

Voters see Bush as decisive, Kerry as intelligent

By Will Lester
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Voters see President Bush as decisive, likable and able to inspire optimism, an Associated Press poll found. They view Democrat John Kerry as intelligent and compassionate.

On the negative side, a majority of people said Bush is arrogant, and fewer than half said Kerry is decisive. Presidential historian Charles Jones said he thought the perception by two-thirds of voters that Bush is decisive could help him in November.

"This election is a lot about Bush, whether to keep him in office," Jones said. "And decisiveness is one of the key characteristics of leadership."

Some analysts say being decisive isn't necessarily a positive trait.

"Being decisive isn't good or bad, it's part of the job," said Robert Shapiro, a political science professor at Columbia University. "In this case, 67 percent is a number larger than the number who think he's doing a good job on Iraq or the economy and terrorism."

"Overall, these numbers are consistent with this being a close election," Shapiro said.

About half or slightly less in various polls approve of Bush's performance on Iraq and the econ-

omy, slightly more on terrorism.

The poll asked voters whether they would or would not use each of seven words — likable, intelligent, decisive, compassionate, honest, arrogant and wealthy — to describe Bush and then Kerry.

While 60 percent said Kerry was compassionate, about the same number, 59 percent, said that of Bush — a finding that was surprising to public opinion analyst Karlyn Bowman of the American Enterprise Institute.

"The compassion number surprised me for Bush because we've heard a lot about erosion in that area," she said.

A majority of voters, 52 percent, said Bush is arrogant, while 44 percent viewed Kerry that way. Shapiro said those numbers do not present a real problem for either candidate because "people in leadership are often perceived as arrogant."

On several qualities, the two were very closely matched, such as honesty and compassion. Bush only had a slight edge on being likable.

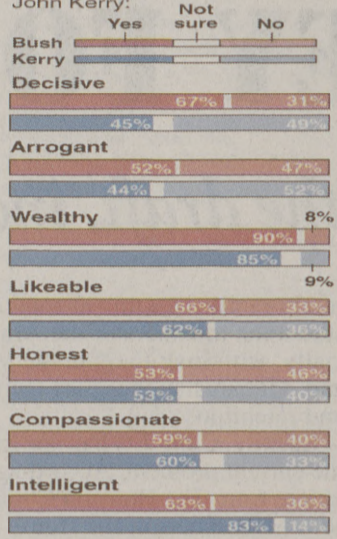
"They both meet some important thresholds," said Bowman. "You have solid majorities saying they are intelligent, likable and compassionate."

Public opinion about Bush is firmly formed by now, while people are still trying to figure out what they think of Kerry, polling suggests.

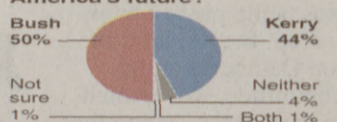
AP POLL

Running traits

In a recent poll, 804 registered voters were asked whether each of the following adjectives describe President Bush and presidential candidate John Kerry:



Who makes you feel more optimistic about America's future?



NOTE: Survey conducted July 5-7 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

SOURCE: Ipsos-Public Affairs for AP

Bush asks Congress to extend tax cuts

By Mary Dalrymple
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — House and Senate Republicans, at President Bush's bidding, have started working to extend tax cuts for wage earners, married couples and parents, a summertime reminder to voters of tax breaks passed on the president's watch.

Bush wants the package to be completed next week, before the Republican and Democratic parties hold their presidential nominating conventions, White House spokesman Trent Duffy said.

"The president wants to get this done," he said.

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., said he didn't know whether the bill can be assembled and passed in time to meet the president's target, however.

At the end of the year, three tax cuts would fully or partially disappear unless Congress acts.

They reduced taxes on the \$7,000 in wages, increased child tax credit to \$1,000 and taxes for some married couples who now pay more than would if they were not married.

House and Senate aides said the bill would not make the cuts permanent.

The bill probably also would include a fourth change, passing House this year and effective for a year, that prevents the alternative minimum tax from creeping closer to the middle class. The levy created to prevent wealthy individuals from dodging taxes.

Republicans have not decided how long to continue the existing tax cuts. A five-year extension could cost roughly \$120 billion.

That price may be too high for some Democrats.

"Our position is it should be paid for, period," Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D.

Government considers replacing food pyramid

By Ira Dreyfuss
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Most Americans are familiar with the federal Food Guide Pyramid — but a lot of people don't understand how to use it.

Too many are confused by the recommendations and can't figure out how to implement them. The proof, Agriculture Department officials say, is that two out of three Americans are fat.

So, as officials develop new guidelines on healthy eating, they also are looking for new ways to get out the message. Replacing the familiar food pyramid, first published in 1992, may be among them.

Agriculture Department officials talked about the problem of the pyramid Monday as they trolled for ideas about how to perk up the nation's nutritional record.

Typical of the pyramid's shortcomings is that some people thought the graphic's recommendation of 6 to 11 daily servings from the grains group, such as bread, meant they could have anywhere from six to 11 servings. A slice of bread is a serving.

Only after the eater checks pyramid's supplemental literature does it become clear that servings are sufficient for people who don't burn a lot of calories a day, such as sedentary women and some older adults. Eleven servings are for those with high-revenue metabolisms, such as teenage boys.

Food pyramid

The Agriculture Department could replace its Food Guide Pyramid as guidelines are being reviewed. A new version is expected in 2005.



SOURCE: Department of Agriculture

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NEWS IN BRIEF

U.S. general announces new offensive

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Thousands of American troops have begun a new operation to prevent militants from achieving Afghanistan's first presidential election, the top commander here said Tuesday in an interview with The Associated Press.

Lt. Gen. David Barno insisted the switch does not blur the military's focus on catching Osama bin Laden and other top fugitives. But he acknowledged he has no firm idea where the al-Qaida leader is hiding or what he might be planning.

Operation Lightning Resolute "kicking off as we speak," Barno said at his headquarters in the Afghan capital.

He said the operation could be enough "offensive punch" to keep militants off balance. It could see an increase in targeted intelligence-driven raids. He gave no specifics.

A 2,000-member Marine unit which has hammered Taliban militants in a southern stronghold since it arrived in March, is in the process of leaving the country, Barno said.

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