ABC NEWS POLL: CAMPAIGN TRACKING #20 – 10/25/04
EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE AFTER 5 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 26, 2004

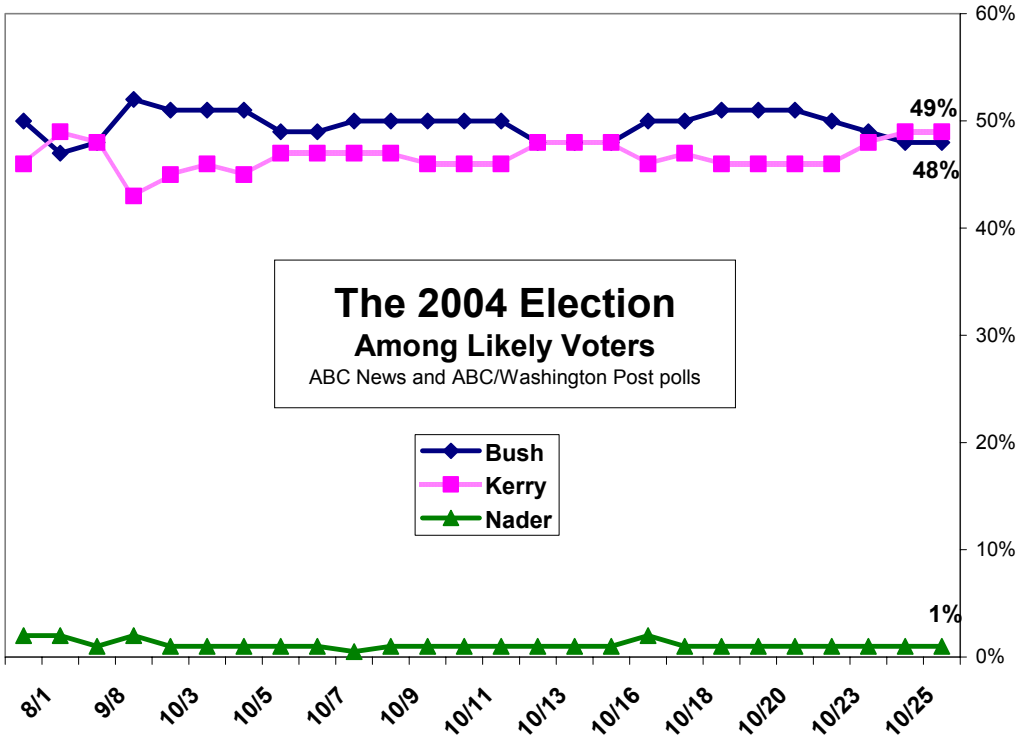
For Nearly One in 10, It's a Done Deal

While the 2004 election is locked in a virtual dead heat, for nearly one in 10 likely voters it's all over but the counting: They've already cast their ballots.

Nine percent of "likely" voters in the ABC News tracking poll say they've voted for president, either by absentee ballot or early voting, a number that's jumped in the last week. Fifty-one percent say they went for George W. Bush, 47 percent for John Kerry.

That doesn't mean Bush is "winning" the absentee vote; the difference is within sampling tolerances. And among all likely voters, including those waiting for Election Day, the race is essentially tied: Forty-nine percent support Kerry and 48 percent Bush, with one percent for Ralph Nader in interviews Friday through Monday.

That's the same as yesterday's tracking result. The race tightened slightly from last week because Saturday and Sunday were two of Kerry's three best days since this tracking poll began Oct. 1; Monday, though, was a bit better for Bush. Tracking polls average results across days to build a reliable sample.



EARLY BIRDS – There's been a recent jump in early voting: The number of registered voters who say they've already voted has risen from one percent in the first three weeks of ABC's tracking poll, through last Thursday, to seven percent now. It reaches nine percent when computed among the ranks of likely voters only.

Early voting is more prevalent in the West than in other regions. (Oregon is one reason – all voting there is by mail – and there's high absentee voting in several other Western states.) Early voters are more likely to be older, women and following the race very closely. They're also a bit more likely to be Republicans than Democrats.

As with any small subgroup, there's greater sampling variability in data on early voters. Given the increased opportunities for early voting in many states, they bear watching as their ranks grow in the coming days.

MOVEABLES – Moveable voters, those who say their minds aren't definitely made up, are another group to watch. This group is down to nine percent of all likely voters, compared with 14 percent at the start of tracking, and moveables divide by 42-41 percent between Bush and Kerry in this poll.

Bush did as well or better with moveables last week; they move, and still can. And an open question is how many of them actually will vote: Moveables are following the campaign much less closely than other likely voters (32 percent "very closely," compared with 66 percent among those who've got a definite preference). That suggests less commitment to the process among moveables.

REFERENDUM – Incumbent elections often are described as a referendum on the sitting president, which helps explain the close race. Precisely as they divide on the horse race, likely voters split 48-49 percent on whether Bush does or doesn't deserve a second term.

That view is highly partisan, marked by the same sharp divisions as vote preferences. Ninety percent of Republicans say Bush deserves a second term; 86 percent of Democrats (and 52 percent of independents) say he does not. Fifty-five percent of whites say he's earned another term; 76 percent of minorities say not. Nearly three-quarters of evangelical white Protestants say yes; two-thirds of the non-religious, no.

The "deserves re-election" number for Bush is down from 54 percent after his convention, when he was at a peak. The race, like the answer to this question, has tightened since.

Whatever the outcome of the election, such results underscore the difficultly Bush has had – and perhaps any president might encounter in this polarized electorate – achieving his goal of being "a uniter, not a divider."

ISSUES and GROUPS – Issue priorities are holding steady, with a close division among the top three: the economy, cited by 24 percent of likely voters as most important in their vote; the war in Iraq, 22 percent; and terrorism, 21 percent.

Terrorism, Bush's best issue, peaked higher, at 28 percent, after his convention. Kerry's been trying, with some success, to drive it down and other issues up in importance, a critically important factor in this competitive race.

Among groups, there's a sharp regional difference in vote preferences: Kerry ahead by 56-41 percent in his home region, the Northeast, and by 54-45 percent in the West; a 52-46 percent Bush-Kerry race in the most populous region, the South; and a 50-46 percent Bush-Kerry contest in the Midwest. The biggest difference from 2000 is the West, better at the moment for Kerry than it was for Gore.

	Now Bush-Kerry	2000 Bush-Gore
East	41-56%	40-56%
South	52-46	55-43
Midwest	50-46	49-48
West	45-54	46-49

Kerry continues to be strong in core Democratic groups, Bush in the Republican base, with an unusual split in the two major swing groups: Independents, now 51-44 percent Kerry-Bush; and white Catholics, 52-44 percent Bush-Kerry. In exit polls since 1980, these two groups have sided with the same candidate, and he's won the presidency.

Religion, or the lack thereof, has its customarily strong influence. Apart from white Catholics, the most centrist large religious group, white Protestants prefer Bush by 30 points, 64-34 percent; that includes evangelical white Protestants, by a wider 71-28 percent, and non-evangelical white Protestants by 57-41 percent. People who profess no religion, 12 percent of likely voters, favor Kerry by 67-31 percent.

	Bush-Kerry
White Catholics	52-44%
White Protestants (all)	64-34
Evangelical white Protestants	71-28
Non-evangelical white Protestants	57-41
No religion	31-67

METHODOLOGY – This poll was conducted October 22-25 among a random national sample of 2,414 adults, including 2,084 registered voters and 1,666 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.

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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.
10/25/04	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.
10/25/04	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:						
10/25/04	All	92	8	2	5	1
	Bush	92	7	2	5	1
	Kerry	92	7	2	5	*

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.
10/25/04	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

6. Based on his performance in office so far, would you say Bush deserves a second term as president, or not?

		Yes	No	No opinion
10/24/04	LV	48	49	3
10/7/04	LV	51	47	2

9/8/04	LV	54	43	3
	RV	52	45	4

Clinton:

5/22/96	56	42	2
1/21/96	47	49	4
1/24/95	41	55	3
8/16/94	38	56	6

END