



Ralph Rocks the Vote

A new poll shows young voters turning toward the consumer advocate, at the expense of John Kerry

For the Newsweek/Ipsos Genext Poll, Ipsos-Public Affairs interviewed 354 registered voters aged 18 to 29, from March 1 to March 17, 2004. The margin of error is plus or minus 5.1 percentage points. References to poll data on registered voters of all ages are from an AP/Ipsos poll conducted March 1-3 on 771 registered voters. That margin of error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

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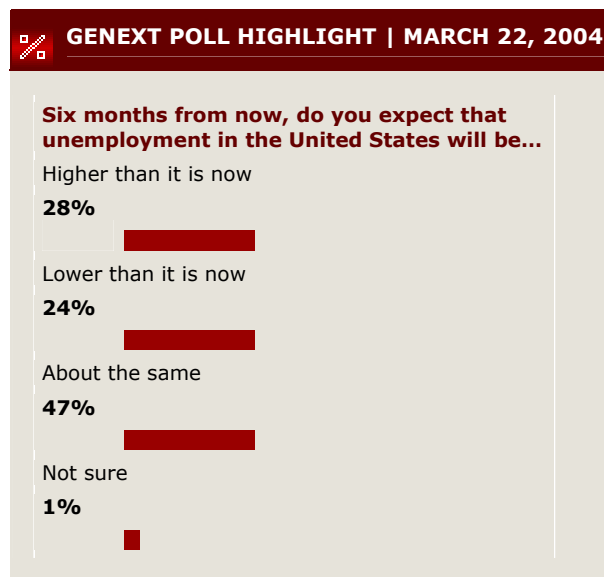
Newsweek – March 22, 2004 - **Newsweek.com** -- Ralph Nader may have been abandoned by some of his celebrity backers, railed against in Democratic Party circles and skewered on late night TV, but the consumer advocate still packs a powerful punch with young voters. According to the latest NEWSWEEK and Newsweek.com Genext poll, the feisty Nader, widely blamed for Al Gore's defeat in the 2000 election, drew twice the support among voters aged 18-29 as he did in a comparable poll of all registered voters. The groundswell of youth support could mean good news for Nader, and perhaps more significantly, for President George W. Bush.

At face value, Bush's performance with the Under-30 set is hardly anything to write home about. His support among young voters has remained steady in the past month—38 percent of 18-29 year olds said they would likely vote for him in a hypothetical election, compared with 41 percent of young voters who supported the president a month ago, an insignificant change within the margin of error. But while Bush's youth numbers still lag behind his performance with voters of all ages (46 percent), the president can perhaps find something to smile about in the Genext numbers of his rival, Sen. John Kerry. While the 47 percent of young voters who say they favor Kerry still gives the Massachusetts senator a nine point lead over the president, Kerry's support has dropped significantly from the 56 percent who said they would vote for him just one month ago.

Nader appears to be a key reason for Kerry's slide. The independent candidate had not officially announced his intention to run for the presidency at the time of the last Genext poll. Yet in just a matter of weeks he's drawn enough interest from young voters so that 12 percent of young voters said they favored Nader over the Republican and Democratic Party candidates. While the so-called "Nader factor" has been attributed to a Kerry drop in several national polls of

registered voters, it would appear to be much more pronounced among 18-29 year olds. Only six percent of registered voters of all ages said they favored Nader, half of his proportion in the Genext poll.

To be sure, other factors, including a tough round of negative advertising from the Bush campaign and Kerry's own verbal missteps on foreign affairs topics in the past weeks, may have also contributed to the Democrat's drop in youth support. But the large numbers of young voters going over to Nader could mean trouble for Kerry come November when both parties try to bring key supporters to the polls in large numbers.



The latest Genext poll also has some unwelcome news for Bush. In the past month, the president has stepped up his campaign profile, crisscrossing the country to talk with voters on key issues like the economy and the war on terror. But the strong-armed stumping hasn't done anything to boost Bush's job approval ratings among young voters. Just 44 percent of young voters approve of the president's performance in office while 54 percent disapprove. This spread is larger than the divide among voters of all ages: An AP/Ipsos poll conducted March 1-3 found that 48 percent approved of Bush and 49 percent disapproved. (Another poll for NEWSWEEK, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates on March 18 and 19 among all adult voters, found Bush's approval rate to be 52 percent favorable; 42 percent unfavorable.)

One area of key concern to young voters seems to be the economy. While 46 percent of young voters approve of Bush's handling of economic issues as president, 53 percent disapproved. Interestingly, a plurality of young voters—47 percent—think the unemployment rate will stay the same in the next six month (28 percent think unemployment will go up while 24 percent think it will go down).

In non-election news, young voters appear uninterested in the raging debates over decency standards on broadcast television and radio. Since the furor erupted over the revelation of Janet Jackson's breast at the Super Bowl halftime shows many have called on broadcasters to crack down on the proliferation of sexual imagery in their entertainment content. But when asked about the types of broadcasting material they found offensive, only 17 percent of 18-29 year olds said that nudity bothered them a great deal and only 15 percent said they were very disturbed by sexual situations. Indeed, the types of behavior that offended the largest proportion of young voters have been barely talked about at all in recent months. Thirty percent of young voters said they were bothered a great deal by the presence of racial stereotypes in broadcasting and 24 percent said they were particularly troubled by violence.

Also, in an era when "The Passion of the Christ's" boffo box office performance has bolstered the calls of some activists for a greater prevalence of religion in public life, young voters seem skeptical about giving the pulpit greater prominence in political decision making. Only 22 percent of young voters thought politically-active religious groups have too little influence over public policy in the United States and a mere 31 percent thought those groups had too much influence. A larger proportion, 44 percent, thought the influence of religious groups was about right.