

## Roundup of Polls on the 2004 Elections

Eric Ostermeier  
PhD candidate

Lawrence R. Jacobs  
McKnight Land Grant Professor

2004 Elections Project  
Humphrey Institute  
University of Minnesota

Recent polls in the Upper Midwest confirm that the region is closely divided, with some early signs that it may defy past patterns. South Dakotans remain conservative but are currently supporting Democratic nominees in both the U.S. House and U.S. Senate races. Although George W. Bush narrowly lost both Wisconsin and Minnesota in 2000, he enjoys a small lead in Wisconsin and is trailing in Minnesota. These poll results, however, provide only an early snapshot of the electoral map in the Upper Midwest and may well change over the coming months.

Here are some of the important results that emerge from recent polls:

### South Dakota Political Map

- South Dakota remains conservative. South Dakotans still believe the country is headed in the right direction (49% to 37%) and overwhelmingly support the Iraq war effort by nearly a 2:1 margin according to the latest Daily Republic poll (March 28-29).
- In addition, 52% of the electorate support new state legislation that would criminalize abortion and 63% support amending the U.S. Constitution to abolish gay marriage. These results would appear to favor Republican candidates and President Bush, though our sources do not have polls on his pairing with presumed Democratic nominee John Kerry.
- Despite the conservative electorate in South Dakota, Democratic candidates are fairing well. In the state's hotly contested Senate race, Democratic minority leader Tom Daschle continues to maintain the 5 to 7 point lead he has held over Republican challenger John Thune since late October 2003. Both men are very popular figures in SD – Daschle currently enjoys a 61% job approval rating and a 66% favorability rating while Thune boasts a 67% favorability rating.
- A special election will be held on June 1<sup>st</sup> for the seat vacated by William Jenklow. Democrat Stephanie Herseth maintains a sizable lead over Republican nominee Larry Diedrich, although this advantage has shrunk from 29 to 16 points since early February. If this race turns out to be as close as the 2002 Senate race (decided by less than 550 votes), the 2% support currently thrown to Libertarian candidate Terry Begay could be an important factor in deciding the winner.

Herseth is a popular figure on the South Dakotan political scene, with a favorability rating of 66% and an unfavorable rating of 22%. Diedrich has a favorability rating of 40% and an unfavorable rating of just 11% – however, nearly half of SD's have not formed an opinion yet on Diedrich, while nearly 90% of the state's electorate has already made up its mind about whether or not they like Herseth.

### Wisconsin Political Map

- In the latest Badger Poll (March 23-31) Bush has built a small lead of 6 points ahead of Kerry, with Ralph Nader garnering 3% - about the same amount of support he received in the 2000 presidential election (3.6%).
- Not only has Kerry's favorability rating dropped 5 points in two months, but, more tellingly, his unfavorability numbers have nearly doubled from 18% to 34%. In other words, those Wisconsinites who had previously not formed an opinion about Kerry are now increasingly deciding they don't like him.
- Bush's favorability rating of 52% is virtually unchanged since the last Badger Poll two months ago, though the 26 point difference between his favorable and unfavorable ratings has declined to 11 points since October 2003.
- There is one other piece of sobering news for Bush: while the number of Wisconsinites who rated Bush's job performance as 'excellent' rose from 11% to 16% in the last two months, his 'poor' rating also rose from 22% to 30% -- the highest rating of his presidency, and three times the amount from one year ago.

### Minnesotan Political Map

- In the latest Minnesota Poll (March 28-31) Kerry has built a sizable lead over Bush, 50% to 38%, with Ralph Nader garnering 2% -- less than half of the support he received in the 2000 election (5.2%).
- Kerry's favorability numbers best Bush 58% to 49% and his unfavorable numbers are just 31%, compared to 46% for Bush. However, more than twice as many Minnesotans have not yet made up their mind about how they view Kerry (11%) compared to the sitting president (5%).
- One of Bush's problems is that only 40% of Minnesotans believe the country is headed in the right direction -- the lowest number since September 2003 -- and 52% believe the country is off on the wrong track.
- The other problem for Bush is that while he is seen by Minnesotans as better than Kerry at handling all foreign policy issues, they also believe the most important problem is the *economy* (24%), with war (14%) and terrorism (12%) lagging behind. Kerry is seen as much better at handling all domestic issues (economy, education, taxes, social security, health care), with the exception of gay marriage.

The Poll Roundup -- an initiative of the non-partisan 2004 Elections Project at the Humphrey Institute, University of Minnesota -- assembles the latest results in the Upper Midwest on pairings of candidates, policy issues, and other important political attitudes. This is the most comprehensive regional compilation of polling results on the 2004 elections in Upper Midwest that is available on line. The results have been assembled from leading regional and national polling organizations including the Argus Leader, Daily Republic, Des Moines Register, Pioneer Press, Star Tribune (Minnesota Poll), the University of Wisconsin Survey Center (Badger Poll), SurveyUSA, and the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.