

Global Journalist: The International Influence of American Elections

Abstract: On this October 14, 2004 program, host Stuart Loory speaks with five journalists around the world to gain international perspectives on the 2004 Presidential Election.

Host: Stuart Loory

Guests: · [Bertram Eisenhauer](#), [Leigh Sales](#), [Martin Kaste](#), [Patrick Fort](#), (Boris Volansky couldn't confirm spelling)

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Stuart Loory 0:00

Welcome to Global Journalist on KBIA. I'm Stuart Loory of the Missouri School of Journalism. By now, the last presidential debate has been talked about endlessly by journalists, pundits, analysts, and those interested in politics as just plain citizens in the United States. We think we know who won, who lost, and how many voters are still undecided. By all accounts, this will be a very close election. But the American election campaign has another constituency, and that one is from other countries. A survey done by a Canadian firm of 34,000 people in 35 countries around the world shows senator John Kerry to be the overwhelming favorite outside the United States. Why is this? How much attention was paid to the debates around the world, particularly last night's and what was made of them? In fact, what do people in other countries make of the entire American electoral process? Those are the questions for today and to discuss them, our guests are Leigh Sales, correspondent with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in Washington DC. Martin Kaste, South American correspondent for National Public Radio in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Bertram Eisenhauer, an editor of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in Frankfurt, Germany, Patrick Fort, correspondent for Agence France-Presse in Madrid, and Boris Volansky (ph?), a columnist for Kommersant, a daily newspaper in Moscow. Welcome to all of you. Let's start by asking each of our guests how important this election campaign is, in other countries. Leigh Sales, what about Australia? It just finished its own election, was this one in the United States paid for much attention to during the election in Australia.

Leigh Sales 2:04

For the past couple of years in Australia, Australia's relationship with the United States and our alliance has been very much in the spotlight because our Prime Minister has taken our country a lot closer to the US and he has a very strong personal relationship with President Bush. Not all Australians have been happy with that, not all Australians were happy that we participated in the war in Iraq. We've signed a free trade deal as well with the United States, which was controversial. So Australia's relationship with America was a feature of our own election campaign. And it was a differential between our Prime Minister and our opposition leader. In terms of the overall U.S. campaign, I think in the next couple of weeks in Australia, we're going to see more attention directed to it, because we've just had our own election campaign. Of course, that tends to overshadow all of the international news, but I think now Australians will turn and start to focus on the U.S.

Stuart Loory 2:57

Mr. Howard was, of course re-elected. He is a strong conservative. Is it considered that there is any indication of how the vote might go in the United States from this?

Leigh Sales 3:12

I don't know that you could draw that parallel. But I think there are some interesting similarities. In Australia, we had John Howard, who's an established incumbent who was our leader during September 11, who was our leader during the war in Iraq and and involved us in that. The opposition leader who he ran up against was a man by the name of Mark Latham who was only installed to lead the party earlier this year. What happened in the election was that Australians basically decided they weren't comfortable going with the new guy because they just didn't know him as well as John Howard. They weren't entirely sure what he stood for. And because our economy is going along quite well at the moment and people are reasonably comfortable, there wasn't any huge impetus to change and Mark Latham didn't give them enough reason to change. I've just been traveling around across the US for the past couple of weeks doing some stories about the election here. And I tended to get that sort of a mood here as well. People often would say to me, that they didn't love George Bush, you know, they were sort of open to the idea of change. But I heard it said over and over again that they weren't quite sure if John Kerry was the person that they want to change to. So I think there's that similarity between Australia and the US.

Stuart Loory 4:26

Okay, if I can move on to Russia, Boris Volansky(ph?). George Bush considers Vladimir Putin to be his friend. Is there much attention being paid to the campaign in Russia? And how do people there feel about Bush versus Kerry?

Boris Volansky 4:44

Well, I would say that elections in the United States have always been a topic of public interest, but there are probably two approaches. One is on the state level, that is, presidents or formerly the party leaders, leadership and so on. And the other is, while I would call it a housewife approach, it's probably also true for America. If you look upon this general public attitude towards who is going to win or who is going to lose, then I might say that there is a great degree of dislike of President Bush in Russia. But the history, at least the history of the second half of the 20th century shows that, however, even if the Russian media or Soviet media at times labeled Republicans as reactionaries, I mean quote marks, and democrats as a progressive party. The real state of relations was usually better under Republicans. And well, when I when we say that President Putin and President Bush called each other they're friends, I think it's not well it's not the real cause, it's just the consequences of the real state of relations.

Stuart Loory 6:05

As Margaret Thatcher once said about Mikhail Gorbachev, George Bush feels he can do business with Vladimir Putin. Let's move on to Germany. Bertram Eisenhauer, a poll that I referred to at the beginning of the broadcast in Germany found that 74% of the respondents were in favor of John Kerry versus George Bush, and I think that reflects relations between the two countries. Has the campaign been followed closely in in Germany?

Bertram Eisenhauer 6:42

Yes, I think it's been followed quite closely. And I assume that the that the interest will get more intense in the next couple of weeks or so. You know, for instance, all the presidential debates were broadcast live, although usually in the middle of the night, around three o'clock in the morning, here on the German public stations. So, you know, there's there's great interest, you just referred to the poll, I think you can, it's safe to say that Germans and you know, in the large majority, dislike, you know, George Bush both, you know, as, you know, as far as his policies are concerned, but also, I think there's sort of a cultural gap between, you know, Germans and, and George Bush. For Germans, I think George Bush represents that half of America that they don't feel comfortable with, you know, they just, you know, people who, who carry guns who, who are against abortions, you know, who are, you know, swaggering Texans. It's, there's also, I think, a strong cultural element. And when Bill Clinton was here a few weeks ago, to market his

autobiography, there was a sort of a real sense that people were looking towards him as the embodiment of a, you know, better America in a way.

Stuart Loory 8:05

Okay, if I may move on to Spain now and ask Patrick Fort the situation there. Patrick... Spain, of course, was a member of President Bush's coalition in Iraq. And then after a change in government there, it pulled out of the coalition, or at least it brought its troops home. I don't know whether it's fair to say that it pulled out of the coalition completely. What, what is the situation there?

Patrick Fort 8:33

Well, the joke here is they don't understand why the Americans are the only ones allowed to vote at the American election because what America decides concerns everybody and that's because they evidently want Kerry to win here. And I know global probably everybody here like, dislikes George Bush doesn't like his policy in Iraq. 80% of the Spanish, Spaniards were against the participation of Spanish troops in Iraq and, and the socialist won elections because of the bombings but also because probably because it was not worth to put troops in Iraq, so people here really dislike Bush more than they like Kerry. They just want to change and they just want the war in Iraq to stop and they want, they want different solutions against terrorism. And they and they, they think George Bush isn't the person who can do that. They see him as uh, somebody who likes to go to war, somebody doesn't know anything about politics. And Kerry on the other hand, even if he's not very famous in Europe, he presents a bit like Europe or the democrats or something, like somebody who would be able to negotiate with with these Islamic countries.

Stuart Loory 9:49

Okay, now, if we can move on to Latin America and ask Martin Kaste, the situation in Brazil?

Martin Kaste 9:58

Well, I think it's no surprise like almost everywhere else in the world that the general public opinion in Brazil has been very, very sour towards George Bush since... probably since about 2002 and especially 2003 in the lead up to the Iraq war. I mean that's, it's almost a given on any room you walk into if the subject of the US election comes up, you know, the mood just darkens. I think most people around the world probably tell similar stories. So I, you know,

there is some interest in this, but there's also sort of a sense of general disgust with US politics. I wouldn't say Brazilians are following a debate for example, very closely. I mean, yes, it's a minor international news story in the papers here. But you know, for one thing very few Brazilians speak English especially not English well enough to to watch the debate. It was on cable here, but I wouldn't I would think about 100 times more people are watching the Colombia Brazil soccer game last night than that. So So I you know, that's the mood is sort of a pox on both houses. Perhaps we have a sense of of confusion over where the US is going, why it's following this this course of action in the Middle East. There, you know, if you talk to the business elite here, it's a little different. There's also sort of a cultural rejection of George Bush, but at the same time, if they're just talking about their personal economic interest, there's traditionally a sense in Latin America that the democrats are worse for business because a democrat is more likely to to try to protect U.S. jobs. And that's bad for Latin American exports in this country, especially a country like Brazil, which is kind of crawling out of economic hard times. It's actually gotten some nice booming exports right now. The specter of of Kerry coming to into office and shutting down some those exports, especially in agricultural exports to United States like orange juice and soy beans, that kind of thing. That that kind of worries the business elite here but the average Brazilian, I mean, you could you could, you could almost safely assume that 9 out of 10 would to see George Bush get voted out of office.

Stuart Loory 12:02

Okay, I want to come back to some of the issues. But first, I just want to say, Martin, you mentioned the Colombia-Brazil soccer game. In the United States, viewers had the chance of watching not only the debates, but 2 playoff baseball games, to see who was going to play in the World Series. It'll be interesting to see later on today, what the ratings were for the baseball games versus the debates. But right now, I have to say you're listening to Global Journalist on KBIA, and I'm Stuart Loory. Welcome back to Global Journalist, you may listen to this program again, ask questions or make comments by going to www.globaljournalist.org or here in mid-Missouri by calling us at 573884-- I'm sorry, 882-9641 that's 573-882-9641. Let's come back to just what the issues are that most people around the world are interested in. The conventional wisdom, of course, and probably the the wisdom is that the big issue is the war in Iraq and against terrorism. But Martin Kaste just mentioned other issues, the economic issues, and there are also some social issues. Boris Volansky, what about in Russia? Is there any particular interest in anything but the the war against terrorism?

Boris Volansky 13:42

Yes, definitely. We have, we are part of this war and we have our problems with terrorism here on Russian soil and therefore, in that respect, I would say that the Republican approach would be more favorable towards what Russia is doing in Chechnya because well, they are pragmatic

and they are less idealistic, although maybe less human than Democrats. I don't know. I'm not going to make any judgments on political parties in the United States. But still, the democrats tend to raise the question of human rights abuses, and that, that, that stuff, that sort of things. But in that case, in that respect, I think that the republican administration would be more favorable.

Stuart Loory 14:28

And Bertram, what are the issues in Germany besides Bush's conduct of the War in Iraq and against terrorism around the world?

Bertram Eisenhauer 14:38

Well, I think clearly the, you know, the War in Iraq overshadows most other issues on this. The in 2002, we had a federal election here, where the Social Democrats who were in power held on to power because one of the 2 major reasons was because they opposed George Bush's engagement in in Iraq, and that was quite, you know, cleverly saw that the electorate, you know, was was very much against this war. So that's, you know, that's, you know, that's the issue that's, I think, more important to, you know, to Germans than, than anything else. But as I said, you know, earlier, I think there's also a question of, of chemistry, you know, between, you know, the Germans, who will look towards the United States and, and, and see George Bush, you know, and there's a lot of talk about the U.S., U.S. being a 50/50 nation. And as I said earlier, you know, Bush clearly is, is the representative of that half, you know, that of the United States that Germans just do not, you know, like it's, it's a it's more of a gut feeling too, so there's, you know, sort of a very strong issue, but also a cultural gap.

Stuart Loory 16:00

Well, the the issues that were discussed last night, were mostly economic and social, as well as the economy. There were issues like abortion, health care, children's rights, the rights of immigrants, the care of the aged, Leigh Sales. Do these issues have much resonance in Australia?

Leigh Sales 16:28

Look, to be honest, I have to agree with everybody else and say that US foreign policy overshadows every other concern, basically, as far as Australians are concerned regarding the election, and that's on two levels. One is the war on terrorism and how the U.S. intends to

continue prosecuting that. The other side of it for us is how the US engages with our neighbors. So U.S. relations with Indonesia, what's going to happen with North Korea, U.S. relations with China, those things are quite critical to Australians. And also trade issues for us, quite important and how the U.S. economy's tracking, all of those sorts of things have a spin off effect. But I agree with the earlier comments that pretty much whatever the US decides to focus on has ripples all throughout the world. So I think for Australia, we tend to be interested in whatever the U.S. is directing most of its energy towards because we know that's the thing that's going to most affect us. So for example, the U.S. at the moment isn't paying a great deal of attention this administration to environmental issues or human rights issues, they're more focused on security and those types of things. So subsequently, that's what Australia tends to focus on as well.

Stuart Loory 17:42

Yeah, what you just mentioned the environmental issue, and Boris Volansky, Russia just ratified the Kyoto Treaty on global warming, is the feeling in Moscow that this is going to have any great influence on the United States?

Boris Volansky 18:06

No I don't think so. I just, I would say that it went unnoticed in Russia because well, we're Russian public in general is not that much concerned about such issues as well, unfortunately, I might say that as environmental protection. That's one of the well, it's obvious that it is through what I say but I still regret it. And I don't think so.

Stuart Loory 18:33

Right. And if I may ask Bertram Eisenhauer. Is it the feeling in Germany that if Kerry is elected, there will be any great change in relations between Germany and the United States?

Bertram Eisenhauer 18:45

Well, I think the expectation is clearly there. Um, I have a sort of I have a hunch that a lot of Germans if Kerry were to be elected, would be quite disappointed because my my hunch is that Kerry in many ways will be a little more, you know, diplomatic, a bit more multilateral. But you know, many of the policies will be quite the same, especially, you know, as I said, with, you know, with the war in Iraq, there was a comment actually, by the German defense minister yesterday, and he said that at this point, Germany would not commit any troops to Iraq. But

you know, maybe in the long run in a few years, that could happen. And there were some people who speculated here, some political observers who said, oh, maybe he was, you know, already kind of expecting a Kerry victory and wanted to signal to him that well, you know, maybe Germany, you know, we've said repeatedly that we would not commit any troops to the war in Iraq. But you know, if with a president Kerry, things could be a little different. But today, actually, you know, the chancellor, both the chancellor and our Secretary of State said no, no, Defense Minister was misquoted, and, you know, there's no way that German troops would ever participate in the, in the operation in Iraq. So there is an expectation clearly that Kerry would bring change. If that is a realistic expectation, if you look at the candidates sort of at the differences in the candidates outlook. I'm quite doubtful about this.

Stuart Loory 20:25

Patrick Fort, what about in Spain? Would a Kerry victory, do anything to change attitudes in Spain? Through the...

Patrick Fort 20:33

Yeah I think so. I think it would really change attitudes because like, like, we talked about Iraq already, we talked about Kyoto and the Spanish feel that you know, Bush has rules for United States that are not that, that he doesn't want to respect that he wants everybody else to respect but not the United States to respect, and they feel like he doesn't respect other countries, and and so we're on on our issues it appears Kerry will, will discuss further options or negotiate on another or even on the trade. So, globally, anybody see if I can let me like, overshoot a bit, but everybody feels like this like, like George Bush is a kind of dictator or when putting an American dictatorship around the world, and they would like this to stop and they see Kerry as somebody who can, who can talk about it, who can talk about what he sees for the future. And like, like, like in Germany, Spain doesn't rule out going back to Iraq if it's a U.S. decision, and apparently Kerry wants to give back some power to the United Nations. And I think a lot of things could change in Europe. And if Kerry is elected and and towards what the public public opinion is towards United States if Kerry is elected.

Stuart Loory 21:53

What about this idea of George Bush as dictator. Martin Kaste, is there any feeling like that in the country you cover?

Martin Kaste 22:02

Well, I mean, in all of Latin America traditionally, rightly or wrongly, the US government, whoever's whoever the president is, is painted sort of as, as something of a bully something of a "might makes right" type. I think maybe the one exception in recent history was Jimmy Carter, who was seen as is a guy who at least, went through the motions of trying to have more of a cooperative relationship with Latin America. I think that you know, if Kerry were to win, a lot of those same resentments would probably end up bubbling up anyway, because as I think one of the other journalists pointed out, U.S. policy does not turn on a dime and especially second tier policy right now, especially things to do with having to do with import tariffs or the drug war. The US relationship with Venezuela is not going to change radically. John Kerry's on the record, basically backing Washington's current sort of hostility, I guess you would need to say towards a Hugo Chavez is the president of Venezuela. So, you know, I think, I think in some ways from a Latin American point of view, especially from the point of view of the opinion makers, journalists and you know, the elite here, you know, whoever the U.S. president is usually is quickly seen as kind of a something of a bully so I'm not sure John Kerry can change that. But you know, the the, at the moment the the disgust with Bush is so great that you know, the "anything but" sentiment wins out here.

Stuart Loory 23:32

So now we have the American president as a dictator and bully. Leigh Sales, do those descriptions apply in Australia?

Leigh Sales 23:44

Look, I don't think so to be honest. I think that Australia is slightly warmer towards George Bush than some of the countries of Europe. I'm not sure about South America and public opinion there. You know, we didn't see the sort of protest in Australia that, for example, Tony Blair had to endure in England. Certainly there's opposition to the war in Iraq, but it hasn't been felt as strongly as it has been around the rest of the world. Australia is a fairly insecure country because of the fact that we're an island and we're, you know, a nation from an Anglo Saxon heritage in the middle of Asia, the Australian population is quite fearful about our security, rightly or wrongly. And so I think generally, the Australian population always feels quite warmly towards whoever the administration is in the United States. Because traditionally, we look to having a relationship with a nation which can be our protector. You know, obviously, it was Great Britain for very many years. And then in recent decades since the Second World War, we've switched more towards the United States. So I think you'd find a mixed range of opinions on George Bush, if you went to Australia, some people would like him. Some people would not. But I don't think you could say that there's overall a hostility towards him in Australia or a sense that he's a dictator.

Stuart Loory 25:05

Yeah, I get the feeling from all of you that there is really not much George Bush can do to repair his relationships around the world in Germany or Spain. And even in some extent in, in Russia, although maybe I'm wrong about that. Does anybody have any comment on that?

Martin Kaste 25:30

But... sorry this is Martin Kaste in Rio, I think I think you're right. And I think that's kind of the catch 22 for Bush, even if he really started to work more to the U.N. again, I think he will always be seen with so much suspicion and and and misgiving that he's almost damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. And I think the whole rebranding idea behind the Kerry campaign, you know, United States needs a new face, that kind of thing, in terms of at least relationships with with areas like Latin America. I suspect with Europe to is really right on that perhaps some of the same policies with a new face might be more palatable to the rest of the world.

Stuart Loory 26:09

Yeah. Bertram, did I hear you?

Bertram Eisenhauer 26:11

Yeah, well, in all fairness, I think it's, it's, we should also note that George Bush is not entirely, you know, to blame for this shift, at least as far as Europe is concerned, you know, in the relations between the US and other countries. I think what has happened is that, because Leigh just mentioned the, that Australia looks towards the United States as a protector. And of course, you know, for for decades during the Cold War, the U.S. was the protector of Western Europe, and that largely defined the relations between Western Europe, Germany, among those countries, of course, and the U.S. and since, and since the end of the Cold War, I think there's been sort of a creeping change in that relationship and that now the Europeans feel more independent towards the United States clearly, you know, and with, I think Clinton sort of you know, there was he sort of slowed down that process a little bit. But clearly, you know, Europeans now, since they're no longer so dependent on the protection by the United States, now feel they can develop their own policy and clearly, you know, the social democratic government that we have now in Germany, feels that they can be become a little more nationalist.

Stuart Loory 27:33

Bertram I'm sorry, I do have to cut you off. Unfortunately, we are out of time. Our guests today have been Boris Volansky (ph?), a columnist for Kommersant in Moscow, Patrick Fort correspondent for Agence France-Presse press in Madrid, Bertram Eisenhauer an editor of Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in Frankfurt, Germany, Martin Kaste, a South American correspondent for National Public Radio in Rio de Janeiro, and Leigh Sales of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in Washington, our director is Pat Akers, our producers Untak Han (ph?), Pavreetha Sarah George(ph?), Renata Johnson and Stephanie Von Borkowski (ph?). For all I'm Stuart Loory. Global Journalist will be back next week.