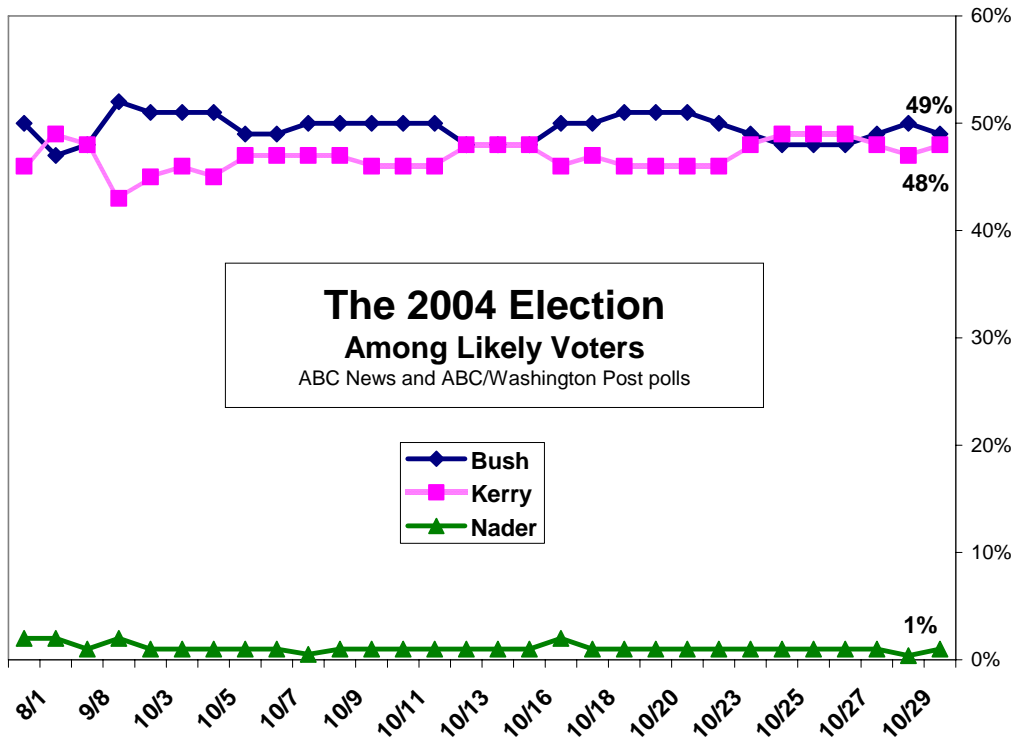


The Closing Weekend Starts With a 49-48 Percent Race

It's closing close: Likely voters divide by 49-48 percent between George W. Bush and John Kerry in the latest ABC News tracking poll, a sharply divided electorate in a contest that looks increasingly likely to turn on turnout.

The race, in interviews Tuesday through Friday, is not meaningfully different from the 50-47 percent division in yesterday's four-day tracking result. Bush, for example, today is just two-tenths of a point shy of the 50-percent mark he reached yesterday.

Preferences among groups and views on the issues also are holding steady, within polling tolerances. Highly prized moveable voters – those who say they haven't definitely made up their minds – divide now by 47-36 percent in Bush's favor. Because they're a small group – eight percent of all likely voters – that's not a meaningful change from yesterday.



The three top issues in the race remain the economy, cited by 23 percent; the war in Iraq, cited by an additional 23 percent; and terrorism, cited by 19 percent. It's the last of those, terrorism, that works best for Bush; among likely voters who call it their top issue, 87

percent support him. Kerry, by contrast, wins 69 percent of those who cite the economy, and 59 percent of those who call Iraq their No. 1. issue.

Terrorism peaked as a top concern immediately after the Republican convention, when it was cited by 28 percent. It's been lower recently, presenting a challenge for Bush, and it didn't rise in interviews last night, after release of the latest communiqué from Osama bin Laden.

TURNOUT – Turnout, as noted, is critical in a close race. For Bush, core supporters include evangelical white Protestants; they support him by 76-22 percent. The 2000 exit poll didn't measure evangelicals, but a very similar group, weekly churchgoing white Protestants, voted by 73-25 percent for Bush in 2000.

For Kerry, union voters are one group to watch; he leads Bush by 58-39 percent among likely voters from union households, almost precisely the same as Al Gore's 59-37 percent margin among such voters in 2000. A strong union turnout could prove critical to the Democrat's hopes.

Most critical in the end will be the partisan makeup of the electorate overall. In each of the last four presidential elections, Democrats outnumbered Republicans by three or four points. Likely voters in this poll are more Democratic than Republican by two points. On Tuesday, where partisanship ultimately leads, the outcome likely will follow.

METHODOLOGY – This poll was conducted October 26-29 among a random national sample of 3,216 adults, including 2,832 registered voters and 2,347 likely voters. The results have a two-point error margin for the likely voter sample. ABC News and The Washington Post are sharing data collection for this tracking poll, then independently applying their own models to arrive at likely voter estimates. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html>.

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*= less than 0.5 percent

3. (and 3a) If the 2004 presidential election were being held today, would you vote for (George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, the Republicans), (John Kerry and John Edwards, the Democrats), or Ralph Nader and Peter Camejo, the independents? Which candidate are you leaning toward?

Net Leaned Vote, Likely Voters:

	Bush	Kerry	Nader	Other (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	Would not vote	No op.
10/29/04	49	48	1	*	1	*	1
10/28/04	50	47	*	1	1	0	1
10/27/04	49	48	1	1	1	0	1

10/26/04	48	49	1	*	*	0	1
10/25/04	48	49	1	*	*	0	1
10/24/04	48	49	1	*	1	0	1
10/23/04	49	48	1	*	1	*	2
10/21/04	50	46	1	*	1	*	2
10/20/04	51	46	1	*	*	*	2
10/19/04	51	46	1	*	*	*	2
10/18/04	51	46	1	*	*	0	2
10/17/04	50	47	1	*	*	*	2
10/16/04	50	46	2	*	*	*	2
10/14/04	48	48	1	*	1	*	1
10/13/04	48	48	1	*	1	0	2
10/12/04	48	48	1	*	1	0	2
10/11/04	50	46	1	*	1	0	2
10/10/04	50	46	1	*	1	0	2
10/9/04	50	46	1	*	1	0	2
10/8/04	50	47	1	*	1	0	2
10/7/04	50	47	*	*	1	0	1
10/6/04	49	47	1	1	1	0	1
10/5/04	49	47	1	1	1	0	1
10/4/04	51	45	1	*	1	0	1
10/3/04	51	46	1	*	1	*	1
9/26/04	51	45	1	*	1	0	2
9/8/04	52	43	2	*	1	0	2
8/29/04	48	48	1	*	1	0	2
8/1/04	47	49	2	*	1	0	1
7/25/04	50	46	2	*	1	*	1

Net Leaned Vote, Registered Voters:

	Bush	Kerry	Nader	Other (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	Would not vote	No op.
10/29/04	48	47	1	*	1	*	2
10/28/04	49	45	1	*	1	*	2
10/27/04	48	46	2	1	1	1	2
10/26/04	47	47	1	1	1	*	2
10/25/04	47	47	2	*	1	*	2
10/24/04	47	47	2	*	1	*	2
10/23/04	49	45	1	*	1	*	3
10/21/04	50	44	1	*	1	*	3
10/20/04	51	44	1	*	1	*	3
10/19/04	51	44	1	*	1	*	2
10/18/04	51	44	1	*	1	*	3
10/17/04	49	46	1	*	1	*	3
10/16/04	49	45	2	*	1	*	3
10/14/04	47	48	2	*	1	*	2
10/13/04	47	47	2	*	2	*	2
10/12/04	47	47	2	*	2	*	2
10/11/04	48	46	2	*	1	*	2
10/10/04	48	46	1	*	1	*	3
10/9/04	48	47	1	*	2	*	3
10/8/04	48	46	1	*	2	*	3
10/7/04	48	47	1	*	2	*	2
10/6/04	49	46	1	1	2	*	2
10/5/04	50	45	2	*	1	*	2
10/4/04	52	43	2	*	1	*	2
10/3/04	50	45	2	*	1	*	2
9/26/04	51	44	2	1	1	*	2
9/8/04	50	44	2	*	2	*	2
8/29/04	48	47	2	*	1	*	2
8/1/04	44	50	2	*	1	1	2
7/25/04	48	46	3	*	1	*	1

7/11/04	46	46	4	1	2	1	1
6/20/04	44	48	6	*	1	*	1
5/23/04	46	46	4	*	1	1	1
4/18/04	48	43	6	*	2	1	*
3/7/04	44	48	3	*	1	2	2

4. (IF NAMED CANDIDATE) Will you definitely vote for (CANDIDATE), or is there a chance you could change your mind and vote for someone else? (IF CHANCE CHANGE MIND) Is there a good chance you'll change your mind, or would you say it's pretty unlikely?

	Definitely vote	---Chance change mind--- NET	Good	Unlikely	No opin.
Likely voters:					
10/29/04 All	93	7	2	4	1
Bush	92	7	2	5	1
Kerry	94	5	2	3	1
Call for full trend.					

5. What (was/will be) the single most important issue in your vote for president this year: (The U.S. campaign against terrorism), (the war in Iraq), (the economy and jobs), (education), (health care), or something else?

	Terrorism	Iraq	Economy/ jobs	Educ- ation	Health care	Other	No op.
10/29/04 LV	19	23	23	5	10	19	3
10/28/04 LV	20	24	23	4	9	18	2
10/25/04 LV	21	22	24	4	9	18	2
10/24/04 LV	20	21	24	5	9	19	2
10/17/04 LV	19	26	26	5	9	13	3
10/14/04 LV	20	26	22	4	14	13	1
10/12/04 LV	22	24	24	4	11	13	2
10/10/04 LV	23	24	24	3	12	12	2
10/7/04 LV	23	23	23	4	10	15	2
10/3/04 LV	24	26	21	4	12	12	2
9/26/04 LV	24	20	27	5	11	10	3
RV	21	19	28	6	13	10	3
9/8/04 LV	28	20	25	6	11	9	2
RV	25	18	27	6	13	8	2
8/29/04 RV	19	19	31	6	12	11	2
8/1/04 RV	20	23	25	7	11	12	2
7/25/04 RV	20	21	27	7	12	12	1

END