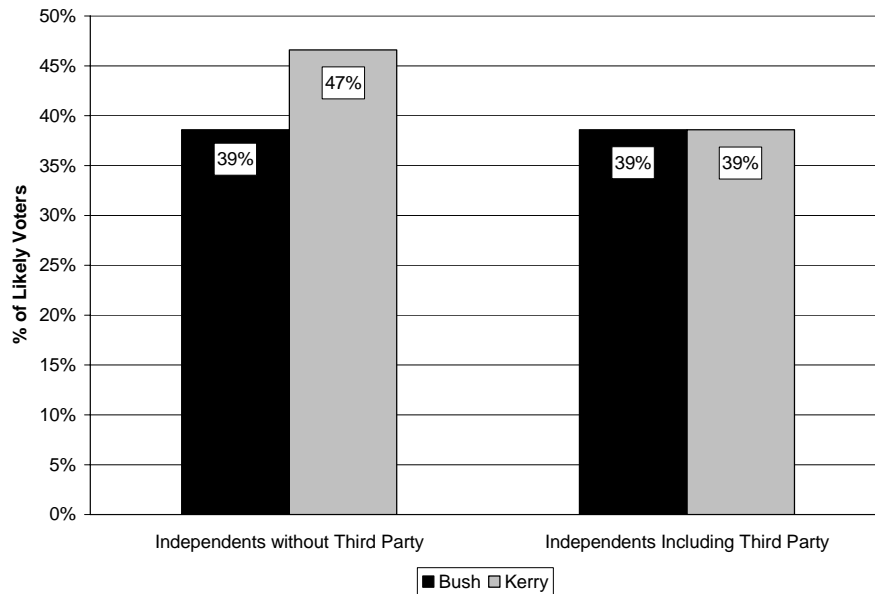
Horse Race in Minnesota Among Likely Voters

	Bush	Kerry	Nader	Badnarik	Don't Know/ Other
Two-person Race	48%	47%	*	*	5%
Republicans	93%	5%	*	*	2%
Independents	39%	47%	*	*	15%
Democrats	5%	92%	*	*	4%
With Third Parties	47%	44%	5%	1%	3%
Republicans	92%	4%	2%	0.4%	1%
Independents	39%	39%	15%	1.1%	7%
Democrats	4%	88%	4%	1.5%	3%

Both candidates are hurt by third party candidates but Kerry is more damaged by them. The inclusion of Nader and Badnarik reduces the President's support by 1 point (from 48% to 47%) but saps Kerry's support by 3 points (from 47% to 44%). Nader is drawing some support from Republicans (as he claims), a bit more support from Democrats (though still not much), and much more from independents who do not align themselves with either major party. Although Badnarik's support is too small to accurately pinpoint the source of his backers, it appears that he is drawing from both Democrats and Republicans. This is a bit surprising; his message of small government was expected to have particular draw among Republicans.

Kerry is most hurt by third party candidates and, specifically, Nader by erasing the Democrat's advantage among independents. Kerry's 8 point edge among independents in the 2 person race disappears with the introduction of third party candidates. With about 9 out of 10 Democrats and Republicans supporting their party's candidate, the vote of independents may well determine who wins the contest in Minnesota.

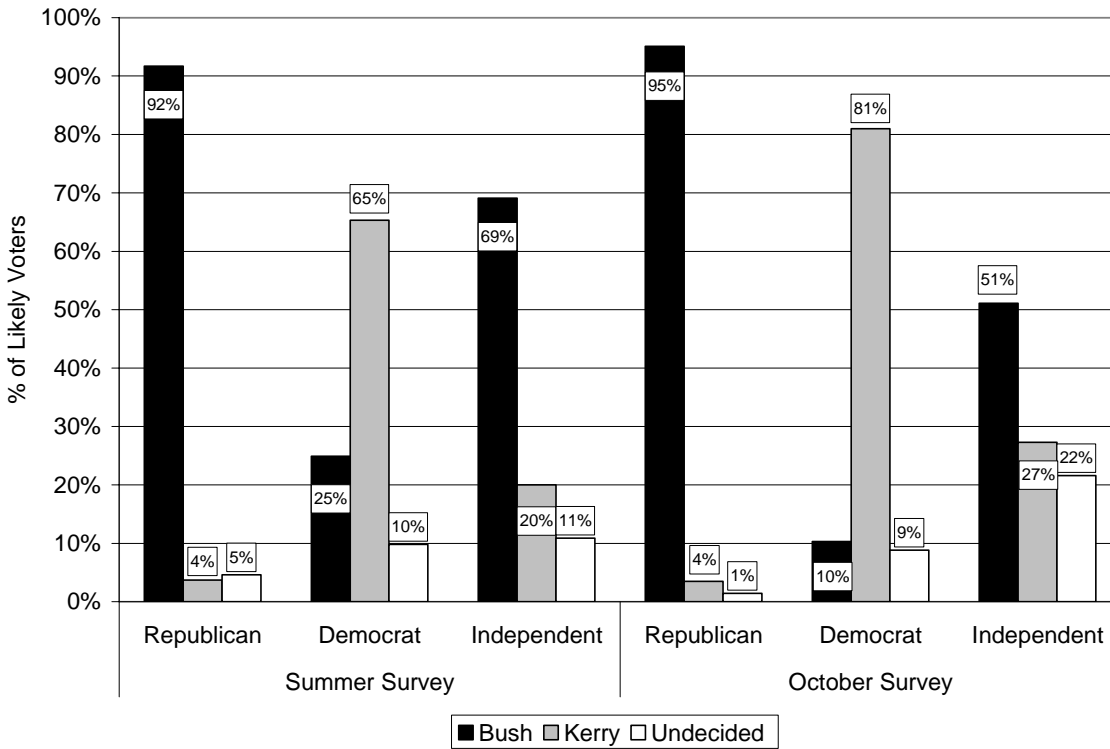
Third Party Impact on Independent Vote for Bush and Kerry in Minnesota



Bush Advantage on Terrorism but Kerry Gains on National Security and Holds Edge on Domestic Issues

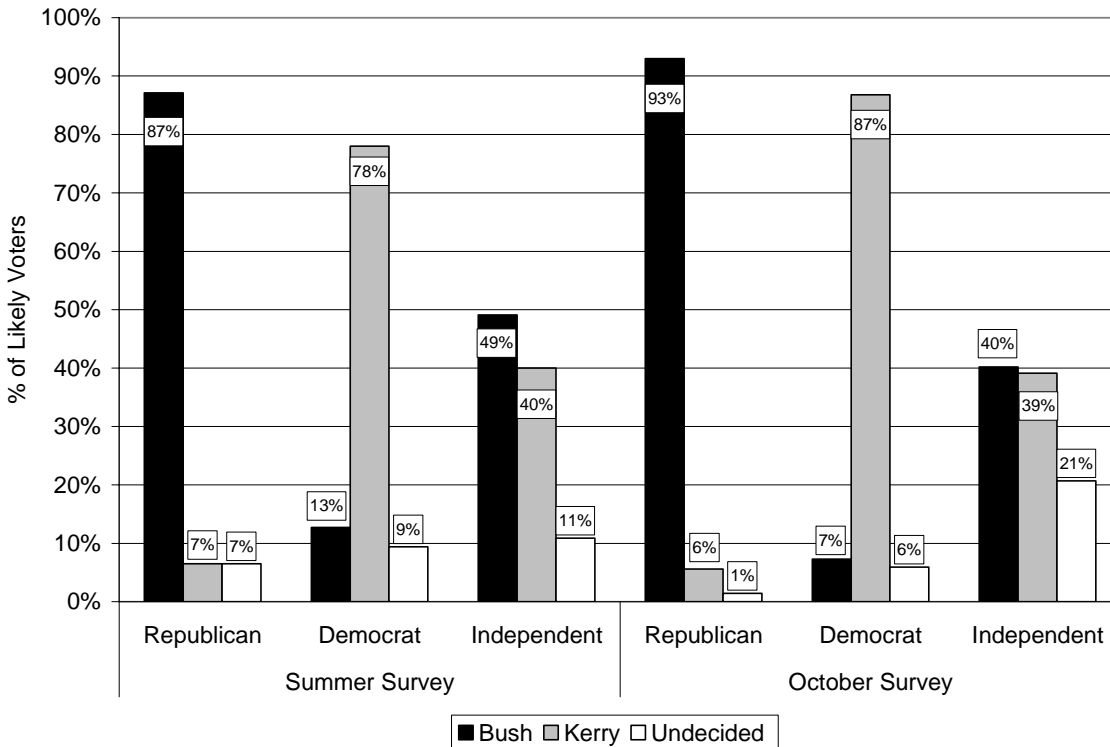
National Security Remains Bush Advantage but Kerry has Closed Gap: President Bush continues to decisively win out over Senator Kerry for doing a better job handling terrorism by 13 points among all likely voters and by 24 points among independents who are likely voters. Nonetheless, Bush's advantage has declined sharply since the summer Humphrey Survey due to three factors. First, Democratic voters are deserting the President: the proportion of Democrats who believed that the President would do a better job on terrorism than Kerry declined from 25% in the summer Humphrey Survey to 10% in this survey. Second, Bush's advantage among independents for handling terrorism has dropped by half since the summer, with the gap between Bush and Kerry declining from 49% to 24%. Third, independents are far more uncertain about which candidate is better able to handle terrorism: the proportion of independents who were undecided rose from 11% this summer to 22% now. Overall, terrorism continues to work for the President but Senator Kerry has narrowed Bush's dominance.

Likely Voters Rate Bush and Kerry on Handling of Terrorism



Kerry Neutralizes Iraq: Neither candidate has a notable advantage on the situation in Iraq, with Kerry successfully neutralizing the issue. Among all likely voters, the President has a narrow 5 point advantage (unchanged since the summer). Democrats have improved their comparative evaluation of Kerry by 9 points and Republicans have lifted their evaluation of Bush by 5 points. But the most striking change is the doubling of independents who do not see a notable difference between the two candidates (from 11% to 21%) and the evaporation of Bush’s advantage among independents.

Likely Voters Rate Bush and Kerry on Handling of Iraq



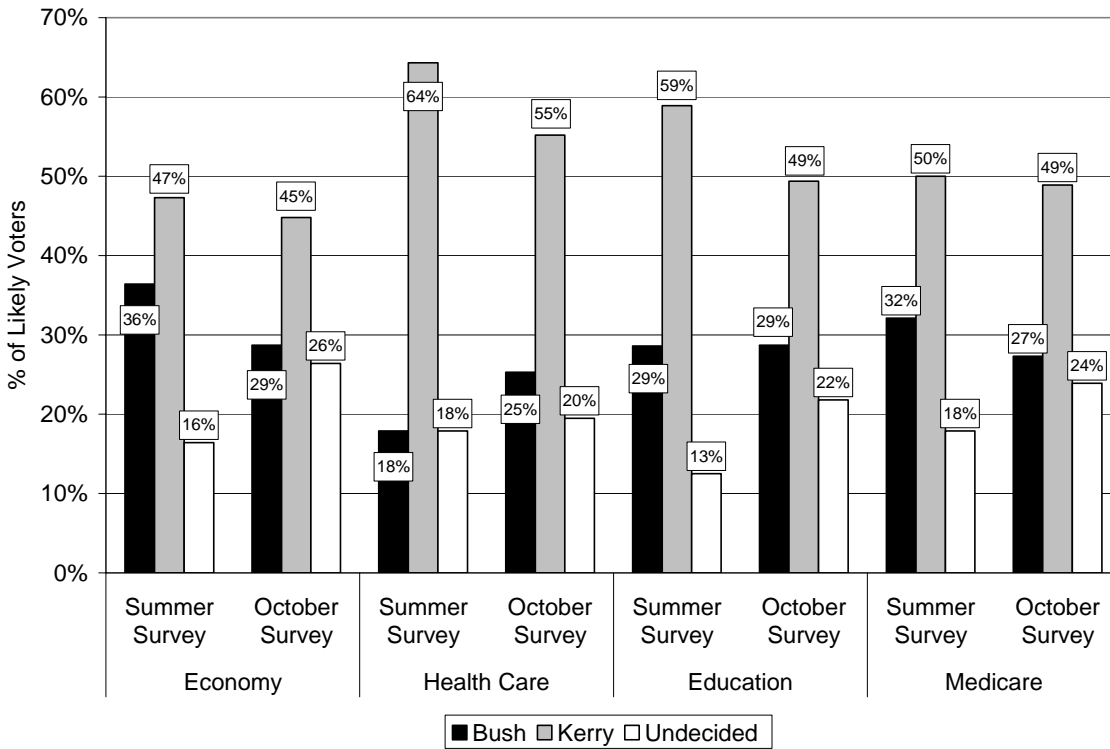
Kerry Advantage on Domestic Issues Remains But Some Erosion

The independent voters who will swing the race in Minnesota give Kerry the advantage on most domestic issues, though it has declined a bit on some issues. The evaluations of independents are particularly important given the hardening of Democratic and Republican loyalists for their party's candidate (as we saw above on national security issues).

On the economy and jobs, which is ranked by the largest proportion of independents as the single most important issue in the campaign, they favor Kerry over Bush by 16 points, a 5 point increase since the summer along with a 10 point jump in those who cannot distinguish between the two. Kerry's continuing lead on this issue is fuelled by the 10 point rise in independents who indicate that over the past year the nation's economy and their personal finances have both gotten worse.

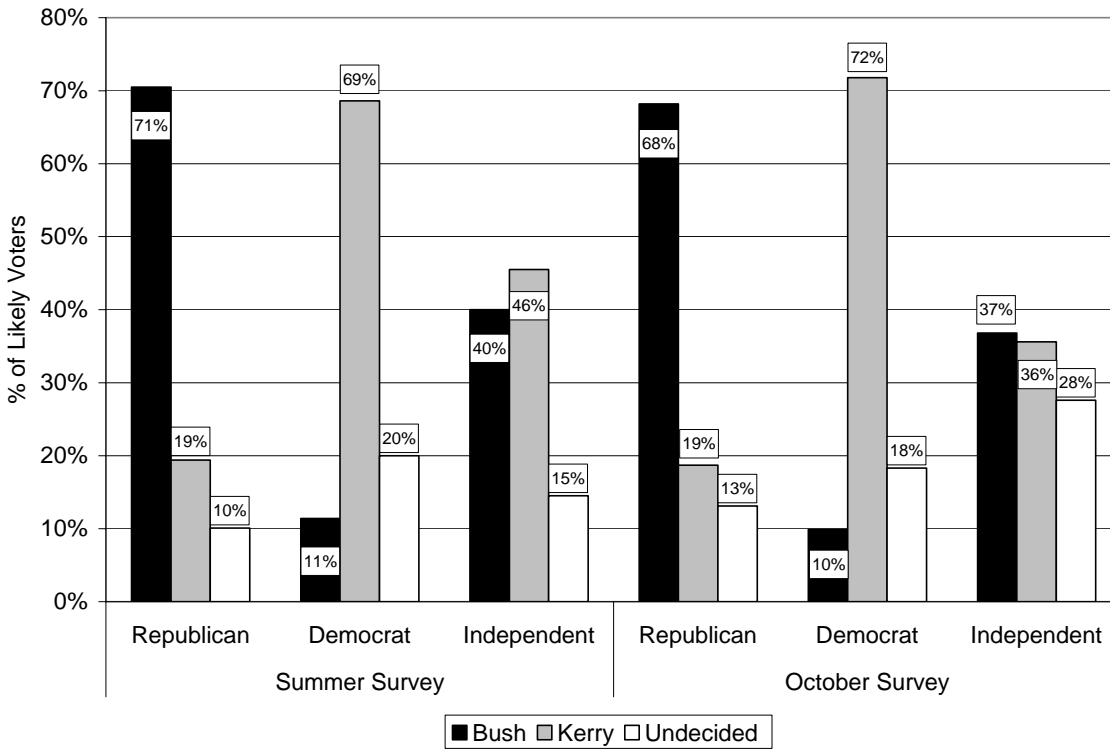
On health care, independents give Kerry a 30 point advantage. Although this is a substantial difference, the gap is 16 points lower than this summer and suggests some success by the President on this issue. Kerry is also 20 points ahead of the President on education among independents, though this is 10 points lower than his summertime advantage due to the rise in voters who were unable to differentiate between the two candidates. The Democratic is 22 points ahead on Medicare and its new drug benefit.

Independent Voters Rate Bush and Kerry on Handling of Domestic Issues



Gay Marriage, which the President has promoted aggressively, has been received coolly by independents and, most surprisingly, by Republicans. Although the issue may rally the most intense supporters of a constitutional ban on gay marriage, it does not appear to be widening his appeal past his political base. Independents are split between the candidates (reversing Kerry's 6 point edge this summer) and the numbers of independents who are undecided has doubled since the last Humphrey Survey. In the most significant defection from the President on any policy issue we have examined, 19% of Republicans side with Kerry on gay marriage (10% of Democrats prefer Bush).

Independent Voters Rate Bush and Kerry on Handling of Gay Marriage



Swing Voters Show More Concern about Economy than Terrorism and Iraq

Elections are often decided by which issues voters are placing the most importance on Election Day. In the final days of the Minnesota contest, more independents identify the economy and jobs as the single most important issue in the campaign (30%) than point to national security or other domestic policies. Their ranking of the economy is 5 points higher since the summer and 6 points greater than the combined ranking of Iraq and the U.S. campaign against terrorism (24%). (Considered separately, the ranking of either terrorism or Iraq is about half as strong as the ranking of the economy.) Health care, which breaks strongly for Kerry, is ranked behind the economy and national security, having declined by 7 points since the summer. Education and gay marriage have also slid down the campaign agenda, with little concern expressed by independents for the latter.

Single Most Important Issue in Presidential Vote among Minnesotan Independents

	Summer Survey (6/21- 7/12/04)	October Survey (10/21-10/26/04)	Change
Economy	25%	30%	+5
Iraq	14%	15%	+1
Health Care	20%	13%	-7
Terrorism	7%	9%	+2
Education	16%	8%	-8
Medicare	2%	1%	-1
Gay Marriage	7%	1%	-6
Other	9%	6%	-3
Don't Know	7%	16%	+9

Note: The exact response categories are: the economy and jobs; the war in Iraq; health care; the U.S. campaign against terrorism; education; Medicare and prescription drugs; gay marriage; or something else.

Partisans echo the agenda of their standard bearers – Republicans loyally single out terrorism as the most important problem (35%) while a similar proportion of Democrats point to the economy (33%).

Bush’s Approval Rating Remains Steady if Mixed

The evaluation of the President’s job performance by all likely voters in Minnesota was mixed, though unchanged since the summer. Bush’s approval rating continued to hover around the symbolically important 50 percent floor (51%), which can signal trouble for an incumbent.

Perhaps more importantly, his approval rating slightly declined among independents since the summer (falling from 51% to 47%). Independents are now split over the President’s job performance (47% approving and 48% disapproving).

President’s Approval Rating among Independents

	Approve	Disapprove	Don’t Know/ Other
Summer Survey (6/21- 7/12/04)	51%	47%	2%
October Survey (10/21- 10/26/04)	47%	48%	5%

Character Attacks Hurt Bush and Kerry

Both campaigns have effectively tarnished the perception of likely voters regarding each candidate’s personal traits. But independents also appear increasingly uncertain and distrustful of the attacks, with a growing number indicating that they are unable to evaluate prominent characteristics to either candidate.

President Bush holds a 7 point advantage on strong leadership among independents but a quarter is unable to differentiate between Bush and Kerry on this critical personality characteristic. The Bush campaign’s attacks on Kerry for “flip-flopping” have clearly impacted the evaluations of independents – they see this description as better applying to Kerry than Bush by a 29 point margin. Nonetheless, this margin is 5 points lower than this summer and a quarter are uncertain which candidate this description best applies.

Senator Kerry has an 8 point edge among independents for “caring” more than Bush. But this is 5 point decline from this summer, and 31% are now unable to differentiate between the candidates on this personality trait. The Kerry campaign’s criticisms of the President for being “stubborn” has stuck, with more independents applying this to Bush than his Democratic challenger by a 47 point margin. Nonetheless, this margin has declined by 19 points since the summer and a fifth of independents were unwilling to attribute the trait to either candidate.

Independents Rate Bush and Kerry on Personality Traits

	Bush	Kerry	Unable to Respond	Bush-Kerry Spread
STRONG LEADER				
Summer Survey (6/21- 7/12/04)	49%	40%	11%	Bush +9
Fall Survey (10/21-10/26/04)	40%	33%	26%	Bush +7
FLIP FLOP				
Summer Survey (6/21- 7/12/04)	26%	60%	15%	Kerry +34
Fall Survey (10/21-10/26/04)	23%	52%	25%	Kerry +29
CARES				
Summer Survey (6/21- 7/12/04)	30%	43%	27%	Kerry +13
Fall Survey (10/21-10/26/04)	31%	39%	31%	Kerry +8
STUBBORN				
Summer Survey (6/21- 7/12/04)	75%	9%	16%	Bush +66
Fall Survey (10/21-10/26/04)	63%	16%	21%	Bush +47

The Missing “Gender Gap”

John Kerry is not benefiting from the gender gap in Minnesota. While Democratic presidential candidates usually enjoy double digit advantages among women, Kerry only has a 5 point edge in the 2 person race (down from his 9 point advantage in the summer Humphrey Survey). A similar finding emerged from the recent Humphrey Survey of likely voters in Wisconsin. (<http://www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/csp/elections/WISurvey.htm>)

About the Survey

The Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota and its 2004 Elections Project designed the survey. The Humphrey Institute and the 2004 Elections Project are non-partisan academic institutions that are committed to rigorous research, quality teaching, and engaged public service. The 2004 Elections Project has conducted a number of studies and initiatives focusing on state and national elections in the Upper Midwest, including policy briefs, analyses of election returns and public opinion, and voter registration efforts. More information can be found at its website: www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/csp/elections.

Lawrence R. Jacobs directed the survey. Joanne M. Miller provided valuable advice and feedback. Dean J. Brian Atwood offered unstinting support and encouragement for which we are grateful. Cindy Orbovich, Julie C. Lund, and Lark Weller generously contributed to preparing and distributing the report. Melanie Burns provided superior research assistance. No opinions, statements of fact, or conclusions should be attributed to the Humphrey Institute or any of the individuals who offered advice and assistance.

The survey was fielded by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut, which has extensive national and state experience conducting non-partisan surveys on politics and government policy.

The survey was conducted by telephone with a total of 855 adults in Minnesota from October 21 to October 26, 2004. Of these, 690 respondents were identified as likely to vote. Respondents were identified as likely voters if they self-identified themselves as definitely planning to vote and either 1) reported that they had voted in all or almost all recent elections or 2) they have a great deal of interest in the 2004 campaign. Although most respondents in the sample report having a past history of voting, our likely voter model also is designed to capture other voters based on interest in the 2004 campaign. This helps to include new voters in our sample.

The distribution of party identification among likely voters analyzed in this survey is as follows:

Republican	44%
Independent	14%
Democrat	42%

The sample of telephone exchanges called was randomly selected by a computer from a list of active residential exchanges within the state. Within each exchange, random digits were added to form a complete telephone number, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers. Within each household, one adult was selected to be the respondent for the survey.

The results have been weighted to take account of household size and number of telephone lines into the residence and to adjust for variations in the sample relating to sex, age, and education.

In theory, in 19 cases out of 20, the results based on the samples in each state will differ by no more than four percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by seeking out all adults in the state. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.