

**AARP Pre-Debate
Missouri and National Survey
Presidential Town Hall Debate
St. Louis, Missouri
October 8, 2004**

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**Report prepared by
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AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to making life better for people 50 and over. We provide information and resources; engage in legislative, regulatory and legal advocacy; assist members in serving their communities; and offer a wide range of unique benefits, special products, and services for our members. These include *AARP The Magazine*, published bimonthly; *AARP Bulletin*, our monthly newspaper; *AARP Segunda Juventud*, our quarterly newspaper in Spanish; *NRTA Live & Learn*, our quarterly newsletter for 50+ educators; and our Web site, www.aarp.org We have staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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AARP Pre-Debate Missouri and National Survey Presidential Town Hall Debate St. Louis, Missouri, October 8, 2004

In late-September, and early October, 2004, AARP commissioned national and Missouri telephone surveys of registered voters, ages 50 and over. A total of 1,001 people responded to the national survey and 500 responded to the Missouri state survey. These surveys gave AARP an opportunity to present election issues important to the 50+ population and issues that may affect their voting decisions. AARP also wanted to learn more about how the 50+ population in Missouri and nationally feels about domestic policy issues that they want the presidential candidates to address in the St. Louis debate.

This report will highlight the Missouri state survey data, with comparisons to data from the national survey, which was conducted just before the vice-presidential debate in Cleveland, Ohio, on October 5th. Given the fact that the presidential town hall debate in St. Louis was held only three days after the vice-presidential debate, it was not possible to conduct a new national survey. Despite this fact, the national survey conducted for the vice-presidential debate can serve as a comparative benchmark by which to judge the Missouri data, as well. The survey methodology is described at the end of this report, and a tabulated questionnaire is appended.

AARP is a non-partisan organization. It does not contribute to political campaigns nor does it endorse or oppose any candidates for public office.

Key Findings

Older voters are following the campaigns and they vote:

- Older Americans not only register to vote in proportionately larger numbers than younger voters; they also turn out to vote in proportionately larger numbers. This magnifies their political “clout” compared to younger age groups.
- Nine in 10 older Americans contacted for the national survey and 94 percent in Missouri said they are registered voters, but only registered voters were actually interviewed. Ninety-three percent of older Missouri registered voters (91 percent nationally) say they are certain to vote in November; 94 percent in Missouri and 93 percent nationally say they voted in 2000.
- 88 percent of older voters in Missouri and 85 percent nationally say they are following the 2004 presidential race at least somewhat closely (53% “very closely” in Missouri, compared to 50% nationally).
- Four in five older voters both in Missouri and nationally say they have definitely decided how they will vote in November; about one in five both in Missouri (18%) and nationally (21%) say they have not yet decided. Compared to decided

voters, older undecided voters are disproportionately female, lower income, less educated, less politically engaged, and more likely to be Independents.

The focus of this series of surveys is on the electoral process and the debates, not on the campaigns generally and on the candidates.

- 76 percent of older voters, both in Missouri and nationally, say they watched at least one of the presidential/vice-presidential debates in 2000. Eight in 10 (80%) older voters in Missouri (70% nationally) say they are at least somewhat likely to watch the town hall debate between the presidential candidates in St. Louis, Missouri, on October 8, 2004.
- Two-thirds (66%) of older voters in Missouri and three-quarters (75%) nationally say the debates are at least somewhat important in the election of the president (31% of older Missourians say they are very important, compared to 38% nationally).

Which way in the country heading? A majority of older voters (51% in Missouri and 56% nationally) believe things in this country have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track; 34 percent of Missouri voters (and 31% nationally) believe things in this country are going in the right direction today.

Voting orientations: issues, candidate qualities, or party? A majority of older voters both in Missouri (54%) and nationally (57%) say they vote for a presidential candidate more in terms of positions on one or two key issues, rather than personal qualities of the candidates (34% in Missouri and 30% nationally), or political party (8% in Missouri and 7% nationally).

Which is more important: foreign policy issues or domestic policy issues? More than one-third (34%) of older Missouri voters and 39% nationally consider domestic issues such as jobs and the economy and health care to be more important than foreign policy issues such as the war in Iraq and the war on terrorism. (26% in Missouri, 24% nationally). More than one-third (38% in Missouri, 35% nationally) consider these issues to be equally important.

Issues of greatest importance in voting for president in 2004: There is one top issue on the minds of voters nationally that will affect their vote for president in November: it is the war in Iraq (32%), followed by the economy and jobs (18%) and terrorism/homeland security (10%). In Missouri, the war in Iraq is the leading issue (33%), followed by the economy and jobs (16%) and terrorism and homeland security (14%).

Domestic issues of greatest importance: Survey respondents were also asked the most important domestic issues that they want to see addressed in the debates by the presidential and vice-presidential candidates. The number one domestic issue for older voters is jobs and the economy, which is equally important in Missouri (63%) and nationally (64%). The second biggest issue for older voters in the debates is health care, which is also an equally important issue in Missouri (48%) and nationally (48%). The third most important issue for older voters is senior issues (such as Social Security and Medicare), which again is equally important in Missouri (23%) and nationally (23%).

Other domestic issues mentioned are terrorism and homeland security (17% in Missouri and nationally), and education (14% in Missouri and 16% nationally).

Survey respondents were also asked which one question about domestic issues they would ask the vice-presidential candidates if they had the chance to do so. Responses were widely scattered, but far and away the top topic was jobs and the economy (20% in Missouri and 16% nationally).

The war in Iraq is an issue for more voters 65 and older than it is for voters 50-64, in Missouri and nationally. Conversely, jobs and the economy is the domestic political issue that is more salient to voters ages 50-64 both in Missouri (69%) and nationally (68%) than it is for voters age 65 or older (57% in Missouri and 59% nationally). Health care is another issue that is more salient for voters ages 50-64 in Missouri (54%) and nationally (53%) than it is for voters ages 65 and up (42% both in Missouri and nationally). Senior issues, such as Social Security and Medicare, are more salient nationally for voters ages 65 and up (27%) than it is for voters ages 50-64 (21% nationally). In Missouri, there are no significant differences between those ages 50-64 (24%) and those ages 65 and older (22%) in the saliency of senior issues.

Partisanship:

Our survey findings confirm the divisive nature of this presidential election. There are sharp partisan differences (see Table, below):

- Nationally, Republicans see the country as heading in the right direction (62%); Democrats (84%) and Independents (57%) see the country as seriously having gotten off on the wrong track. In Missouri, the partisan differences are also sharp: More Republicans (69%) see the country as heading in the right direction; Democrats (83%) and Independents (58%) see the country as seriously having gotten off on the wrong track.
- More Republicans (46% in Missouri and 42% nationally) say they will vote for president this year more in terms of the candidates' personal qualities than will Democrats (23% in Missouri and 19% nationally) and Independents (33% in Missouri and 31% nationally). More Democrats (59% in Missouri and 62% nationally) and Independents (61% both in Missouri and nationally) than Republicans (45% in Missouri and 48% nationally) say they will cast their presidential vote based on positions on one or two key issues.
- More Republicans (42% in Missouri and 38% nationally) than Democrats (16% in Missouri and 13% nationally) and Independents (20% in Missouri and 27% nationally) say foreign policy issues are more important than domestic policy issues in voting for president this November. More Democrats (52% in Missouri and 50% nationally) and Independents (38% in Missouri and 36% nationally) than Republicans (16% in Missouri and 28% nationally) say domestic policy issues are more important. More than four in 10 older Republicans (42%) in Missouri and one-third nationally, and three in 10 older Missouri Democrats (36% nationally) and Independents (41% in Missouri and 37% nationally), say these two types of issues are equally important.

Methodology

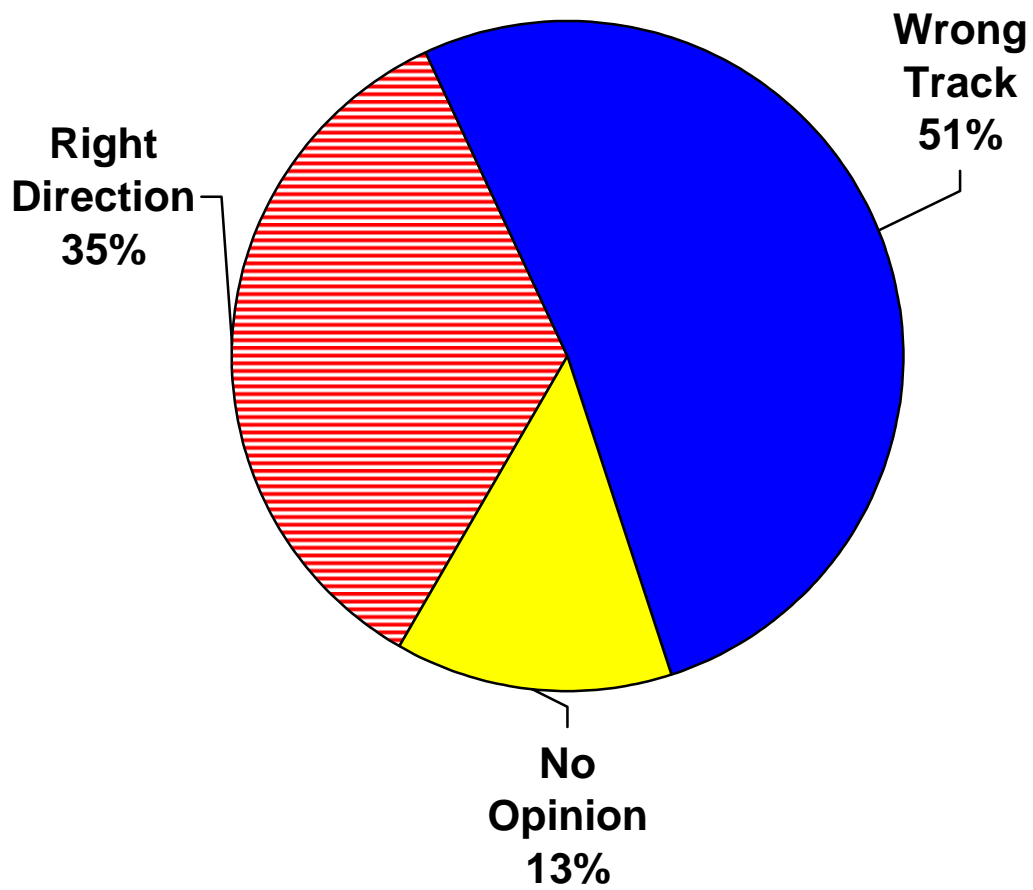
AARP commissioned Woelfel Research, Inc., a national survey research firm, to conduct a random digit dial (RDD) telephone survey of registered voters, age 50+ nationally (n=1,001) and a separate survey of 500 registered voters ages 50+ in the state of Missouri. Interviews in the national survey were conducted between September 22-30, 2004, and the Missouri survey was conducted between September 25 and October 3, 2004. The national survey has a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples of this size, the results obtained in the sample would fall in a range of 3 percentage points of what would have been obtained if every person 50+ in the U.S. had been surveyed. The Missouri survey has a sampling error rate of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

For presentation purposes, percentage points have been rounded off to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages in a given table column may total slightly higher or lower than 100%. For questions that permit multiple responses, columns may total to significantly more than 100%, depending on the number of different responses offered by each respondent. Similarly, when only selected responses are shown, percentages may total less than 100%.

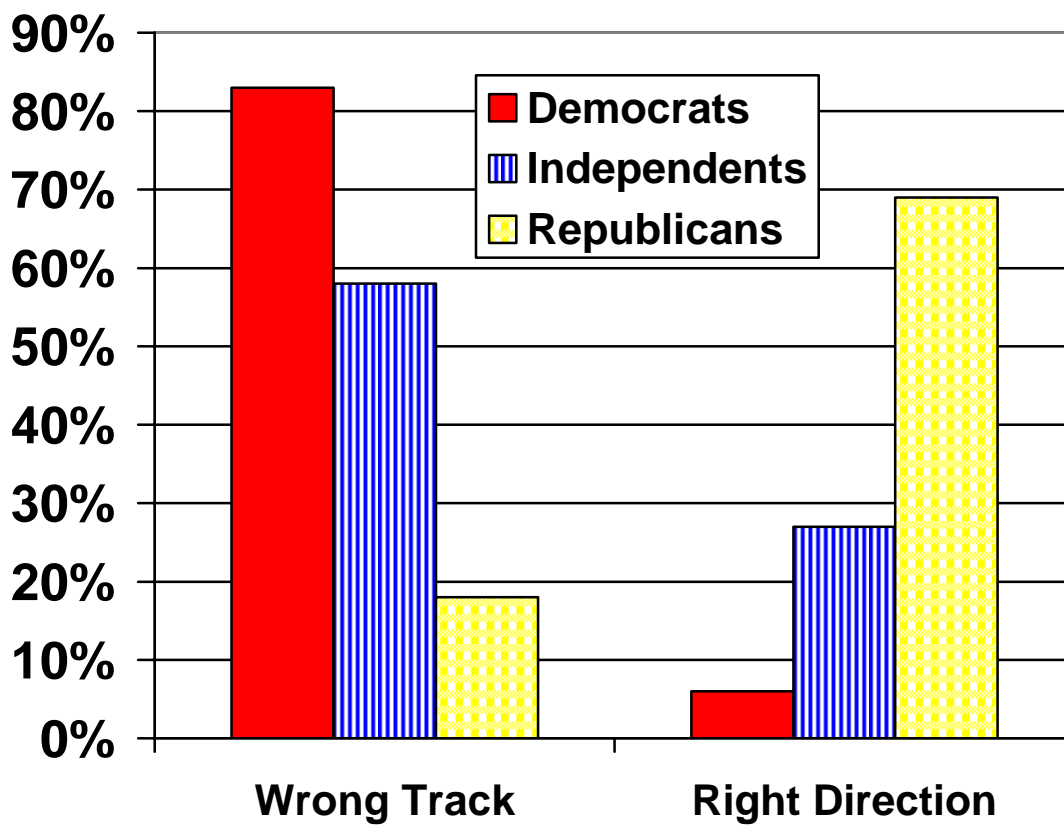
**Partisan Differences in Responses to Key Issues
(Missouri data)**

	Party ID			
	Rep	Dem	Ind	Total
Country heading in: Right Direction	69%	7%	27%	34%
Wrong Track	18%	83%	58%	51%
Don't know	13%	9%	14%	13%
<hr/>				
Vote in terms of: Candidates personal qualities	46%	23%	33%	34%
Position on one or two key issues	45%	59%	61%	54%
Political party	6%	14%	2%	8%
<hr/>				
Foreign policy issues more important	42%	16%	20%	26%
Domestic policy issues more important	16%	52%	38%	34%
Both foreign and domestic policy issues equally	42%	30%	41%	38%
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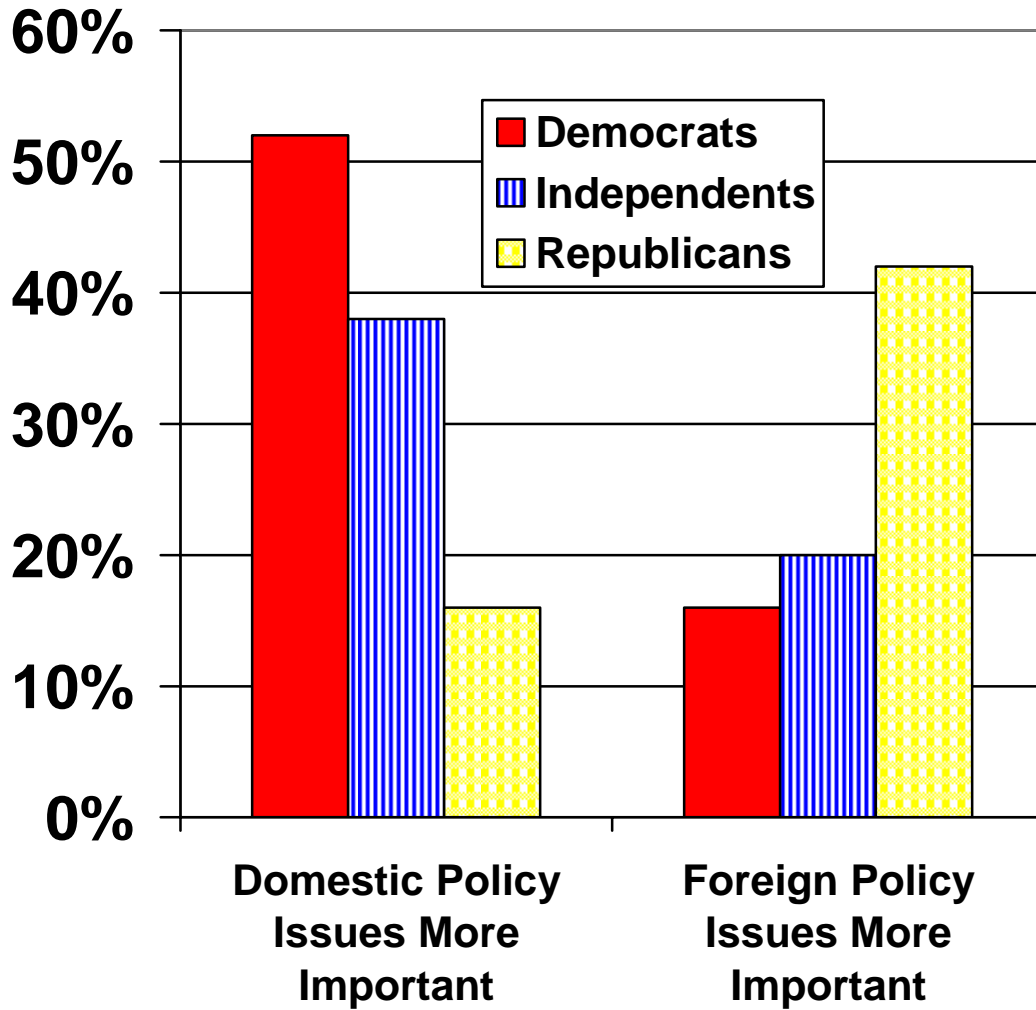
**Direction Country is Headed
(Missouri data)**



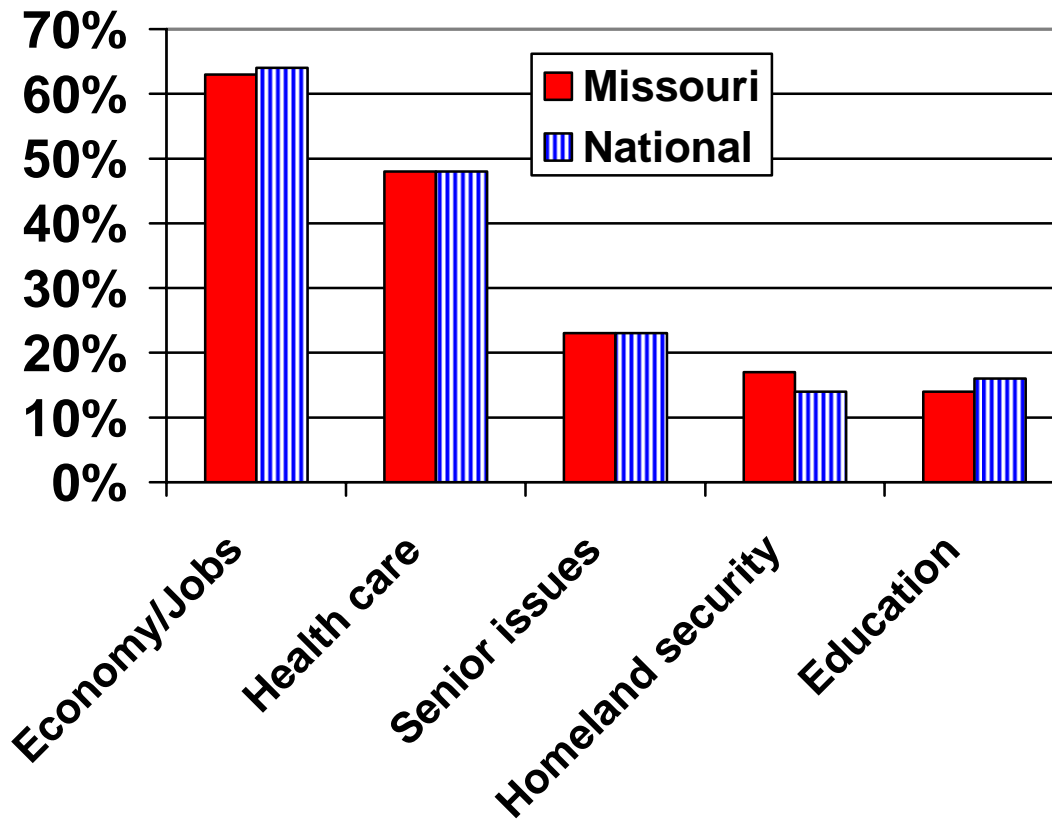
**Direction the Country is headed by Party Identification
(Missouri data)**



**The Relative Importance of Domestic Policy Issues
and Foreign Policy Issues by Party Identification
(Missouri data)**



Most Important Domestic Issues Candidates Should Address



questionnaire for the Pre-Debate Missouri and National Surveys

1. Do you feel things in this country are going in the right direction today or do you feel that things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?

Missouri	National	
34%	31%	Right direction
51%	56%	Wrong track
13%	12%	(DO NOT READ) Don't know
2%	1%	(DO NOT READ) Refused

2. Are you registered to vote at your current address?

100%	Yes	CONTINUE
--	No	TERMINATE

3. I'd like you to rate the chances that you will vote in the presidential election in November: Are you absolutely certain to vote, will you probably vote, are the chances 50-50 or less than that?

Missouri	National		
93%	91%	Certain to vote	CONTINUE
5%	5%	Probably vote	CONTINUE
2%	3%	Chances 50/50	CONTINUE
--	2%	Less than 50/50	CONTINUE
--	--	Don't think will vote (vol.)	TERMINATE

4. Did you vote in the 2000 presidential election?

Missouri	National	
94%	93%	Yes
6%	6%	No
1%	--	Don't know

5. Did you watch any of the presidential/vice presidential debates in 2000?

Missouri	National		
76%	76%	Yes	CONTINUE
15%	16%	No	SKIP TO Q. 6
9%	7%	DK	

5a. Did you watch all of them or just some of them?

Missouri	National	
--	--	None of them
64%	66%	Some of them
31%	30%	All of them
5%	3%	DK

6. How closely are you following the 2004 presidential race -- very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely or not closely at all?

Missouri	National	
53%	50%	Very closely
36%	35%	Somewhat closely
9%	10%	Not too closely
2%	5%	Not closely at all
--	1%	No opinion

7. Have you decided definitely which presidential candidate you will vote for or are you still undecided at this point in the campaign?

Missouri	National	
81%	79%	Definitely decided
18%	21%	Undecided

8. How likely are you to watch the upcoming presidential town hall debate in St. Louis on October 8th: Are you very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, or not at all likely?

Missouri	National	
56%	61%	Very likely
24%	24%	Somewhat likely
7%	6%	Not too likely
11%	8%	Not at all likely
2%	1%	Don't know

9. All things considered, how important do you think the presidential debates are to the election of the president?

Missouri	National	
31%	38%	Very important
35%	37%	Somewhat important
18%	14%	Not too important
11%	8%	Not at all important
5%	3%	DK

10. What will be the most important political issue in your vote for president this November?

(RECORD VERBATIM. PROBE FOR CLARITY. ACCEPT ONE ONLY)

- 1 Answer given (SPECIFY) _____
- 2 None
- D (DO NOT READ) Don't know
- R (DO NOT READ) Refused

10A. What is more important to you, foreign policy issues, such as the war in Iraq and the war on terrorism, or domestic policy issues, such as jobs and the economy and health care?

Missouri	National	
26%	24%	Foreign policy issues
34%	39%	Domestic policy issues
38%	35%	Both are equally important
2%	1%	No opinion

11. What are the most important domestic issues you want to see addressed by the presidential and vice-presidential candidates?

(RECORD VERBATIM. PROBE FOR CLARITY. ACCEPT UP TO 3; ask and code as the most important, the next most important, and the third most important?)

Missouri	National	
2%	2%	Civil liberties
14%	16%	Education
48%	48%	Health care
17%	14%	Homeland security
1%	1%	Importation of prescription drugs from Canada or other countries
1%	--	Long term care issues
7%	8%	Medicare/Medicare premium increases
6%	4%	Prescription drug prices
11%	7%	Social issues such as abortion and gay marriage
13%	14%	Social Security
10%	10%	Taxes
63%	64%	The economy and jobs
3%	5%	The environment
5%	5%	The federal government deficit
--	2%	Other
10%	10%	DK

12. If you could ask just one question of the presidential candidates concerning domestic issues in the upcoming town hall debate in St. Louis on October 8th, what would it be?

(RECORD VERBATIM. PROBE FOR CLARITY. ACCEPT ONE ONLY)

13. Which of the following matters most when you vote for a candidate for president this year - the candidate's political party, the candidate's position on key issues, or the personal qualities of the candidate?

Missouri	National	
8%	7%	Political party
54%	57%	Position on one or two key issues (PROBE: Which issues?)
34%	30%	Personal qualities (PROBE: Which qualities?)
2%	2%	None of these (vol.)
3%	4%	Don't know (vol.)

14. Do you think the tone of the presidential candidates' campaigns this year thus far is more positive, more negative, or about the same as presidential candidates' campaigns in the past?

Missouri	National	
6%	6%	More positive
40%	45%	More negative
50%	43%	About the same
4%	5%	DK/Refused

**15. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as...?
(READ LIST. ENTER ONE ONLY)**

Missouri	National	
31%	30%	A Republican
30%	35%	A Democrat
31%	27%	An Independent
3%	3%	(Do not read) Other
2%	3%	(Do not read) Don't know
3%	2%	(Do not read) Refused

(SCRAMBLE CODES 1-3)

**16. Generally speaking, would you characterize your political views as being...?
(READ LIST. ENTER ONE ONLY)**

Missouri	National	
37%	36%	Conservative
42%	39%	Moderate
14%	16%	Liberal
2%	2%	(Do not read) None of the Above
4%	6%	(Do not read) Don't know
2%	1%	(Do not read) Refused

Demographic questions:

D1. What is your age as of your last birthday? [RECORD IN YEARS]

Missouri	National	Age
33%	39%	50-59
14%	17%	60-64
32%	25%	65-74
17%	17%	75+
3%	3%	Refused
Avg. age = 65	Avg. age = 64	

D2. What is your marital status? Are you currently....

Missouri	National	
63%	61%	Married,
11%	13%	Divorced,
1%	2%	Separated,
19%	17%	Widowed,
4%	6%	Or have you never been married?
--	1%	Living with partner [DO NOT READ]
--	--	Don't know [DO NOT READ]
1%	1%	Refused [DO NOT READ]

[ASK ONLY IF RESPONDENT IS 50 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER]

D3. Are you [OR YOUR SPOUSE IF MARRIED] a member of A-A-R-P formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons? [IF NOT "MARRIED" ASK, "Are you a member..."]

Missouri	National	
50%	51%	Yes
48%	48%	No
1%	1%	Don't know [DO NOT READ]
1%	--	Refused [DO NOT READ]

D4. What is the highest level of education you have completed? [READ LIST]

Missouri	National	
9%	9%	Less than high school
32%	28%	High school graduate or equivalent
27%	24%	Some college or technical training beyond high school
16%	21%	College graduate
14%	18%	Or, Post-graduate or professional degree
1%	1%	Don't know [DO NOT READ]
1%	1%	Refused [DO NOT READ]

D5. Which of the following best describes your current employment status? Are you currently....[READ LIST]

Missouri	National	
24%	27%	Employed full-time
8%	11%	Employed part-time
53%	48%	Retired and not working
1%	2%	Unemployed and looking for work
5%	4%	Homemaker
5%	5%	Disabled
--	--	Student
3%	3%	Or something else [Specify: _____]
--	--	Don't Know [DO NOT READ]
1%	1%	Refused [DO NOT READ]

D6. Would you say that you always vote in presidential elections, usually vote, sometimes vote, rarely vote, or never vote)

Missouri	National	
83%	80%	Always
12%	14%	Usually
2%	4%	Sometimes
2%	2%	Rarely
--	--	Never
1%	1%	Refused [DO NOT READ]

D7. For statistical purposes only, please stop me when I get to the category that includes your household's income before taxes in 2003. Was it... [READ LIST]

Missouri	National	
5%	6%	Less than \$10,000
9%	9%	\$10,000 but less than \$20,000
14%	11%	\$20,000 but less than \$30,000
10%	12%	\$30,000 but less than \$40,000
8%	9%	\$40,000 but less than \$50,000
13%	13%	\$50,000 but less than \$75,000
9%	7%	\$75,000 but less than \$100,000
7%	10%	\$100,000 or more
3%	3%	Don't know [DO NOT READ]
22%	19%	Refused [DO NOT READ]

D8. Are you Spanish, Latino, or Hispanic?

Missouri	National	
1%	3%	Yes
98%	36%	No
--	--	Don't Know
2%	1%	Refused

D9. Which of the following groups best describes your race? [READ LIST]

Missouri	National	
90%	87%	White
6%	8%	Black or African-American
--	1%	Asian
--	--	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
1%	1%	American Indian or Alaska Native
1%	2%	Other
--	--	Don't know
1%	1%	Refused

D10. [RECORD STATE]

D11. What is your gender?

Missouri	National	
45%	45%	Male
55%	55%	Female

D12. Finally, what is your 5-digit zip code?

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING! YOUR OPINION COUNTS!