

Roundup of Polls on the 2004 Elections

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The race for president remains extremely tight in two Upper Midwestern states – Iowa and Minnesota – based on polls taken after the presidential and vice presidential debates. Polls before the debates showed that President George W. Bush enjoyed double-digit leads over John Kerry in both Wisconsin and South Dakota. These races may have tightened up after the debates.

The war in Iraq, homeland security, and the war on terrorism seem to be emerging as the most important issue for Upper Midwestern voters – especially in Iowa and South Dakota. Bush enjoys an advantage on these issues, though it has declined in the past week. The president also has drawn even with Kerry on handling economic issues. In the race for U.S. Senate, Democrat Tom Daschle (SD) continues to hold a narrow lead over challenger John Thune, while Democrat Russ Feingold (WI) currently holds a healthy lead over Republican newcomer Tim Michels.

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

Iowa Political Map

- The race for the presidency is a dead heat in Iowa. In the latest Humphrey Institute survey, taken before and after the first presidential debate, Kerry leads Bush 47% to 46%, with Independent candidate Ralph Nader polling at 3.5% and Libertarian candidate Michael Badnarik at just 0.2%.
- The president's approval rating hovers just above the 50% danger mark for an incumbent (53%), with 46% of Iowans currently disapproving of Bush's job performance according to the Humphrey Institute poll.
- National security issues have risen in importance, according to the Humphrey Institute survey. The proportion of voters who identified Iraq and terrorism as the single most important issue in the 2004 presidential election rose from a combined 32% during the Humphrey Institute's summer survey to 41% in its most recent poll. Meanwhile, health care and the economy declined as the top issues, from 39% to 32%.

Minnesota Political Map

- Polls before the debates showed the race for president in Minnesota to be a toss up. A Gallup poll reported the race a tie, while the *Star Tribune* Minnesota Poll had Kerry

ahead by nine points and the *Pioneer Press*/Minnesota Public Radio poll had Bush up by two points.

- Bush's unfavorable rating is at its highest level in 2004 (47% unfavorable, 46% favorable), while a majority of Minnesotans has a favorable view of Kerry (54% favorable, 36% unfavorable), according to the *Star Tribune's* mid-September poll.
- Based on the *Pioneer Press* /MPR poll before the debates, the economy, jobs, and unemployment continue to be the most influential issue for the November election in Minnesota, cited by 28% of survey respondents, higher than homeland security and the war on terror (19%) or the situation in Iraq (17%). Kerry's advantage over Bush in handling the economy has evaporated, however, with Bush now holding a 45%-44% advantage. Bush has maintained a large double-digit lead over Kerry in handling the war on terror (56%-35%) and now also holds a 14-point lead in handling the situation in Iraq (51%-37%).
- However, the *Star Tribune* poll also shows the number of Minnesotans who believe the country is heading in the right direction is at its lowest level (37%) since September 2003.

South Dakota Political Map

- Bush continues to hold a double-digit lead over Kerry in South Dakota – 50% to 37% in a mid-September *Argus Leader* poll. More than half of South Dakotans have a favorable view of the president (51%, compared to just 30% for Kerry. Bush's highest rating is on homeland security and the war on terrorism (66% - much higher than his rating on the economy (49%) and the situation in Iraq (48%).
- In the race for Senate, Tom Daschle continues to hold narrow, single-digit leads over Republican challenger John Thune. September polls show Daschle with a two-point advantage in the *Rapid City Journal* survey and a five-point lead in the *Argus Leader* poll. Daschle has maintained a lead in each of the last three statewide polls sponsored by the *Rapid City Journal*, dating back to March 2004, and the last five statewide polls sponsored by the *Argus Leader*/KELO-TV, dating back to August 2003. The *Argus Leader* poll also showed Daschle with a 52% favorability rating, only two points higher than Thune.
- In the race for South Dakota's lone U.S. House seat, Democrat Stephanie Herseth has opened up a seven-point lead against Larry Diedrich, her opponent in June's special election, according to the latest *Argus Leader* poll. In the *Rapid City Journal* poll, Herseth's lead is nine points. Libertarian candidate Terry Begay does not appear to be much of a factor at this point, polling around 1%. South Dakotans rate Herseth's job performance as 'excellent' or 'pretty good' by a 2:1 margin over those who rate it 'fair' or 'poor' (61%-31%). Herseth's favorability rating (51%) also is higher than Thune's (45%).
- On the issues, the *Argus Leader* poll reveals that South Dakotans are most concerned about homeland security and the war on terror (22%) and the situation in Iraq (21%). The economy, jobs, and unemployment (16%) rank only slightly ahead of moral issues (13%). South Dakotans overwhelmingly support an amendment to the U.S. Constitution outlawing same-sex marriages (64% to 25%).

Wisconsin Political Map

- Before the debates, Wisconsin showed the greatest shift in Bush's performance from the 2000 election in any of the Upper Midwestern states. While Bush lost Wisconsin by less than 1% in 2000, polls in September showed him with a double-digit lead over his Democratic challenger. The Harris Poll just before the first presidential

debate reported Bush up by 10 points (50% versus 40%, with Nader receiving 6%). The mid-September Badger Poll showed Bush ahead of Kerry by a solid 47%-34% margin. Bush has led Kerry in all four Badger polls this year – by six points in March, 12 points in April, four points in June, and 13 points in September. In a mid-September Knight Ridder / MSNBC Poll, however, Bush only held a 46%-44% lead.

- Although Bush held a 13-point advantage over Kerry in polls before the debates, the number of Wisconsinites who want Bush re-elected is only three points higher than those who would like someone else (49%-46%), according to the Badger Poll. This suggests Bush's support in the Badger state is not deep. On the other hand, Kerry has not endeared himself to the state's voters as an attractive alternative to the president.
- Bush's approval rating currently is at its highest level in Wisconsin since December 2003 – 51% rate his job performance as 'excellent' or 'good,' according to the September Badger Poll. His favorability rating is a healthy 54%, compared to just 36% for Kerry (who also has a 48% unfavorable rating).
- Bush also has opened up a 52%-15% margin over Kerry in Wisconsinites' estimation as to which candidate would protect the country from terrorism. Bush also has virtually drawn even with Kerry in respondents' perceptions of his ability to improve the economy and deal with the federal budget.
- In the race for U.S. Senate, Democratic incumbent Russ Feingold leads Republican Tim Michels 47%-33% in the September Badger Poll. Although less than half of Wisconsinites have a favorable view of Feingold (46%), only 24% have an unfavorable view, with 27% not knowing enough about him to offer an opinion. Newcomer Michels has a 31% favorable rating, with nine percent of respondents giving him an unfavorable rating and 58% not knowing enough to answer. Nearly half (49%) rate Feingold's job performance as 'excellent' or 'good,' with 38% rating it 'fair' or 'poor' – his highest rating in more than a year and a half. Feingold's rating had remained between 45% and 48% in seven Badger polls between February 2003 and June 2004.

About this report

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, Rapid City Journal, Daily Republic, Des Moines Register, KCCI-TV Des Moines, Pioneer Press, Star Tribune (Minnesota Poll), St. Norbert College Survey Center, the University of Wisconsin Survey Center (Badger Poll), and the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.