

Roundup of Polls on the 2004 Elections

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The battle for the presidency continues to be closely fought in the Upper Midwest. President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry and their families regularly visit Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, and media advertising buys in these states are among the 10 largest in the country.

Recent polling shows that the three presidential debates and one vice presidential debate have eroded Bush's once moderate leads in Wisconsin and Iowa and have helped Kerry to maintain a small lead in Minnesota. Although the post-debate polls indicate that Kerry gained some momentum, the Upper Midwest remains tightly contested, with the President's campaign well positioned to win one of these states for the first time since Ronald Reagan's re-election run in 1984. (Only Minnesota rebuffed Reagan for favorite son Walter Mondale, who narrowly won 49.7% to 49.5%.)

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

Political Map in Iowa

The Iowa presidential contest is knotted up.

- A new American Research Group survey of likely Iowa voters (conducted October 10-12, with a +/- 4% margin of error) shows the race even: 47% for Bush and 47% for Kerry, with Ralph Nader at 2%, and only 4% undecided. Bush was able to pry away almost twice as much support from Democratic voters (9%) as Kerry was able to garner from Republicans (5%). Kerry was aided by independents, which gave him a 48%-42% edge.
- In a Chicago Tribune poll of likely voters conducted a few days earlier (October 8-11), Bush held a 47%-45% advantage over Kerry. Nader drew 1% of Iowans, with 7% undecided. The race is deadlocked after taking into account the margin of error (+/- 4.4%).
- In the latest Humphrey Institute survey, conducted before and after the first presidential debate (September 27-October 3, with a margin of error of +/- 4%), Kerry lead Bush just 47% to 46%, with Independent candidate Ralph Nader polling at 3.5% and Libertarian candidate Michael Badnarik at 0.2%.

Political Map in Minnesota

- Kerry has consistently (though not uniformly) held a narrow lead over Bush in Minnesota. The Chicago Tribune poll of likely voters (October 8-11) gives Kerry a two-point edge – 45% to 43% - well within the poll's margin of error (+/- 4.4%). Nader polls at 2%, with 10% still undecided. Nader's support across the nation and in Minnesota has dissipated since 2000, when he received 5.2% of the vote in the Minnesota contest that Al Gore won by only 2.4%.
- A Star Tribune poll of likely voters (taken October 9-11, with a +/- 3.4% margin of error) shows Kerry with a five-point lead over Bush: 48%-43%. Like the Chicago Tribune poll, the Star Tribune poll finds Nader garnering the support of just 2% of likely voters.
- Only 45% of Minnesotans approve of Bush's job performance, with 50% disapproving according to the Star Tribune poll. Bush's disapproval numbers are even higher for his handling of the economy (55%) and the situation in Iraq (54%).
- The Star Tribune poll also shows that 54% of Minnesotans believe the country is 'pretty seriously off on the wrong track,' while just 39% believe it is 'generally headed in the right direction.'

Political Map in Wisconsin

- A Chicago Tribune poll of likely voters in Wisconsin (conducted October 8-11) shows Kerry with a four-point lead over Bush, with the contest standing at 47%-43% and Nader at 2%. The Tribune poll is one of the first polls in months to show Kerry ahead of Bush in the Badger State, although Kerry's lead is well within the margin of error (+/- 4.4%).
- A Gallup/CNN/USA Today poll of likely voters taken during the previous week (October 3-5, with a margin of error of +/- 4%) showed Bush with a three-point lead, 49%-46%, with Nader again drawing 2%. The poll also showed Bush with a big lead over Kerry as the best candidate to handle the war on terrorism (54%-41%) as well as the situation in Iraq (53%-44%). Wisconsinites were even split at 48% as to which candidate they viewed as best able to handle the economy.

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.