



AP Poll: Bush, Kerry tied in presidential race, Nader at 6 percent

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) - John Kerry and President Bush are starting the general election campaign tied, according to an Associated Press poll, while independent Ralph Nader is drawing enough support to make Democrats squirm.

The Associated Press Poll is conducted by Ipsos-Public Affairs. Between March 1-3, 2004, the AP/Ipsos poll interviewed a representative sample of 1,000 adults nationwide, including 771 registered voters. The margin of error is +/- 3.1 for all adults, +/- 3.5 for registered voters.

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WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) - John Kerry and President Bush are starting the general election campaign tied, according to an Associated Press poll, while independent Ralph Nader is drawing enough support to make Democrats squirm.

The Republican incumbent had 46 percent support, Democrat Kerry had 45 percent and Nader, the 2000 Green Party candidate who entered the race last month, was at 6 percent in the survey conducted for the AP by Ipsos-Public Affairs.

Bush and the four-term Massachusetts senator, who emerged as the nominee Tuesday after a string of primary race wins over several rivals, have run close or Kerry has been ahead in most recent polls that did not include Nader.

Since Nader entered the race Feb. 22, campaign strategists and political analysts have been trying to assess the impact of another presidential bid by the consumer activist who is blamed by some Democrats for Al Gore's loss in 2000.

In the last presidential election, Nader was on the ballot in 43 states and Washington, D.C., garnering only 2.7 percent of the vote. But in Florida and New Hampshire, Bush won such narrow victories that had Gore received the bulk of Nader's votes in those states, he would have won the general election.

Exit polls from 2000 show that about half of Nader's voters would have backed Gore in a two-way race, far more than would have supported Bush. Nader dismisses the spoiler label.

While Nader's support in the AP-Ipsos poll was 6 percent, his backing in polls in 2000 fluctuated in the single digits -- often at about 4 percent, but sometimes higher. This year, Nader is unlikely to get the Green Party's nomination and he faces a stiff challenge in getting his name on the ballot in the 50 states.

Kenneth Freeman, an 86-year-old retiree from New Smyrna Beach, Fla., who leans Democratic, was unhappy with Nader's presidential bid. "Ralph Nader is fouling it all up," Freeman said. "He's taking votes away from the Democrats. I think he's on an ego trip."

Bush's job approval in the AP-Ipsos poll was 48 percent, with 49 percent disapproving -- essentially the same as last month when 47 percent approved of his job performance.

His approval rating, which soared close to 90 percent after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and remained high for months, has dipped to the lowest levels of his presidency in recent weeks.

Six in 10 said the country is on the wrong track, up from last month, while slightly more than one-third of those surveyed -- 35 percent -- said the country is headed in the right direction.

"We're 240-something days from Election Day. We've got a long way to go and expect it to be a close race throughout, no matter what the factors are," said Terry Holt, a spokesman for the Bush campaign.

The poll was conducted Monday through Wednesday as Kerry captured nine of 10 Super Tuesday elections and claimed the nomination. Nightly results suggested that Kerry did not get a bounce from winning the nomination.

"For all those who want to bring change to America, we need to remain united behind the Democratic nominee," said Kerry campaign spokeswoman Stephanie Cutter.

Kerry, who had solid backing from 28 percent of the voters, was strong among minorities, low-income people, singles, older voters and Catholics.

Bush, who had solid backing from 37 percent, did well among whites, men, Protestants, homeowners and suburban dwellers.

"I'm worried about the Democrats taking control," said Stephanie Rahaniotis, a Republican from Lynbrook, N.Y. She said after the Sept. 11 attacks she feels safer with Bush in charge and thinks Democrats will "divert our attention from the military."

In the poll, Nader was most likely to get the backing of young adults, and independents.

The AP-Ipsos poll of 771 registered voters was taken March 1-3 and had a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

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Ipsos Public Affairs

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