

Roundup of Polls on the 2004 Elections

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The 2004 Elections Project began nearly one year ago on the premise that the race for the presidency would be fought and won in the Upper Midwest. With the election one day out, nothing has been decided – including which candidate will take the 27 highly prized electoral votes in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. While pundits continue to calculate that the winner on November 2 will be the candidate who wins two of the three 'big battleground' states (Florida, Pennsylvania, and Ohio), it also is true that the candidate who is able to sweep these Upper Midwestern battleground states also will likely be in the White House come January 2005.

Only one thing is for certain in the latest crop of presidential polling in the Upper Midwest: President Bush can bank on South Dakota's three electoral votes. In Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin each candidate can point to at least one poll in the last week or two that shows him ahead.

But South Dakota is serving up two fascinating races – the race for U.S. Senate between Democratic incumbent Tom Daschle and Republican John Thune and battle over the state's at-large seat in the U.S. House between Democratic incumbent Stephanie Herseth and Republican Larry Diedrich. Both Daschle and Herseth had been leading in statewide polls all year long – until this week. Now each race is neck-and-neck, with both Thune and Diedrich inching ahead in the very latest Daily Republic poll.

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

THE RACE FOR PRESIDENT

Iowa Political Map

- Bush and Kerry are in a dead heat in the Hawkeye state, with two new polls unable to paint a clear picture of which candidate has the advantage. A KCCI-TV poll of likely voters (taken October 25-27) shows Bush ahead of Kerry 49% to 48%, with one percent for Nader and just two percent for other candidates or undecided. A new Des Moines Register poll of likely voters or those who already have voted (conducted October 25-29) showed Kerry ahead 48% to 45%, with one percent for Nader and six percent undecided.
- Both polls showed Bush ahead of Kerry in handling the campaign against terrorism: 51% to 39% in the KCCI-TV Poll and 49% to 40% in the Des Moines Register poll.

Bush's advantage in handling the situation in Iraq has all but vanished: 46% to 45% in the KCCI-TV poll and 47% to 42% in the Des Moines Register poll. The polls were split in gauging who Iowans think would better handle the economy: KCCI-TV had Bush up 45%-43% with the Des Moines Register poll showing Kerry with a 48%-43% advantage.

- The two polls also agreed that more Iowans disapprove than approve of Bush's handling of Iraq. According to the KCCI-TV poll, 41% approve of Bush's handling the situation with Iraq, with 51% disapproving; the Des Moines Register poll found 41% approving and 50% disapproving. The Des Moines Register poll also had bad news for the President in his handling of the job as president overall (45% approve, 47% disapprove), the economy (43% approve, 52% disapprove), and the budget (33% approve, 58% disapprove).

Minnesota Political Map

- Several new polls of likely voters in the Gopher state reveal Minnesota is still in play for both candidates. The new Humphrey Institute Survey (conducted October 21-26) had Bush ahead of Kerry by a 47%-44% margin, with Nader at five percent. A Pioneer Press poll (taken October 27-29) also had Bush leading, but only by one point: 48%-47%, with one percent of respondents for Nader. A Star Tribune poll (conducted October 26-29) found Kerry leading Bush 49%-41%, with one percent for Nader. The latest Zogby poll (taken October 28-30) had Kerry ahead by a two-point margin (49%-47%).
- Two of these polls show Bush has made strides in his overall approval rating. According to the Humphrey Institute Survey Bush has a 51% approval rating, with 47% disapproving of his performance. The Pioneer Press poll found 51% rated Bush as doing an 'excellent' or 'good' job, with 49% rating his performance as 'fair' or 'poor.' The Star Tribune poll found just 44% of Minnesotans approve of Bush's performance, while 49% disapprove.
- Bush still maintains a double-digit lead over Kerry as the candidate best able to handle the war against terrorism, according to the Humphrey Institute (53%-40%) and Pioneer Press (53%-39%) polls. Likewise, Bush is favored over Kerry in handling the situation in Iraq in the Humphrey Institute (50%-45%) and Pioneer Press (51%-40%) surveys. The polls were split in measuring which candidate Minnesotans believe would best handle the economy: in the Humphrey Institute Survey Kerry led 48% to 45%, while in the Pioneer Press poll Bush led 46% to 42%.

Wisconsin Political Map

- Polls also are mixed in the Badger state. The very latest polls of likely voters released by Zogby (conducted October 27-30), Mason-Dixon (taken October 27-29), and American Research Group (conducted October 25-27) show Kerry leading Bush: by 52%-44%, 48%-46%, and 48%-47%, respectively. Two slightly older polls of likely voters showed Bush in the lead. The Badger Poll (taken October 23-27) had Bush up 48%-45% and the Humphrey Institute Survey (conducted October 14-19) showed Bush leading 48%-47%.
- The Badger Poll also found that 50% of Wisconsinites want someone else in the White House and 46% want to re-elect Bush. It remains to be seen whether or not Kerry can sway the small percentage of voters who don't want Bush re-elected and who currently are not inclined to vote for him.

South Dakota Political Map

- Bush is running away with South Dakota, according to a new Argus Leader poll of likely voters (conducted October 19-21), leading Kerry by a 55% to 36% margin, with seven percent of likely voters undecided.
- Bush's favorable rating of 53% (31% unfavorable, 16% neutral) is at its highest level in four surveys since November 2003, according to the Argus Leader poll. Kerry has been unable to break the 33% mark in any of these four polls – he currently holds a 32% favorable rating, with 46% of respondents indicating their impression as unfavorable and 22% saying that they have a neutral perception of the candidate.
- The Argus Leader poll also shows that Bush gets healthy marks on his handling of the economy (53% approve, 36% disapprove), the situation in Iraq (53% approve, 41% disapprove), and homeland security and the war on terrorism (65% approve 24% disapprove).

THE RACE FOR SENATE

South Dakota: Thune vs. Daschle

- The most closely watched Senate race in the country is in South Dakota – and the race has tightened to the narrowest of margins according to new polls of likely voters by the Daily Republic and the Argus Leader. The Daily Republic poll (taken October 25-26) shows John Thune with a 49%-46% lead – the first lead he has amassed in the 10 polls sponsored by these two media organizations since August 2003. The Argus Leader poll taken a week earlier (October 19-21) had Daschle up by a scant 49% to 47% margin.

Wisconsin: Michels vs. Feingold

- Democratic incumbent Russ Feingold seems likely to return to Washington, D.C., for a third term according to the latest Badger Poll of likely voters (conducted October 23-27). Feingold leads his Republican opponent Tim Michels by a 51% to 36% margin, with two percent supporting other candidates. Those inclined to vote for Feingold have increased from 34% in June to 47% in September to 51% in the October Badger Poll as undecided voters have declined from 58% to 15% to nine percent, respectively. A new Zogby poll of likely voters (taken October 27-30) also shows Feingold with a healthy lead (57%-37%).

Iowa: Small vs. Grassley

- Popular Republican incumbent Charles Grassley is poised to return to Washington, D.C., representing Iowa for a fifth term with a big victory over Democrat Art Small. The latest KCCI-TV poll (conducted October 25-27) shows more than twice as many Iowans lending their support to Grassley (65%) than to Small (27%). Previously undecided voters are breaking for Small, whose support increased from 15% in the September KCCI-TV poll, but Grassley consistently gets the nod from about two-thirds of likely Iowa voters.
- The KCCI-TV poll found Grassley's favorable rating to be at 66% (27% unfavorable), while Small has failed to simply make an impression at all – 55% have no opinion of him, with 27% having a favorable impression and 18% an unfavorable rating.

THE RACE FOR US HOUSE

- In Iowa's closely watched 3rd Congressional District, a new KCCI-TV poll of likely voters (taken October 25-27) showed four-time Democratic incumbent Leonard Boswell leading Republican challenger Stan Thompson by a 52% to 43% margin. This race is a rematch of 2002 in which Boswell beat Thompson by 8.4 points.
- The race for South Dakota's lone U.S. House seat has taken a surprising turn. In a June 2004 special election Democrat Stephanie Herseth beat Republican Larry Diedrich by 1.2 points. But the latest Daily Republic poll of likely voters (conducted October 25-26) has Diedrich leading Herseth 48% to 46%. This marks the first time Diedrich has opened up a lead in eight statewide polls conducted since February 2004. These results are a bit surprising considering the poll also found Herseth maintaining a solid approval rating – 55% of South Dakotans rate her job performance as 'excellent' or 'pretty good,' with 41% rating it as 'fair' or 'poor.' Moreover, Herseth's 51% favorable rating (35% unfavorable) actually is higher than Diedrich's (46% favorable, 33% unfavorable), according to the Argus Leader poll (taken October 19-21).
- In Minnesota's 6th Congressional District, Republican incumbent Mark Kennedy currently holds a 53%-36% lead over Democratic challenger Patty Wetterling, according to a late-October KSTP poll of likely voters.

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.