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Kerry leads Bush by six points in California

President edges upward since last quarter, but likely voters remain sharply critical on direction of country, Iraq and economy; split views on terrorism

San Jose, Oct. 5, 2004 --U.S. Sen. John Kerry leads President George Bush 48-42% among California's likely voters, who give Bush poor marks on his handling of Iraq and the economy, according to the latest findings of the Survey and Policy Research Institute at San Jose State University.

Kerry's six-point advantage reflects an improvement for Bush since July, when the Democratic senator led the Republican president 50-39% in a head-to-head match-up among likely voters. But most of Bush's gain came from more conservative, white Democrats in the Central Valley and rural California, while Kerry has held his base in the more populous urban areas of the Bay Area and Los Angeles.

Overall, the state remains sharply divided by party and race, with Kerry winning 77% of the Democrats, 63% of Latinos, 61% of Blacks and 50% of the Asians, and Bush leading with 82% of Republicans and 47% of whites. Significantly, however, Kerry leads Bush 54-28% among independents. And while liberals favor Kerry 82-10% and conservatives back Bush 83-10%, the largest group of voters -- moderates -- are supporting Kerry 50-37%. About 7% of California likely voters say they are undecided.

"President Bush cut into Sen. Kerry's lead in California following the national party conventions and the swift boat charges," said Phil Trounstine, director of SPRI. "But Democrats and independents remain committed to Kerry by large margins and unless something dramatic alters the landscape, it's likely that there are too few undecided voters left in California for Bush to make up his deficit here."

These are some of the findings of SPRI's survey of 600 likely voters in California Sept. 27-Oct. 1. The poll was part of the California Consumer Confidence Survey of 1,006 adults. The margin of error among likely voters is +/- 4%.

Among likely voters, Bush leads Kerry by significant margins in Southern California outside of Los Angeles (54-36%), in the Central Valley (51-35%) and in the rural parts of the state (56-39%). But in Los Angeles, Kerry overpowers Bush 53-35%, in the Bay Area he holds a crushing lead of 64-28% and in the Central Coast region Kerry leads 59-34%.

Bush's problem in California stems from voters' disapproval of the president's handling of key components of his job and their sense that the country is going in the wrong direction.

While 77% of those supporting Bush say they're voting for him and 18% say they're voting against Kerry, just 38% of Kerry supporters are voting for him while 60% are voting against Bush.

"Commitment to Bush among his supporters is vastly stronger than the level of enthusiasm for Kerry among his backers," Trounstine said. "Antipathy toward Bush, not affection for Kerry, is driving the vote in California."

This is evident in the president's job ratings: just 42% approve his handling of his job as president compared to 50% who disapprove. On the economy his approval rating is 42-52% and on his handling of Iraq it is 37-57%.

Only on his handling of terrorism does Bush win positive marks -- 50% approval and 44% disapproval, including approval from 83% of Republicans, 38% of independents and 26% of Democrats.

However, only 33% of the likely voters say the war in Iraq has made the U.S. safer, compared to 42% who say the war has made the U.S. less safe and 21% who say the war has had no effect on safety in the U.S.

And only 39% say all in all it was worth going to war in Iraq, compared to 54% who say it was not worth it.

"The president's sharply different approval ratings on terrorism and Iraq make it clear why Bush has sought to fuse the two issues in the public's mind and why Kerry has sought to decouple them," Trounstine said.

Overall, just 42% of California likely voters say the country is moving in the right direction compared to 51% who say it's seriously off on the wrong track. Moreover, 53% of California's likely voters -- 76% of Democrats, 18% of Republicans and 67% of independents -- say they generally do not believe that what President Bush tells the American people is true.

	July		October	
	Bush %	Kerry %	Bush %	Kerry %
California	39	50	42	48
Democrats	8	82	12	77
Republicans	78	12	82	13
Independents	27	50	28	54
Bay Area	27	61	28	64
Los Angeles	29	53	35	53
Other SoCal	50	37	54	36
Central Valley	44	48	51	35
Central Coast	41	56	34	59
Rural Cal*	50	50	56	39
Men	42	47	42	45
Women	36	52	42	50
Black*	22	63	17	61
White	42	47	47	45
Asian	33	44	33	50
Latino	29	59	25	63

*very small subsamples

	Right track %	Wrong track %	Approve Bush %	Disapprove Bush %
California	42	51	42	50
Democrats	21	74	16	77
Republicans	71	22	80	14
Independents	38	52	33	57
Bay Area	31	63	27	68
Los Angeles	32	61	34	60
Other SoCal	57	36	55	35
Central Valley	46	48	59	36
Central Coast	43	48	32	56
Rural Cal*	50	44	50	39
Men	43	52	41	50
Women	41	51	44	50
Black*	55	40	33	60
White	43	50	46	49
Asian	27	59	33	50
Latino	34	58	29	54

*very small sub-samples

The Survey and Policy Research Institute interviewed a random sample of 600 likely voters, Sept. 27-Oct. 1 in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. The margin of error among likely voters is +/- 4% and is greater among smaller sub-samples. Likely voters are defined as adults who are certain they are registered to vote in their precinct and who vote always or most of the time.