

# THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY  
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS  
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

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**ALTHOUGH KERRY SEEN AS  
DEBATE WINNER, HIS LEAD  
OVER BUSH IN CALIFORNIA DID  
NOT CHANGE.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

While Californians were more likely to view John Kerry as having outperformed George W. Bush in the first presidential debate, the division of vote preferences were not affected in a significant way.

In the week immediately prior to last Thursday's debate, the *Field Poll* found the preference gap between the two candidates had narrowed to eight points, 49% for Kerry and 41% for Bush. After the debate, Kerry's lead stands at nine points – 49% for Kerry and 40% for Bush, statistically unchanged from its pre-debate level.

*The Field Poll* interviewed a statewide sample of 549 likely voters September 24-29 before the debate. A new fresh sample of 586 likely voters was interviewed following the debate September 30 – October 3.

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**Table 1**  
**Trend of voter preferences for President**  
**(among California likely voters)**

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	<b><u>Kerry- Edwards</u></b>	<b><u>Bush- Cheney</u></b>	<b><u>Other/ Undecided</u></b>
Sept. 30-Oct. 3 ( <i>post-debate</i> )	49%	40	11
Sept. 24-29 ( <i>pre-debate</i> )	49%	41	10
August 2004	53%	41	6
May 2004	55%	40	5
February 2004*	53%	41	6
January 2004*	39%	48	13

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\* January and February measures asked of all registered voters.

Note: prior measures did not include names of the Vice Presidential candidates.

### **Debate impressions**

California voters who saw the debate were asked to rate each candidate on seven different aspects of their debate performance. On all seven, Kerry outscored Bush, in some cases by very large margins.

Asked which candidate made the better overall impression, California voters choose Kerry over Bush, 70% to 18%. Kerry was also seen as being more self-confident than Bush 54% to 28%. Just 31% believed Bush was better able to defend himself, compared to 56% for Kerry.

On who had a more appealing personality, it was Kerry 52% and Bush 36%. Kerry even outshone Bush on which candidate seemed more presidential – 50% to 36%. Kerry also led the President 50% to 38% on who had the better grasp of the issues.

In one other area Kerry's edge over Bush was narrow. The Senator was seen as appearing to be more sincere than Bush 45% to 37%.

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**Table 2**  
**Voter impressions of the debate performance of each man**  
**(among likely voters who saw or heard about the debate)**

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<b><u>Which man...</u></b>	<b><u>Kerry</u></b>	<b><u>Bush</u></b>	<b><u>Both/neither/ No opinion</u></b>
Made the better overall impression	70%	18	12
Was better able to defend himself and his positions	56%	31	13
Seemed more self-confident	54%	28	18
Had a more appealing personality	52%	36	12
Was more presidential	50%	36	14
Had a better grasp of the issues	50%	38	12
Seemed to be more sincere	45%	37	18

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### **Iraq and terrorist threat**

In the post-debate poll voters were asked which man would be more likely to bring a satisfactory resolution to the war in Iraq and who would do a better job in reducing the terrorist threat.

On the Iraq question Kerry was given the edge over Bush 49% to 42%. However, with regard to reducing the terrorist threat Bush had a slight edge over Kerry 47% to 40%.

**Table 3**  
**Assessments of Bush and Kerry regarding**  
**the war in Iraq and the terrorist threat**  
**(among California likely voters)**

	<u>Kerry</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<u>More likely to bring a satisfactory resolution to war in Iraq</u>				
Early October 2004	49%	42	5	4
August 2004	47%	38	9	5
<u>Would do a better job reducing the terrorist threat</u>				
Early October 2004	40%	47	5	8
August 2004	NA	NA	NA	NA

NA: Not asked in August

**Doubts/reservations about Bush and Kerry**

Majorities of California voters say they have doubts and reservations about each candidate – 61% say this about Bush and 56% feel this way about Kerry. Opinions of the two candidates divide largely on a partisan basis, with Democrats generally viewing Kerry as a leader you can trust, and Republicans feeling the same way about Bush.

Among non-partisans/others, while 57% say they have doubts and reservations about Kerry, greater than seven in ten (71%) of this group say this about Bush.

**Table 4**  
**Do you think Bush/Kerry is a leader you can trust**  
**or do you have some doubts and reservations**  
**(among California likely voters)**

	<u>Have doubts/ reservations</u>	<u>Leader you can trust</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<u>Bush –</u> Early October	<u>61%</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>1</u>
August	61%	38	1
Democrats	87%	13	*
Republicans	24%	76	*
Non-partisans/others	71%	27	2
<u>Kerry –</u> Early October	<u>56%</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>3</u>
August	58%	37	5
Democrats	31%	66	3
Republicans	86%	12	2
Non-partisans/others	57%	38	5

\* Less than 1/2 of 1%

**Strength of support**

Kerry's 49% overall post-debate support in California subdivides between 33% who support him strongly and 16% who support him somewhat. Bush's 40% post-debate support includes 30% who support him strongly and 10% who say their support is not strong.

A somewhat larger proportion of Republicans (70%) say their support for the President is strong compared to the proportion of Democrats (58%) who strongly support Kerry. However, greater than twice as many non-partisans in this state support Kerry strongly (32%) as support Bush strongly (14%).

	<u>Support Kerry</u>		<u>Support Bush</u>		<u>Other/</u>
	<u>Strongly</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Strongly</u>	<u>undecided</u>
Total voters	33%	16	10	30	10
Democrats	58%	22	4	6	10
Republicans	3%	5	14	70	8
Non-partisans/others	32%	24	13	14	17

**For or against vote**

When asked to state whether their preference is more a vote for their man or a vote against his opponent, 55% of Kerry voters admit their preference is a vote against the President, while 40% say it is more a vote for the Senator. By contrast, 71% of Bush voters say their vote is based more on their support of the President than a vote against Kerry (26%). The proportion of Kerry voters who say their preference is more a pro-Kerry than anti-Bush vote has increased since May.

	<u>Kerry voters</u>		<u>Bush voters</u>	
	<u>For Kerry</u>	<u>Against Bush</u>	<u>For Bush</u>	<u>Against Kerry</u>
Early October	40%	55	71%	26
August	38%	58	79%	17
May	33%	65	71%	25

*(Differences between 100% and the sum of each candidate's percentages in each poll equals the proportion with no opinion.)*

## Candidate images

Voters in this state continue to view Bush more unfavorably than favorably by a 52% to 45% margin. On the other hand, Kerry is viewed more positively than negatively 51% to 39%.

Democratic Vice Presidential candidate John Edwards is viewed much more favorably than incumbent Vice President Dick Cheney. Voters in this state currently view Edwards favorably by a nearly two to one margin, while Cheney is viewed unfavorably five to four.

**Table 7**  
**Images of the Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates**  
**(among California likely voters)**

	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<u>John Kerry</u>			
Early October (post-debate)	51%	39	10
Late September (pre-debate)	51%	42	7
August	58%	35	7
May	48%	40	12
<u>George Bush</u>			
Early October (post-debate)	45%	52	3
Late September (pre-debate)	44%	52	4
August	42%	53	5
May	44%	53	3
<u>John Edwards</u>			
Late September (pre-debate)	54%	28	18
August	57%	27	16
<u>Dick Cheney</u>			
Late September (pre-debate)	39%	51	10
August	40%	52	8

*Note: Edwards and Cheney were not measured in early October or May.*

## Kerry vs. Bush – voter subgroups

Kerry's nine-point preference lead over Bush in this state is derived from big leads over the President from voters in the state's two major metropolitan areas – Los Angeles County (55% to 34%) and the San Francisco Bay Area (67% to 22%). Bush gets his strongest support from Southern California voters living outside of Los Angeles County (54% Bush and 38% Kerry), and leads Kerry by a narrow margin among voters in the Central Valley (45% to 38%). Voters in the Northern California areas outside the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area are about evenly divided (45% Kerry vs. 49% Bush).

Women support Kerry over Bush 51% to 39%. Men also favor Kerry but by a narrower margin, 48% to 41%.

White non-Hispanic voters prefer Bush by a 48% to 44% margin. By contrast, six in ten Latino voters (59%) and 66% of voters of other racial or ethnic groups favor Kerry.

Among young voters age 18-29, 61% favor Kerry while just 26% support Bush. However, voters 65 and over prefer Bush 51% to 39%.

Protestants divide about two to one in favor of Bush. On the other hand, Catholics favor Kerry 47% to 37%. Those affiliated with other religions and those who have no religious preference support Kerry very strongly.

**Table 8**  
**Post-debate Presidential preferences by region and party**  
**(among California likely voters)**

	<u>Kerry- Edwards</u>	<u>Bush- Cheney</u>	<u>Others/ undecided</u>
Total Statewide	49%	40	10
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	55%	34	11
Other Southern California	38%	54	8
Central Valley	38%	45	17
San Francisco Bay Area	67%	22	11
Other Northern California*	45%	49	6
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	80%	10	10
Republicans	8%	84	8
Non-partisan/other	56%	27	17
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	48%	41	11
Female	51%	39	10
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	44%	48	8
Latino*	59%	22	19
Other*	66%	23	11
<u>Age</u>			
18-29	61%	26	13
30-39	50%	46	4
40-49	46%	44	10
50-64	52%	34	14
65 or older	39%	51	10
<u>Religion</u>			
Protestant	34%	60	6
Born Again	28%	63	9
Catholic	47%	37	16
Other*	63%	25	12
No preference*	77%	16	7

\* Relatively small sample.

### **Who voters think will win**

Despite the fact that Kerry leads Bush in voter preferences in this state, a majority think Bush will ultimately win the Presidential election when the votes across the country are counted. One-half (50%) of California voters think Bush will be the winner, while just 28% think it will be Kerry. This Bush advantage, however, is down from an almost three to one (59% to 21%) expectation of a Bush victory found immediately before the debate.

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**Table 9**  
**Regardless of who you support,**  
**who do you think will win the presidential election**  
**(among California likely voters)**

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	<b><u>Bush</u></b>	<b><u>Kerry</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
Early October (post-debate)	50%	28	22
Late September (pre-debate)	59%	21	20
August	40%	38	22

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## **Information About The Survey**

### **Sample Details**

The results in this report are based on telephone interviews conducted in English and Spanish among random samples of Californians considered likely to vote in the November election. Interviewing was conducted in two waves – the first was completed September 24-29, 2004 among 549 likely voters, while the second was completed September 30-October 3, 2004 among 586 likely voters.

Sampling for each wave was carried out using a random digit dial methodology, which gives all voters including those whose phone number is listed or unlisted, an equal chance of being contacted. Up to four attempts were made to reach a randomly selected voter at each number dialed. After the completion of interviewing, the overall registered voter samples from each survey wave was weighted to *Field Poll* estimates of the characteristics of state's total registered voter population.

According to statistical theory, the overall results from each wave have a sampling error of +/- 4.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. There are other possible sources of error in any survey in addition to sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sequencing or through omission or errors in sampling, interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.

### **Questions Asked**

If the election for President were being held today, for whom would you vote – the Democratic ticket of John Kerry and John Edwards, or the Republican ticket of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, or someone else?

(IF BUSH OR KERRY) Do you support (George W. Bush) (John Kerry) strongly or somewhat? Is your preference more a vote for (George W. Bush) (John Kerry) or more a vote against (John Kerry) (George W. Bush)?

Apart from how you intend to vote, who do you think is likely to win the Presidential election in November – Bush or Kerry?

Is your opinion of (George W. Bush) (John Kerry) (John Edwards) (Dick Cheney) favorable or unfavorable?  
(READ IN RANDOM ORDER)

Did you happen to watch or listen to any of the first Presidential debate between George W. Bush and John Kerry on Thursday night or not?

Since the Thursday Presidential debate, have you seen, read or heard any news reports or articles written about the debate?

(IF YES TO EITHER) From what you saw or heard either during or after the debate, which man do you think made the better overall impression in the debate – Bush or Kerry? From what you saw or heard during or after the debate, which man, Bush or Kerry... (SEE RELEASE FOR ITEMS)? (CATEGORIES READ IN RANDOM ORDER)

Which presidential candidate – George Bush or John Kerry – do you think would be more likely to bring about a satisfactory resolution to the war in Iraq?

Which presidential candidate – George Bush or John Kerry – do you think would do a better job reducing the terrorist threat?

Do you think George W. Bush is a leader you can trust or do you have some doubts and reservations?

Do you think John Kerry is a leader you can trust or do you have some doubts and reservations?