

**AARP Pre-First-Debate  
National Survey  
Miami, September 30, 2004**



September 2004



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**Report prepared by  
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## **AARP Pre-First-Debate National Survey Miami, September 30, 2004**

In mid-September, 2004, AARP commissioned national and Florida telephone surveys of registered voters, ages 50 and over. A total of 1,003 people responded to the national survey and 504 responded to the Florida 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 Florida feels about foreign policy issues such as the war in Iraq and terrorism, since this is the topic for the first debate between the two major party presidential candidates.

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 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 two surveys said they are registered voters, but only registered voters were actually interviewed. Nine in 10 older registered voters interviewed say they are certain to vote in November; 92 percent say they voted in 2000.
- 82 percent say they are following the 2004 presidential race at least somewhat closely (43% “very closely”).
- Almost four in five (79%) say they have definitely decided how they will vote in November; 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.

- Four out of five watched at least one of the presidential/vice presidential debates in 2000, and 83 percent say they are at least somewhat likely to watch the first presidential debate this year.
- 71 percent say the debates are at least somewhat important in the election of the president (32% say they are very important)

The war in Iraq is expected to be the major issue discussed by the candidates in the first presidential debate in Miami on September 30<sup>th</sup>. It is the top issue on the minds of voters that will affect their vote for president in November (26%), followed closely by the economy and jobs (22%), and national security/terrorism (12%).

The controversial nature of the Iraq war issue can be seen in the following findings from this survey:

- Looking back from this point in time, older voters are evenly split on the correctness of the original decision to invade Iraq: 47 percent of older voters feel that going to war with Iraq was the right decision and 48 percent believe it was the wrong decision, and only 5 percent have no opinion on this issue.
- However, once there, a slight majority (52%) of older voters think we should stay there as long as it takes to rebuild Iraq, whereas 35 percent believe we should leave as soon as possible, and 13 percent have no opinion.
- A majority (54%) of older voters believe that the war with Iraq is part of the war on terrorism, whereas 39 percent believe the two issues are separate. (Seven percent have no opinion.)
- As far as the impact of the war in Iraq on terrorism is concerned, half (50%) of older voters believe that the Iraq war has increased the risk of terrorism, while 32 percent are of the opinion that the Iraq war has reduced the risk of terrorism. (Eight percent have no opinion.)

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

- Republicans see the country as heading in the right direction (65%); Democrats (81%) and Independents (58%) see the country as seriously having gotten off on the wrong track.
- More Republicans say they will vote for president this year more in terms of the candidates' personal qualities (41%) than will Democrats (23%) and Independents (32%). More Democrats (57%) and Independents (61%) than Republicans (48%)

say they will cast their presidential vote based on positions on one or two key issues.

- More Republicans (38%) than Democrats (9%) and Independents (20%) say foreign policy issues are more important than domestic policy issues in voting for president this November. More Democrats (69%) and Independents (53%) than Republicans (30%) say domestic policy issues are more important. Thirty-two percent of Republicans, 19% of Democrats, and 26% of Independents say these two types of issues are equally important.
- More than 8 in 10 (82%) Republicans feel going to war with Iraq was the right decision, whereas majorities of Democrats (77%) and Independents (51%) think it was the wrong decision. (Only 5 percent have no opinion on this issue.)
- Once having gone into Iraq, nearly three-quarters (73%) of Republicans and 57 percent of Independents believe we should stay as long as it takes to rebuild Iraq, whereas a majority of Democrats (55%) say we should leave as soon as possible.
- Older Republicans overwhelmingly (85%) believe that the war with Iraq was part of the war against terrorism, whereas nearly two-thirds (65%) of Democrats view these as two separate issues. A majority of Independents (55%) think these two issues are connected, whereas 40 percent see these as separate issues.
- Finally, a majority (57%) of older Republicans think the war in Iraq has reduced the risk of terrorism, whereas 71 percent of Democrats and 58 percent of Independents believe the Iraq war has increased the risk of terrorism.

### **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=1,003) and a separate survey of 504 registered voters ages 50+ in the state of Florida. Interviews in both surveys were conducted between September 15-27, 2004. The national survey has a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points for the overall results. 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 state of Florida had been surveyed. The Florida survey has a sampling error rate of plus or minus 4 percentage points for overall results.

Interviewing for both surveys was completed before the Miami debate topic was changed from domestic issues to foreign policy issues. Survey respondents were re-contacted and most were successfully re-interviewed (676 or 67 % in the national survey and 387 or 77% in the Florida survey) on a series of foreign policy questions. Sampling error for the foreign policy questions in the national survey is 4 percentage points and 5 percentage points in the Florida survey.

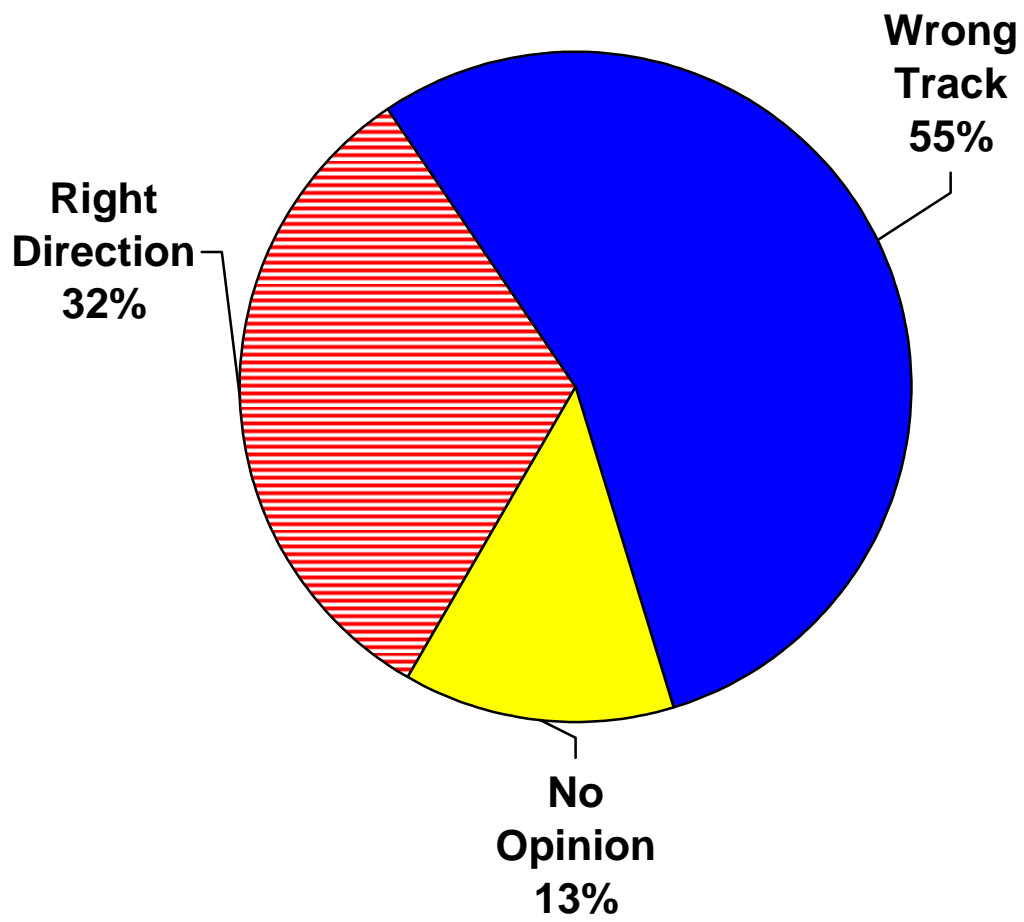
For presentation purposes, percentage points have been rounded off to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages in a given table column may total slightly higher or lower than 100%. For questions that permit multiple responses, columns may total to significantly more than 100%, depending on 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

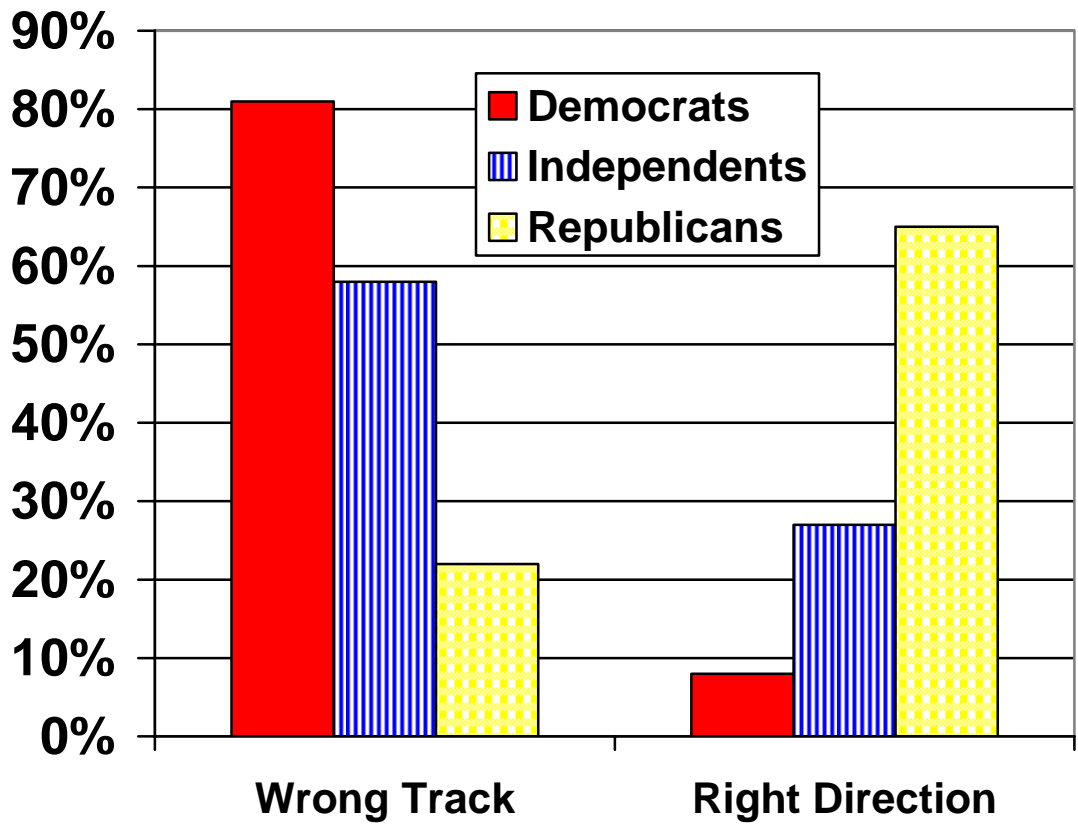
	Party ID			
	Rep	Dem	Ind	Total
Country heading in, Right Direction	<b>65%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>32%</b>
Wrong Track	<b>22%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>54%</b>
Vote in terms of, Candidates personal qualities	<b>41%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>32%</b>
Position on one or two key issues	<b>48%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>55%</b>
Foreign policy issues more important	<b>38%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>22%</b>
Domestic policy issues more important	<b>30%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>51%</b>
Both foreign and domestic policy issues equally	<b>32%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>25%</b>
<u>Right</u> decision to go to war with Iraq	<b>83%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>47%</b>
<u>Wrong</u> decision to go to war with Iraq	<b>12%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>48%</b>
Stay in Iraq as long as it takes	<b>73%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>52%</b>
Leave Iraq as soon as possible	<b>15%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>35%</b>
War in Iraq is part of war on terrorism	<b>85%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>54%</b>
War in Iraq is separate from war on terrorism	<b>10%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>39%</b>
War in Iraq <u>reduced</u> risk of terrorism	<b>57%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>32%</b>
War in Iraq has <u>increased</u> the risk of terrorism	<b>20%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>50%</b>
Had no effect	<b>16%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>11%</b>



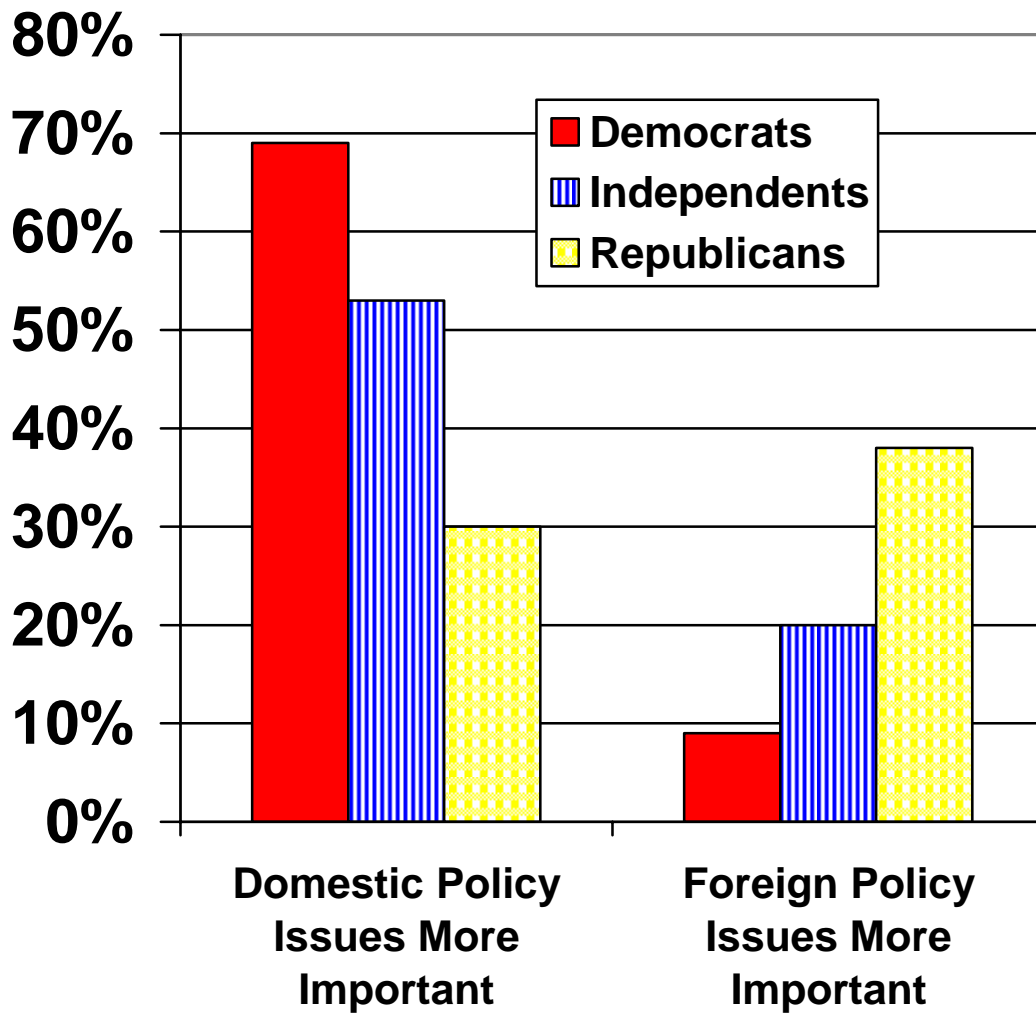
## Direction Country is Headed



### Direction the Country is headed by Party Identification



## The Relative Importance of Domestic Policy Issues and Foreign Policy Issues by Party Identification



# Questionnaire for the AARP Pre-First-Debate National Survey

**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?**

32%	Right direction
54%	Wrong track
12%	(DO NOT READ) Don't know
1%	(DO NOT READ) Refused

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

100%	Yes	<b>CONTINUE</b>
--	No	<b>TERMINATE</b>

**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?**

89%	Certain to vote	<b>CONTINUE</b>
7%	Probably vote	<b>CONTINUE</b>
3%	Chances 50/50	<b>CONTINUE</b>
1%	Less than 50/50	<b>CONTINUE</b>
--	Don't think will vote (vol.)	<b>TERMINATE</b>

**4. Did you vote in the 2000 presidential election?**

92%	Yes
7%	No

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

80%	Yes	<b>CONTINUE</b>
13%	No	<b>SKIP TO Q. 6</b>
7%	DK	

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

--	None of them
72%	Some of them
24%	All of them
4%	DK

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

43%	Very closely
40%	Somewhat closely
13%	Not too closely
4%	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?**

79%	Definitely decided
21%	Undecided

**8. How likely are you to watch the upcoming debate between the presidential candidates on Sept. 30<sup>th</sup> in Miami: Are you very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, or not at all likely?**

55%	Very likely
28%	Somewhat likely
6%	Not too likely
9%	Not at all likely
2%	Don't know

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

32%	Very important
39%	Somewhat important
16%	Not too important
9%	Not at all important
4%	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

**11. As you may know, the upcoming presidential debate in Miami on Sept. 30th focuses exclusively on domestic issues. What are the most important domestic issues you want to see addressed by the 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?)

**[NOTE: This question was asked of all respondents because it was expected that domestic issues would be the focus of the first debate. When the focus was changed to foreign policy issues, two-thirds (n=676) of the original respondents were successfully re-interviewed and asked a series of foreign policy questions – cf. A-1 through A-5, below.]**

- 2% Civil liberties
- 17% Education
- 40% Health care
- 16% Homeland security
- 1% Importation of prescription drugs from Canada or other countries
- 1% Long term care issues
- 11% Medicare/Medicare premium increases
- 7% Prescription drug prices
- 5% Social issues such as abortion and gay marriage
- 16% Social Security
- 13% Taxes
- 54% The economy and jobs
- 4% The environment
- 4% The federal government deficit
- Other
- 12% DK

**12. If you could ask just one question of the candidates in the upcoming presidential debate in Miami on Sept. 30th that is devoted to domestic issues, 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?**

- 8% Political party
- 55% Position on one or two key issues (PROBE: Which issues?)
- 32% Personal qualities (PROBE: Which qualities?)
- 1% None of these (vol.)
- 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?**

- 6% More positive
- 42% More negative
- 48% About the same
- 4% DK/Refused

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

- 31% A Republican
- 34% A Democrat
- 29% An Independent
- 2% (DO NOT READ) Other
- 1% (DO NOT READ) Don't know
- 3% (DO NOT READ) Refused

(SCRAMBLE CODES 1-3)

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

- 35% Conservative
- 44% Moderate
- 13% Liberal
- 2% (DO NOT READ) None of the Above
- 6% (DO NOT READ) Don't know
- 1% (DO NOT READ) Refused

[NOTE: The original issues question (Q11) was posed for all respondents in terms of domestic issues, since it was expected that domestic issues would be the focus of the first debate. When the focus was changed to foreign policy issues, two-thirds (n=676) of the original respondents were successfully re-interviewed and asked the following series of foreign policy questions – A-1 through A-5, below.]

**A-1. Looking back in time, how do you feel about the original decision to go to war with Iraq? Do you think we made the right decision or the wrong decision in going to war with Iraq?**

**(base n=676)**

- 47% Right decision
- 48% Wrong decision
- 5% No opinion

**A-2. With regard to the war in Iraq, what should we do now? Should we stay as long as it takes to rebuild Iraq, or should we leave as soon as possible?**

**(base n=676)**

- 52% Stay as long as it takes
- 35% Leave as soon as possible
- 13% No opinion

**A-3. Do you think of the war with Iraq as part of the war against terrorism or as separate from the war against terrorism?**

**(base n=676)**

- 54% Part
- 39% Separate
- 7% No opinion

**A-4. Do you think the war in Iraq has reduced the risk of terrorism or increased the risk of terrorism?**

**(base n=676)**

- 32% Reduced
- 50% Increased
- 11% Had no effect
- 8% No opinion

**A-5. 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?**

**(base n=676)**

- 22% Foreign policy issues
- 51% Domestic policy issues
- 25% Both are equally important
- 2% No opinion



**Demographic questions:**

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

- 39% 50-59
- 16% 60-64
- 24% 65-74
- 20% 75+
- 2% Refused
- Avg. age = 64

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

- 62% Married,
- 11% Divorced,
- 1% Separated,
- 19% Widowed,
- 6% Or have you never been married?
- Living with partner [DO NOT READ]
- Don't know [DO NOT READ]
- 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..."]

- 55% Yes
- 44% No
- 1% Don't know [DO NOT READ]
- Refused [DO NOT READ]

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

- 7% Less than high school
- 29% High school graduate or equivalent
- 28% Some college or technical training beyond high school
- 22% College graduate
- 14% Or, Post-graduate or professional degree
- Don't know [DO NOT READ]
- 1% Refused [DO NOT READ]

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

- 30% Employed full-time
- 9% Employed part-time
- 47% Retired and not working
- 2% Unemployed and looking for work
- 5% Homemaker
- 4% Disabled
- Student
- 3% Or something else [Specify: \_\_\_\_\_]
- Don't Know [DO NOT READ]
- Refused [DO NOT READ]

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

- 81% Always
- 13% Usually
- 5% Sometimes
- 1% Rarely
- Never
- 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]

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

D8. Are you Spanish, Latino, or Hispanic?

- 3% Yes
- 96% No
- Don't Know
- 1% Refused

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

- 86% White
- 7% Black or African-American
- 1% Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 2% American Indian or Alaska Native
- 4% Other
- 1% Don't know
- 1% Refused

D10. [RECORD STATE]

D11. What is your gender?

- 37% Male
- 63% Female

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

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**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING! YOUR OPINION COUNTS!**