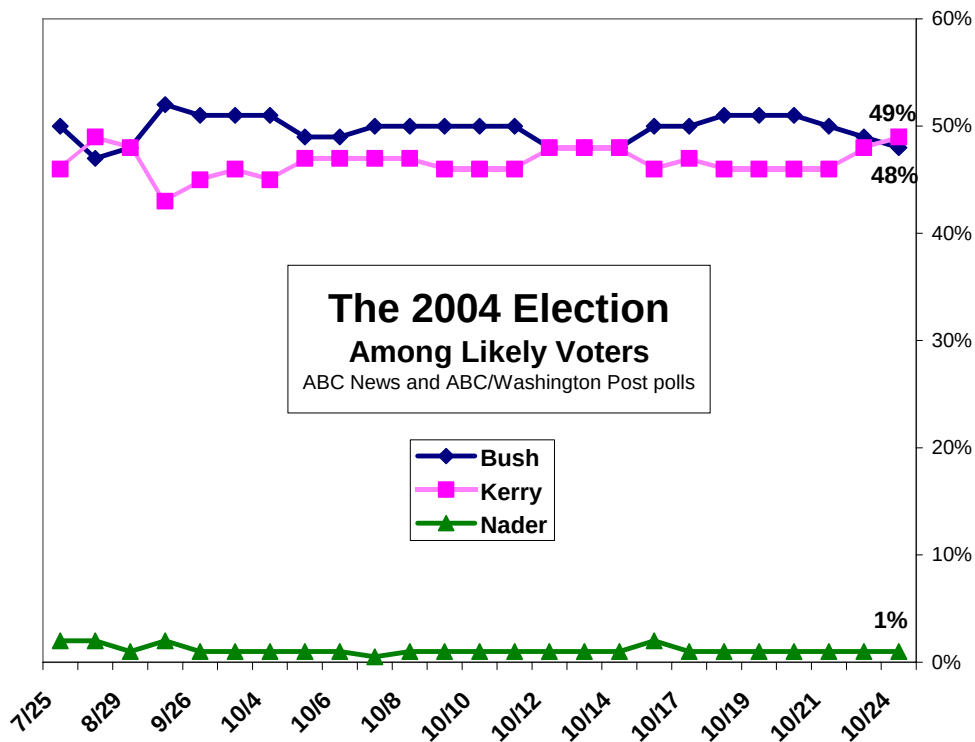


“Wrong Track” Sentiment Is a Factor in Kerry’s Favor

Skepticism about the nation’s direction is boosting John Kerry’s campaign for president: Fifty-five percent of likely voters say the country is on the wrong track, and their discontent is fueling Kerry to an even race against George W. Bush.

Overall, 49 percent of likely voters now support Kerry, 48 percent Bush, one percent Ralph Nader. Given polling tolerances that’s essentially a tie, but it is the first time since Aug. 1 that Kerry’s held a numerical advantage, however slight, in ABC News polls.

A weekend advance did it: Saturday and Sunday were two of Kerry’s three best individual days since this daily tracking poll began Oct. 1. Today’s results are based on Thursday-Sunday interviews.

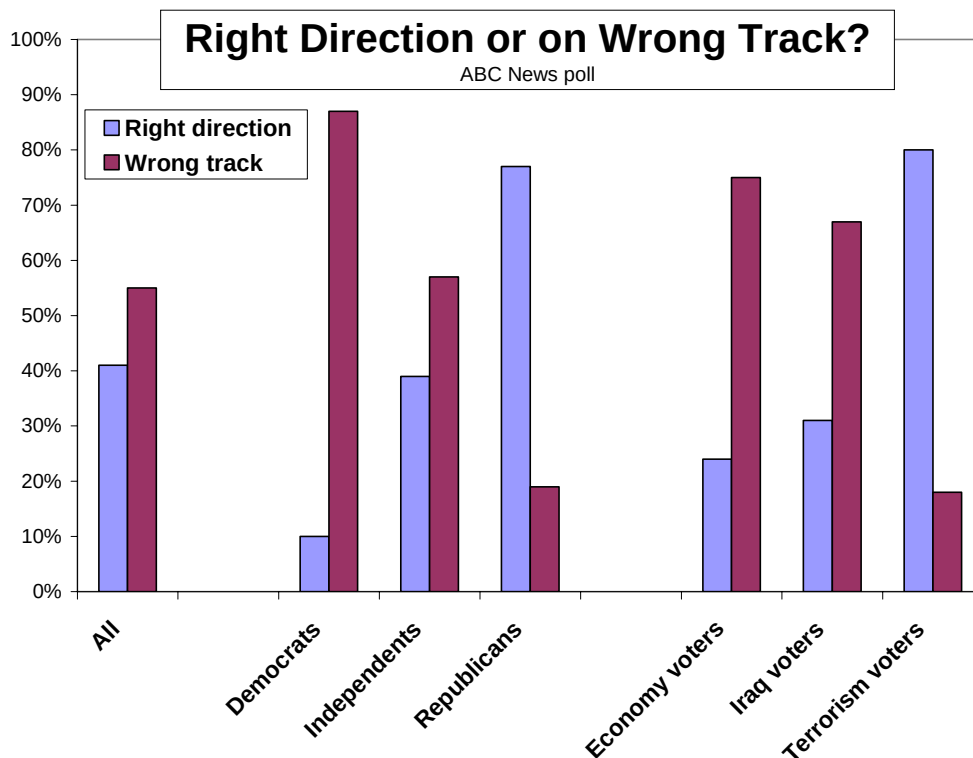


DIRECTION – Discontent is the necessary element in removing an incumbent from office, and Kerry clearly has harnessed much of it: Among likely voters who say the country’s on the wrong track, 84 percent support him.

At the same time, 12 percent of discontented voters are so far sticking with Bush – as are, more naturally, 94 percent of those who say the nation’s headed in the right direction. A fundamental question for this election is whether discontent is high enough – and goes strongly enough to the challenger – for the incumbent to lose.

Before the 1992 election it was clearer: Amid much broader economic discomfort, 76 percent of registered voters said the nation was on the wrong track, and Bush’s father was voted out. But shortly before the 1996 election 55 percent said the country was on the wrong track, the same as now, and Bill Clinton nonetheless cruised to re-election. The difference from ’96 is that the discontent now cuts more strongly to vote choices.

	Right Direction	Wrong track
10/04	41%	55
10/96	40	55
10/92	22	76

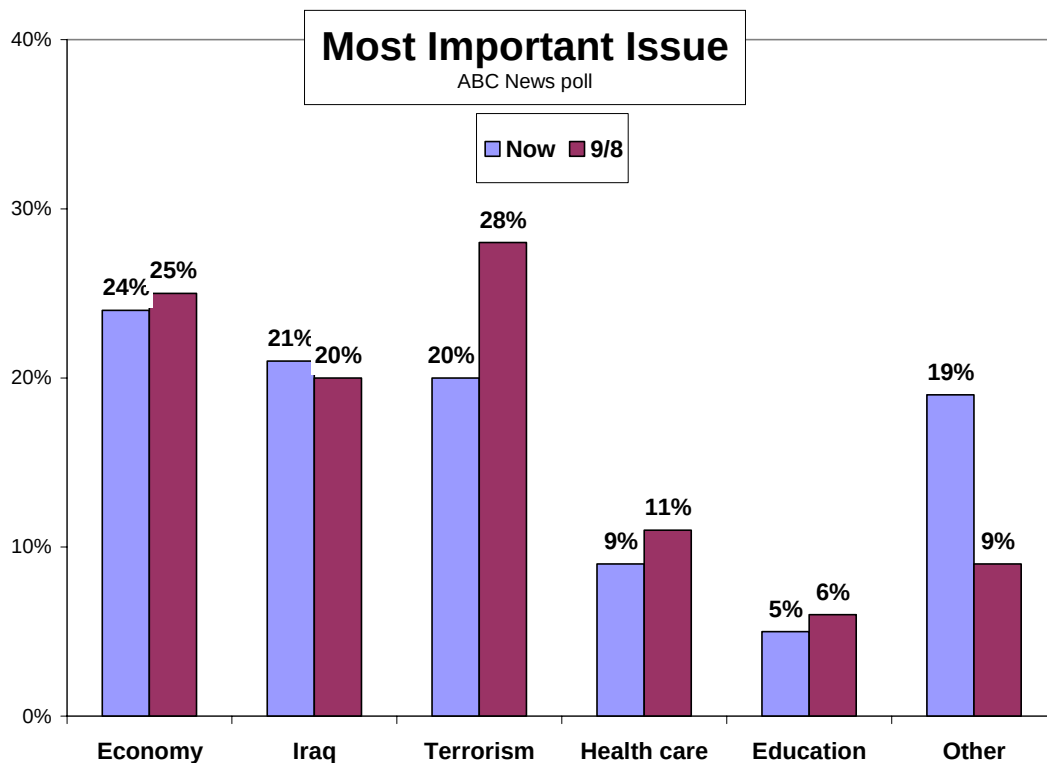


ISSUES – The right direction/wrong track results also underscore the extent to which Bush’s prospects rest on the issue of terrorism. Among likely voters who say terrorism is the top issue in their vote, 80 percent say the country is headed in the right direction – and 87 percent support Bush for re-election.

By contrast, among those who cite the economy, Iraq, health care or education as their top issue, two-thirds or more say the country is headed in the wrong direction – and about as many support Kerry.

In short, every voter who shows up at the polls next week with terrorism foremost in his or her mind is very likely to be a Bush supporter, while those focused on another of the top issues – the economy, Iraq, health care or education – are likelier by 2-1 to support Kerry than Bush. The campaigns’ closing messages can be expected to reflect that reality.

Bush, in particular, may seek to raise the profile of terrorism as an issue, given slippage in this concern: The number of “terrorism voters” has fallen from a peak of 28 percent of likely voters the week after his convention to 20 percent today, and he needs them.



OTHERS – But life isn’t entirely this simple: There’s also a sizable “other” group – people who cite something other than these five top items as the most important issue in their vote. And the number of “other issue” voters has doubled since Labor Day, from nine percent after the Republican convention to 19 percent today.

People in this group tend to cite issues of morals or principles, and they divide differently than others: They split evenly on the nation’s direction, 48-47 percent, but they’re also more apt to support Bush than Kerry, 60-38 percent.

Top issue:	Right track	Wrong direction	Presidential preference Bush	presidential preference Kerry
Terrorism	80%	18	87%	12
Economy, Iraq, health care or education	26	70	30	66

Other mentions	48	47	60	38
----------------	----	----	----	----

These “other issue” voters are different politically: They’re more apt than other issue voters to be Republicans, by a 15-point margin, and to be conservatives, by 14 points.

On issues they include those who cite abortion as No. 1, one percent of all likely voters, and those who mention moral values, another one percent; but also those who cite the candidates’ personality or their honesty, another one percent each. Another one percent say their top issue is removing Bush from office; four percent simply call it a combination of factors; and the rest, nine percent, divide among a wide range of issues.

Other top issue mentions (among likely voters)						
Abortion	Morals	Personality	Honesty	Removing Bush	Combination	Others
1%	1	1	1	1	4	9

VERBATES – Verbatim response from these “other issue” voters help deliver a sense of these individuals. “The erosion of personal liberties” is the top issue for one; “integrity” for another; for a third, “Kerry is in favor of the United Nations and I’m not.”

A few cite same-sex marriage; others, stem-cell research, guns, immigration or Social Security. For each who’s specific – “taxes,” “environment” or “Supreme Court judicial appointments” – another is more atmospheric, citing “overall leadership” or “everything.”

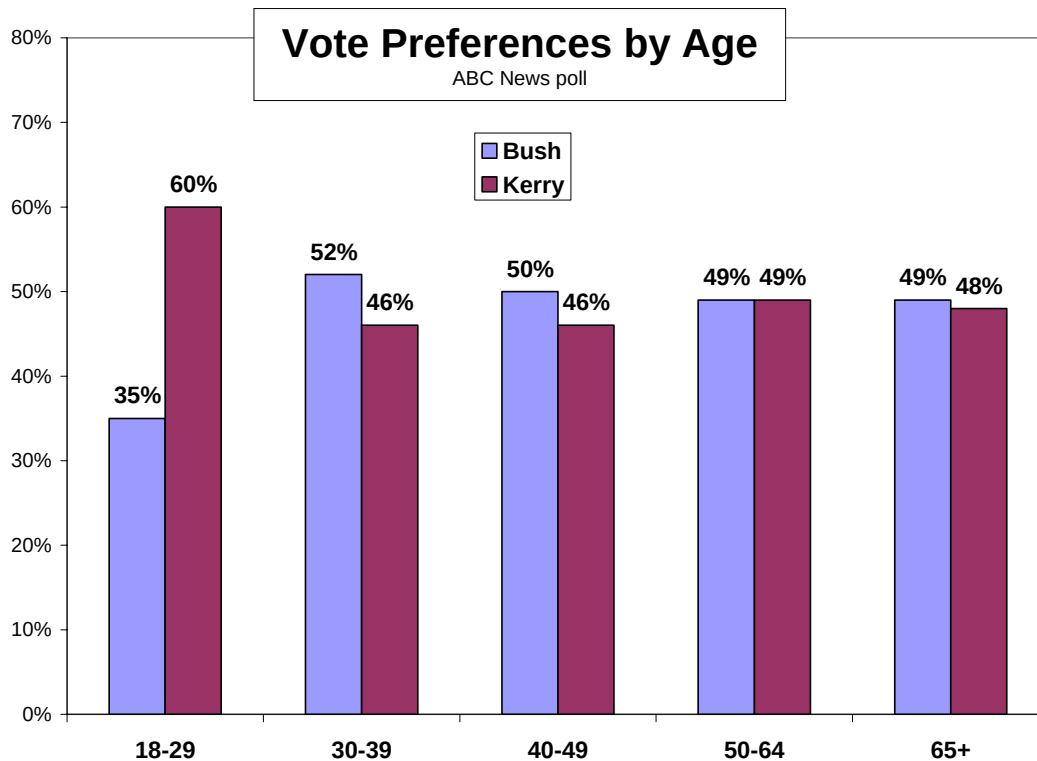
One says it’s most important to “vote for the person who is a Christian,” but for another the top voting issue is: “The church (has) got to get out of the White House.” Some make personally disparaging remarks about one or the other candidate. “Kerry is way too liberal,” contrasts with, “Bush did a horrible job.”

As with the picture overall, these verbatim responses show, in sum, a nation divided.

AGE – Age continues to be a very striking factor in vote preferences. Kerry now leads by a wide 60-35 percent among likely voters age 18 to 29, a group that divided evenly between Bush and Al Gore, 46-48 percent, four years ago. Indeed most of the movement the past week has occurred specifically among young men; one reason is that they’re more likely than others to cite the economy as the top issue in their vote.

Not surprisingly, young adults are the most likely to say the country is headed off on the wrong track, by a broad 63-34 percent.

This age gap also is expressed by marriage, with Kerry doing far better with singles, who tend to be younger. This could pose somewhat of an advantage for Bush, since young voters have a less reliable track record of showing up on Election Day. As Bush needs terrorism voters, Kerry needs young voters.



If young voters do show up in great numbers, it could underscore the clout a concerted group can make. About half of 18- to 29-year-old likely voters say this will be their first time voting. Fewer in this age group, 33 percent, were first-timers in 2000.

MARRIAGE – An interesting aside to this gap by age – and especially by marital status – is that the gender gap has faded dramatically. In 2000 Bush won men by 11 points and Gore won women by 11; today it's Bush +1 among men, Kerry +4 among women. Bush, rather, has a big lead among married men and women alike (56-41 percent among all marrieds); Kerry, a big lead among single men and women alike (63-33 percent overall).

Compared with singles, married people are seven points more apt to cite terrorism as the top issue in their vote, and 11 points less likely to cite the economy, Iraq, terrorism, health care or education.

MORE GROUPS – The candidates meanwhile are solid in their bases. Bush is supported by 93 percent of conservative evangelical white Protestants, 10 percent of all voters; Kerry, by 91 percent of blacks, about the same size group.

Kerry also leads by 65-30 percent among Hispanic voters, a group that appears to be staying in its usual 2-1 Democratic position despite outreach efforts by the Bush campaign. But Bush holds a 55-42 percent lead among white voters, very similar to what it was in 2000.

Union household voters – another important turnout group – favor Kerry by 2-1, a bit better than for Gore in 2000.

In, like the gender gap, another departure from the norm, there's a division now between two key swing groups, independents and white Catholics. In elections since 1980, one candidate has won both these groups, and has been elected president. White Catholics today side with Bush by 53-42 percent; independents go 50-44 percent toward Kerry.

METHODOLOGY – This poll was conducted October 21-24 among a random national sample of 2,410 adults, including 2,079 registered voters and 1,631 likely voters. The results have a 2.5-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>.

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934, or Lisa Finkel, (212) 456-6190.

Full results follow (*= 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.
10/24/04	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.
10/24/04	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	NET	---Chance change Good	mind--- Unlikely	No opin.
Likely voters:					
10/24/04 All	91	8	3	5	1
Bush	93	6	2	4	1
Kerry	92	8	2	6	*

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.
10/24/04 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

Call for full verbatim list of "other" responses.

6. Do you think things in this country (are generally going in the right direction) or do you feel things (have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track)?

		Right direction	Wrong track	No opin.
10/24/04	LV	41	55	4
11/1/98	LV	55	44	1
10/17/96	RV	40	55	5
10/27/92	RV	22	76	2
10/25/88	RV	49	46	6

Call for full trend.

END