



The Vanishing Young Kerry Voter

A new GENEXT poll shows Kerry losing support from young voters

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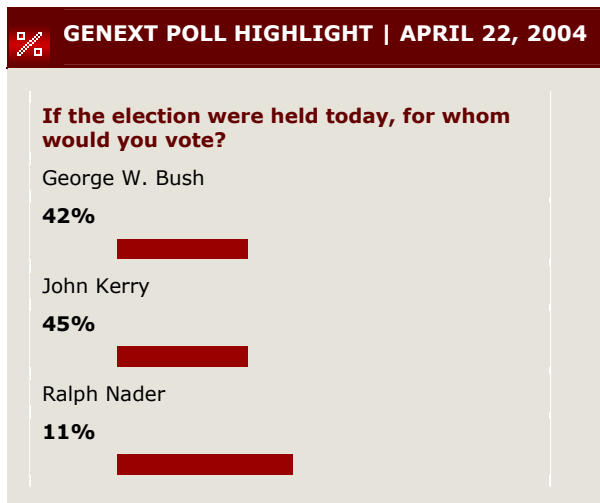
For the NEWSWEEK/GENEXT Poll, Ipsos-Public Affairs interviewed 351 registered voters age 18 to 29, from April 5 to April 18. The margin of error is plus or minus 5.2 percentage points. References to poll data on registered voters of all ages are from an AP/Ipsos poll conducted April 5-7 on 758 registered voters. That margin of error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

By Jonathan Darman
Newsweek.com

April 22, 2004 (Newsweek.com) -- Sen. John Kerry, who once held a commanding, double-digit advantage over President George W. Bush among young Americans, now finds himself in a statistical dead heat with the president among voters aged 18-29, according to the latest IPSOS/NEWSWEEK/GENEXT poll. While Kerry currently leads Bush within the margin of error, 45 percent to 42 percent, back in February 56 percent of 18-29 year-olds said they supported the senator versus 42 percent who said they would vote for Bush.

The decline for Kerry among young voters comes as the candidate appears to be losing ground overall. An AP/Ipsos poll of registered voters taken at the time of the GENEXT poll showed Bush leading Kerry within the margin of error, 45 percent to 44 percent. Eight weeks ago, Kerry led Bush 48 percent to 45 percent in a NEWSWEEK poll.

Analysts attribute Kerry's overall decline to a variety of factors including Bush's aggressive \$40 million advertising campaign in swing states and the perception that Kerry has been unable to switch his own general-election campaign into high gear. Even in the wake of damaging testimony before the 9/11 commission and an upswing in Iraqi insurgent violence that has drawn questions about Bush's stewardship of foreign affairs, the president has continued to maintain a slight edge over Kerry in many national polls.



Clearly, some young voters have turned away from Kerry for the same reasons as older citizens. But the GENEXT poll indicates that the presumptive Democratic candidate's strength among the youth vote has been disproportionately dissipated by the entrance of independent Ralph Nader into the presidential race. In the latest GENEXT poll, the consumer advocate earns 11 percent of the under-30 vote. While Nader's showing is down 1 point from a month earlier, it still is nearly double the 6 percent of voters who said they would vote for him in the AP/Ipsos poll of all voters.

Nader says his main appeal lies with voters who the major political parties have previously turned off. And 29 percent of respondents in the GENEXT poll who said they were likely to vote for Nader said they wouldn't vote at all if he had not entered the race. Still, 49 percent of GENEXT Nader voters said they would vote for Kerry if they didn't vote for Nader, compared to only 20 percent who said they would vote for Bush.

Indeed, while some young voters may be moving away from Kerry, they're not moving toward Bush. Even as Kerry dropped 11 points in the GENEXT poll from February to April, Bush only managed to increase 41 percent showing of two months ago by 1 percentage point.

On the issues, young-voter dissatisfaction with the president is stark: Fifty-three percent of 18-29 year-olds say they disapprove of Bush's handling of foreign-policy issues and the war on terrorism, significantly more than the 43 percent of all registered voters who disapproved in the AP/Ipsos survey. On the homefront, 54 percent of young voters said they disapproved of Bush's handling of the economy, mirroring Bush's 53 percent disapproval rating on the economy among voters overall.

But young voters' faltering approval of Kerry is particularly surprising if only because the senator has sometimes seemed willing to do everything short of appearing in a Jessica Simpson video in order to attract youth support. From the outset, the Kerry campaign has engaged in aggressive youth outreach. In the primaries, it flooded college campuses with an array of bright young things—Kerry's own daughters, Vanessa and Alex; his stepson, Christopher Heinz, and celebrities like actor Scott Wolf and Blink-182 frontman Tom DeLonge.

Kerry himself has ratcheted up the effort since capturing the nomination, sitting down for an MTV "Choose or Lose" special and strutting around campaign stages with tunes from Bon Jovi and Coldplay reverberating through the air. Just last week, the candidate went on a national college tour drawing attention to his proposals for college tuition relief and national service.

While it's possible this heavy wooing may stem Kerry's slide among young voters, the GENEXT poll indicates that the candidate can't even count on the support he currently

holds: A substantial proportion, 30 percent, of 18-29-year-olds pledged to Kerry said they could change their mind before the November election while only 13 percent of young Bush voters said they might switch their vote.

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