



Tri-state Area Residents:*
Expectations for Presidential Debate

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This Marist College Institute for Public Opinion poll reports:

- **Residents say presidential debates matter and most expect to tune in tonight:**
President George Bush and Senator John Kerry face-off on foreign policy in the first presidential debate tonight. 70% of residents in the tri-state area believe the presidential debates make a difference in who wins or loses in November, and nearly one in five residents in the area say the debate will help them decide their vote. Most residents expect to watch at least some of the presidential debate.

Question Wording: Do you think the presidential debates will have a great deal, some, not very much, or no effect at all on who wins or loses this election?

Tri-state Residents	A Great Deal	Some	Not Very Much	Not at All
September 2004	26%	44%	20%	10%

Question Wording: Will the debates help you decide whom to vote for president or have you already made up your mind?

Tri-state Residents	Help Decide Vote	Made Up Mind	Unsure
September 2004	19%	76%	5%

* The tri-state area includes the five boroughs of New York City, the New York suburban counties to the north of New York City including Dutchess, Putnam, Rockland, and Westchester counties, and Nassau and Suffolk counties on Long Island, Northern New Jersey, and southern Connecticut.

Question Wording: Do you plan on watching a great deal, some, not too much, or none at all of the presidential debate this Thursday night between George Bush and John Kerry?

Tri-state Residents	A Great Deal	Some	Not Very Much	None at All
September 2004	47%	25%	10%	18%

- **Expectations edge for President Bush:** More residents in the tri-state area think George Bush is likely to win tonight's debate. They see John Kerry as the underdog but with the most to gain.

Question Wording: Who do you expect will win the presidential debate:

Tri-state Residents	George Bush	John Kerry	Unsure
September 2004	45%	38%	17%

Question Wording: Do you think George Bush or John Kerry has more to (gain/lose) in the presidential debate on Thursday night?

Tri-state Residents	George Bush	John Kerry	Unsure
More to gain	22%	70%	8%
More to lose	56%	33%	11%

- **What residents expect from the candidates:** Tri-state residents expect President Bush to be more likely than John Kerry to play it safe during the debate. They think Bush will speak more plainly, will be more himself, and will be more consistent. They also think he is more likely than John Kerry to make a mistake. Residents think Senator Kerry will be more likely than George Bush to propose changes for the future, be in touch with average voters, be closer to them on the issues, be more serious, and be more believable.

Question Wording: Do you think George Bush or John Kerry is more likely to do each of the following in the debate:

Tri-state Residents	George Bush	John Kerry	Unsure
Play it safe	55%	32%	13%
Make a mistake	55%	31%	14%
Be more himself	51%	40%	9%
Talk plainly	51%	38%	11%
Be more consistent	50%	40%	10%
Be more decisive	50%	41%	9%
Be more informed	48%	43%	9%

Tri-state Residents	George Bush	John Kerry	Unsure
Have an understanding of world issues	48%	40%	12%
Be more likeable	46%	47%	7%
Say what he believes, not what people want to hear	46%	41%	13%
Be more believable	40%	50%	10%
Be more specific	40%	51%	9%
Be closer to you on the issues	39%	51%	10%
Be more serious	38%	49%	13%
Be more in touch with people like yourself	33%	57%	10%
Propose changes for the future	23%	66%	11%

- **Tell us about the next four years:** Many residents in the area want both candidates to use the debate as an opportunity to spell out their plans for the next four years. Other debate tips from residents for each of the candidates include: admit that you've learned from past mistakes, express yourself more clearly, respond directly to your opponents' criticisms, be forceful, and be likeable.

Question Wording: What would you most like to see George Bush do in the debate?

Tri-state Residents	George Bush
Talk about his plans for the next four years	45%
Say he's learned from his mistakes	29%
Respond to his opponent's criticisms	10%
Express himself more clearly	8%
Be forceful	6%
Be likeable	2%

Question Wording: What would you most like to see John Kerry do in the debate?

Tri-state Residents	John Kerry
Talk about his plans for the next four years	48%
Express himself more clearly	24%
Respond to his opponent's criticisms	10%
Be forceful	9%
Be likeable	5%
Say he's learned from his mistakes	4%

- **And the question is....** If residents in the tri-state area could ask the candidates just one question, 42% want to know what the candidates plan to do to end the war in Iraq. 24% want to know how they'll prevent future acts of terrorism, 14% would ask about the growing nuclear threats in North Korea and Iran, 9% want to know how the candidates will handle conflicts between the Israelis and Palestinians, 6% want to know if they will

reinstate the draft, and 5% want to hear the candidates plans for capturing Osama Bin Laden.

Question Wording: Thursday night's presidential debate is going to focus on foreign policy. Which one of the following questions would you most like to ask the candidates?

Tri-state Residents	
What are their plans to end the fighting in Iraq?	42%
How will they prevent another terror attack in the United States?	24%
How will they deal with the growing nuclear threat in countries like North Korea and Iran?	14%
How will they deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?	9%
Will they reinstate the draft?	6%
How will they capture Osama Bin Laden?	5%

- **But residents divide over whether the candidates will stick to the issues:** 45% of tri-state residents think that President Bush and Senator Kerry will spend more time talking about the issues during the debate, but 49% are concerned the candidates will end up spending more time attacking each other.

Question Wording: Do you think that during the debate the candidates will spend more time:

Tri-state Residents	Talking About the Issues	Attacking Each Other	Unsure
September 2004	45%	49%	6%

How the Survey Was Conducted

This survey was conducted on September 28th, 2004. 461 residents in the tri-state area were interviewed in proportion to the population. All interviews were conducted by telephone. The results are statistically significant at $\pm 4.5\%$. The margin of error increases for cross-tabulations.