

Is This Campaign Exciting or What? Half the Public Chooses the Latter

It's been a political junkie's dream: The insurgent candidate surges, the party favorite looks suddenly vulnerable, the campaign turns nasty and the next primary takes on the trappings of a make-or-break battle.

Half the public's response: A stifled yawn.

For all the reputed political drama of the last two weeks, 48 percent of Americans in an ABC News poll describe the 2000 presidential campaign as "dull." Slightly fewer, 44 percent, call it "interesting." At least that's better than it was in the summer of the 1996 campaign, when a whopping 73 percent found the contest dull.

	The Presidential Campaign:	
	Interesting	Dull
2/13/00	44%	48
8/2/96	21	73

Why is half the public unengaged? One reason may be that some Americans regard the primaries as preliminaries – after all, large majorities don't even vote in the primaries; they may be saving their interest for the main event. For example, interest in the 1996 campaign, while never high, gained 20 points by its closing days.

Another reason is that the nation's long-running economic boom has created what's been called a "a hotbed of rest" in the nation: Gripes are down, contentment is up, so public demand for a political fix to the nation's problems is on the wane. Voter interest and turnout alike tend to rise when the economy's in bad shape, and to slip in good times.

GROUPS – Interestingly, the voting bloc that's responsible for much of both John McCain and Bill Bradley's support is the least engaged overall: Most independents call the campaign dull, compared to minorities of Republicans and Democrats.

Independents tend to be less interested in politics overall; so do young adults, another group that's more apt to say the campaign is dull.

	Interesting	Dull
Republicans	53%	41
Democrats	51	44
Independents	34	58

TREND – Interest could increase, especially if the general election contest is close (and/or the economy happens to tank). Interest was low in the 1996 election, when the economy was good and the incumbent had a long-term and seemingly unassailable lead. But interest was much higher in the 1992 election, when the economy was poor and the public was agitated; just before Election Day, 84 percent of Americans called that race interesting.

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News.com survey was conducted by telephone Feb. 9-13, 2000, among a random national sample of 1,011 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork by ICR-International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Dalia Sussman and Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:

<http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

40. Would you be more likely to describe the 2000 presidential campaign as interesting or dull?

	Interesting	Dull	No opinion
2/13/00	44	48	8
11/2/96*	40	55	5
10/29/96	37	59	4
10/20/96	39	58	3
10/13/96	44	50	6
8/2/96	21	73	6
11/1/92	84	14	3
10/30/92	76	19	5
10/28/92	80	17	4
10/23/92	75	21	4
10/4/92	57	39	4
11/16/88	40	54	6
10/24/88	41	53	6
11/14/84	58	39	3
4/26/84	68	24	8

*11/2/96 and previous polls by CBS/Times except 8/2/96 by PSRA.