

Gore Opens His Campaign Lugging a Heavy Load

The charisma-challenged Al Gore steps into the presidential race lugging an impressive load. Outside his party, and to an extent even within it, the vice president faces stubborn skepticism about his leadership, his empathy – and his ability to generate a little sizzle.

Plenty can change before the still-distant election, and Gore is maintaining a huge lead over Bill Bradley in the race for his party's nomination. But a new ABC News/Washington Post poll finds that Gore's made up no ground against Republican George W. Bush in recent months, and trails especially among the six in 10 Americans who say they've definitely decided between the two.

Presidential Preference		
- All Americans		
	Gore	Bush
6/13/99	36%	53
3/14/99	41	54

THREE KEYS - Leadership, empathy and a little excitement are all key qualities in a White House campaign. The first, leadership, may be an inescapable issue for a newly minted candidate who's spent more than six years as a loyal No. 2. Today just 39 percent of Americans see Gore as strong leader, while 51 percent do not. Even among Democrats, almost one in three doubt Gore's leadership ability. So do six in 10 independents.

Other problems relate more to Gore's public persona than to his current job. Fifty-one percent describe him as boring, and the public splits evenly on whether he understands the problems of average people (long a wellspring of strength for Bill Clinton). Again, substantial numbers of Democrats share these doubts (37 and 24 percent, respectively), as do most independents and Republicans.

These views show up in the bottom line. Gore not only trails Bush among independents by more than 30 percentage points, he also hemorrhages a quarter of Democrats to the Texas governor. Bush, by contrast, loses only a trace of Republicans to Gore.

And while there is a gender gap, Gore even trails among women, often a majority Democratic group. Bush leads by 11 points among women, and by 23 points among men.

Bush's position is not assured; it's relatively common for fresh faces whose positions are not well known to capture the public's imagination (witness Ross Perot and Colin Powell). But while Bush faces the job of defining himself more clearly, Gore's may be even more difficult: not defining, but redefining his public image.

STRENGTH - Trailing candidates often can take solace in their strength of support; when they're down to their core, at least it's a solid core. But Gore does not have bragging rights here, either. While 64 percent of his supporters say they've definitely made up their minds, 70 percent of Bush's supporters say they're solid, too.

Among all Americans, 37 percent say they'd definitely vote for Bush; an additional 16 percent say they currently prefer Bush but might change their minds. Twenty-three percent say they'd definitely support Gore; 13 percent back Gore now but could reconsider.

Those most likely to say their minds are not made up include young adults, independents and less-educated Americans. These groups, however, are among those less likely to vote.

PARTY - The best results for Gore are within his own party. Among Democrats and independents who lean Democratic, a whopping 65 percent support Gore for the party's nomination, compared to 26 percent for Bill Bradley.

METHODOLOGY - This poll was conducted by telephone June 9-13 among a random national sample of 1,045 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Field work by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

News and research organizations wishing to receive ABC News polls via e-mail may send a request to Ben.X.Fitzpatrick@ABC.com.

ABC News polls can be found at [ABCNEWS.com](http://abcnews.com) on the Internet at:
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/PollVault/PollVault.html>

Full results follow:

1. If the election for president in the year 2000 were being held today, and the candidates were (Al Gore, the Democrat), and (George W. Bush of Texas, the Republican), for whom would you vote?

	Gore	Bush	Other (vol.)	Neither/None/ Wouldn't vote (vol.)	No opin.
6/13/99	36	53	*	8	2
6/6/99	40	53	1	4	3
3/14/99	41	54	*	3	2
2/14/99	41	49	NA	5	5
10/25/98	34	45	NA	8	13
8/21/98	41	43	NA	8	7
1/19/98	40	45	NA	7	7

9/23/97 35 40 NA 16 9
 6/6, Washington Post poll. 2/14 and previous, unleaned.

2. Would you definitely vote for (preferred candidate), or is there a chance you could change your mind and vote for (other candidate)?

6/13/99

	Definitely vote	Chance to change mind	No opinion
Gore Voters	64	34	2
Bush Voters	70	27	2

3. Please tell me whether the following statement applies to Gore, or not?

A. He understands the problems of people like you

	Yes	No	No opin.
6/13/99	44	44	12
3/14/99	48	41	11

B. He is a strong leader

	Yes	No	No opin.
6/13/99	39	51	9
3/14/99	41	47	12

C. He is boring

	Yes	No	No opin.
6/13/99	51	40	10
3/14/99*	56	40	5

*Would you say Gore is very boring, somewhat boring, somewhat interesting, or very interesting? Net responses given.

4. (Asked of leaned Democrats) Suppose your state holds a Democratic primary or caucus for president in 2000 and the candidates were: (Al Gore) and (Bill Bradley). For whom would you vote?

Net Leaned:

	Gore	Bradley	Jackson	Other (vol.)	Neither/None/ Wouldn't vote (vol.)	No opin.
6/13/99	65	26	NA	*	4	5
6/6/99	56	19	19	0	2	4
3/14/99	58	21	17	*	2	2

END