

Second Debate: Bush Takes It

Viewers of the second presidential debate picked George W. Bush as the winner by a 16-point margin, partly because a disproportionately Republican audience tuned in, but also because they were more pleased with their candidate's performance.

Among registered voters who watched the debate, 46 percent picked Bush as the winner, while 30 percent thought Al Gore won. Eighteen percent called it a tie. In the first debate, by contrast, viewers divided about evenly between Bush and Gore as the winner.

	Who won?	
	10/11/00	10/3/00
Gore	30%	42%
Bush	46	39
Tie	18	13

As noted, a more pro-Bush audience chose to watch. Viewers favored Bush by 52-42 percent before the debate; that compares to a closer 48-45 percent race among likely voters nationally in an ABC News/Washington Post poll completed Monday.

But Bush also did a better job pleasing his supporters. Among those who supported Bush going into the debate, 76 percent said he won it. Among those who supported Gore going in, fewer - 63 percent - picked him as the winner. Indeed Gore's supporters were almost twice as likely as Bush's either to call it a tie, or to say the other guy won.

	Who won?		
	Gore	Bush	Tie
Among:			
Gore supporters	63%	11	20
Bush supporters	4%	76	13

These assessments are different from the first debate: Then Gore's supporters were as likely as Bush's - even slightly more likely - to say their candidate won.

PARTY - Political party preferences show a similar result. After the first debate, 75 percent of Democrats said Gore won; this time that was down to 61 percent. And after the first debate 68 percent of Republicans said Bush won; this time that was up to 76 percent.

EFFECT - Regardless of the winner, again the debate had little direct effect on vote preferences among those who watched. Bush's support among viewers was 52 percent before the debate and 54 percent after it; Gore's, 42 percent before, 41 percent after.

Vote preference - registered voters who watched the debate		
	Before debate	After debate
Gore	42%	41%
Bush	52	54
Nader	2	2
Buchanan	1	1

Looking at the movement - or lack thereof - another way: Among people who supported Bush going into the debate, 96 percent still supported him after it. Among those who backed Gore going in, 91 percent stayed with him.

These represent the undiluted opinions of viewers immediately after the debate ended. As noted, it's not a sample of all Americans or all likely voters; instead it's a random sample of registered voters who chose to watch the debate.

GENDER - There's still a gender gap in views of the candidates, but this time with a twist: Men who watched picked Bush as the winner by a 26-point margin. But women who watched didn't pick Gore as the winner; they divided about evenly. That too is different from the first debate, when most women said Gore won.

	Who won?			
	10/11 debate		10/3 debate	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Gore	24%	37	32%	52
Bush	50	41	45	33
Tie	19	16	18	9

METHODOLOGY - This survey was conducted by telephone among a random-sample panel of 491 registered voters who watched Wednesday's debate. Respondents were initially interviewed Oct. 6-9. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

Here are the full results:

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

10/11/00	Gore 30	Bush 46	Tie 18	No opin. 7
10/5/00	Lieberman 24	Cheney 43	Tie 27	No opin. 5
	Gore	Bush	Tie	No opin.

10/3/00 42 39 13 5

2. The candidates in November's presidential election are (Al Gore and Joseph Lieberman, the Democrats,) (George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, the Republicans), (Ralph Nader and Winona LaDuke of the Green Party) and (Pat Buchanan and Ezola Foster of the Reform Party). If the election were being held today, who would you vote for - (Gore), (Bush), (Nader) or (Buchanan)?

	Gore	Bush	Buchanan	Nader	Other	No op.
Second presidential debate:						
10/11/00 - post-debate	41	54	1	2	1	1
10/9/00 - pre-debate	42	52	1	2	1	2
Vice-presidential debate:						
10/5/00 post-debate	44	51	1	1	0	1
10/4/00 pre-debate	45	49	1	2	*	1
First presidential debate:						
10/3/00 - post-debate	45	49	1	2	*	2
10/1/00 - pre-debate	45	48	1	3	1	2