

Memorandum

To: Chairman Duncan
From: Jan R. van Lohuizen
Date: 4/24/08
Re: What to look for in Presidential polling

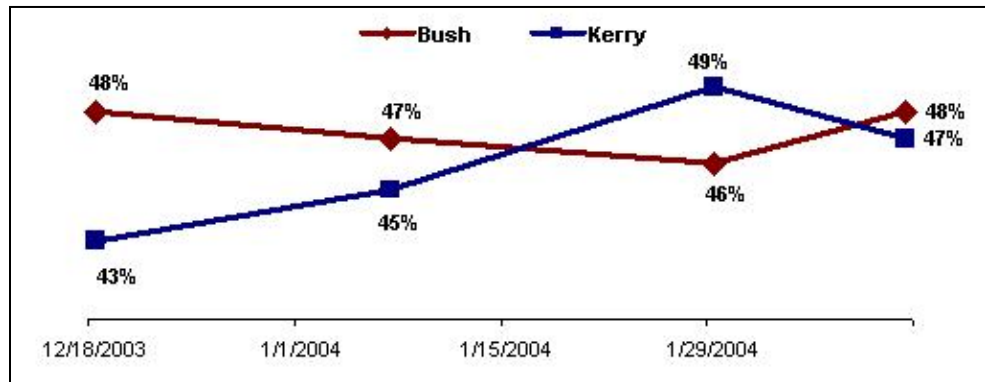
As I have, I am sure you are getting many questions about polling concerning the Presidential election. We've seen some fairly dramatic swings in the past 3 or 4 weeks that have generated an increased interest in polls. Here are a few things to keep in mind when interpreting new polling as it becomes available:

- √ Since countless polls are released to the press daily there is little benefit in trying to interpret the results of any single survey or to have a debate over which surveys are 'good' or 'bad'. With so many publicly released polls we should focus on movement in the average of all public polling and not worry too much about any one individual poll.
- √ At this stage in the race, polls tend to follow news coverage. When a candidate gets good news their numbers increase, and when it's bad news or no news their numbers drop. We saw this occur recently. When Barack Obama had to deal with the Reverend Wright story his numbers dropped. At the same time, when Senator Clinton was confronted with her 'sniper' tale, her numbers also dropped, and Senator McCain led both Democrats in public polls. Since that time, with the media focused almost exclusively on the other side, Senator McCain's numbers have slipped a bit and the race has tightened. We have seen this in public polling as well as the polling we conduct for the RNC.
- √ We can expect to continue to see fluidity until the conventions. The thing to keep in mind is this: whether any one candidate is ahead or behind right now has very little predictive value for the outcome of the General Election. While we should not completely ignore them, spending too much time focusing on 'head to head' numbers in polls is frankly not a good use of time. We should instead continue to focus on the fundamentals of organizing and fundraising.

Going forward, here are some things to look for:

- √ Will Senator McCain continue to outpoll the 'generic' Republican numbers? He has consistently done better than the Republican brand among all partisans, and particularly among Independents. His continued ability to do so is vital in two regards: first, obviously, it is a key indicator for whether he will win this fall. Second, his ability to do so will benefit everyone running on the Republican ticket this November.

- √ When (finally) a Democratic nominee emerges, we should expect a small bounce in their poll numbers. The chart below shows what happened when John Kerry locked down the nomination in 2004. Although it happened far earlier in the process, the point here is that it did not continue.



- √ We should look for the extent to which Democrats coalesce behind their nominee. When Senator Obama initially had Senator Clinton on the ropes it looked as if the Democrats did start to unify behind their nominee. Much has of course happened since that time, and we should look to see if it happens again.
- √ We should expect each party to get a bounce out of their respective conventions. As you may recall, the 2004 bounce was better and longer lasting for our convention than for the Democratic convention. Because it was so late, the GOP convention set up President Bush for a lead that lasted through the debates. This year the Democrats will have a later convention, but if their nomination is not settled, seating fights and other sources of contention could very well make for no bounce at all (or, if such a thing exists, a negative bounce).
- √ The fall debates can have a substantial impact, as they did both in 2000 and in 2004.

The bottom line is that we should continue to see fluidity in Presidential 'head to head' numbers. If and when a winner emerges from the Democratic primary, we should expect their nominee's numbers to improve, and perhaps at some point overtake Senator McCain. We should also expect that the press will over-interpret this, and we need to prepare surrogates and spokespersons for this event. Finally, as a Party we should focus on what does matter, and get ready for a close election in November regardless of what the poll numbers say today.