

A Draw in the Third Debate, With Bragging Rights to Kerry

John Kerry and George W. Bush battled to another draw in their last debate of the 2004 campaign, with perhaps bragging rights to Kerry, since more Republicans tuned in.

Among registered voters who watched the debate, 42 percent called Kerry the winner, 41 percent said Bush won and 14 percent called it a tie. That's similar to the outcome of the second debate, while Kerry won the first among viewers by a nine-point margin.

	Who won?
Kerry	42%
Bush	41%
Tie	14%

The audience for the third debate was a bit more Republican in its allegiance: Among viewers, 38 percent identified themselves as Republicans, 30 percent as Democrats and 28 percent as independents. That makes the draw more of an accomplishment for Kerry.

	Party ID of debate viewers
Democrats	30%
Republicans	38%
Independents	28%

It occurred in part because Democrats who watched were more apt to stand by their man. Among Democratic viewers, 81 percent called Kerry the winner, and five percent said Bush won; among Republicans who watched, 73 percent said it was Bush's win, and 12 percent gave the win to Kerry. Independents divided by 42-35 percent, Kerry-Bush.

	Who won?		
	Kerry	Bush	Tie
Among Democrats	81%	5	11
Among Republicans	12	73	11
Among independents	42	35	22

As is customary, there were no immediate changes in vote preferences. Viewers divided about evenly between Bush and Kerry, 49-48 percent, before the debate; and absolutely evenly, 49-49 percent, after it.

	Vote Preference Among Viewers	
	Before debate	After debate
Kerry	48%	49%

Bush	49%	49%
Nader	<.5%	1%

Kerry runs evenly with Bush in the horse race among debate viewers, despite the Republican advantage in political allegiance, in part because the independents who tuned in were more Democratic-leaning in vote preferences, breaking 52-43 percent, Kerry-Bush. (Kerry also was supported in vote preference by 13 percent of the Republicans who watched, while Bush was supported by fewer Democrats, six percent.)

TUNERS – The audience for a debate poll can depend on a variety of factors, including, for instance, whether viewers find it interesting enough to stay tuned, and what else is on television. Part of doing well in a poll of debate viewers means getting people who support you to tune in.

That’s one reason Dick Cheney won the vice presidential debate by eight points, 43-35 percent over John Edwards; the audience was seven points more Republican. (Cheney also did better with his side’s supporters than Edwards did with his.) While not a win, getting a draw among a more-Republican audience adds luster to Kerry’s performance in Tempe.

As noted, it was also a draw between Kerry and Bush in their second debate. Kerry’s win in the first debate breathed new life into his campaign, promoting an eight-point rise in his personal favorability rating and a closer contest between the two candidates.

	Tonight	Who won?	
		Second debate	First debate
Kerry	42%	44	45
Bush	41	41	36
Tie	14	13	17

METHODOLOGY - This survey was conducted by telephone among a random-sample panel of 566 registered voters who watched the presidential debate. Respondents were initially interviewed Oct. 9-12. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

Full results follow (* = less than one percent).

1. Who, in your opinion, won the debate?

	Bush	Kerry	Tie	No opin.
10/13/04	41	42	14	2
10/8/04	41	44	13	2
9/30/04	36	45	17	2

For comparison:

	Cheney	Edwards	Tie	No opin.
10/5/04	43	35	19	3

2. Presidential preference among debate viewers:

	Bush	Kerry	Nader	Other	Neither/ Wouldn't vote	No opinion
10/13/04:						
Post-debate	49	49	1	0	*	1
Pre-debate	49	48	*	*	1	1
10/8/04:						
Post-debate	48	50	*	*	1	*
Pre-debate	47	50	*	*	1	1
10/5/04 (VP):						
Post-debate	50	49	0	*	*	1
Pre-debate	51	48	*	*	*	*
9/30/04:						
Post-debate	51	47	*	*	*	1
Pre-debate	50	46	1	*	1	2

3. Party ID among debate viewers:

	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
10/13/04	30	38	28
10/8/04	35	32	29
10/5/04 (VP)	31	38	27
9/30/04	35	35	24

END