

Viewers Divide on Winner In Second Presidential Debate

The presidential contenders battled to a draw Friday night, with viewers of their second debate divided, largely along partisan lines, on who won.

Among registered voters who watched the debate, 44 percent called John Kerry the winner, 41 percent said George W. Bush won and 13 percent called it a tie. That three-point difference between Kerry and Bush is within the poll's margin of sampling error.

It's a bit of a comedown for Kerry from the first debate, which viewers by a nine-point margin, 45-36 percent, said he won.

Second Presidential Debate	
Who won?	
Kerry	44%
Bush	41%
Tie	13%

About equal numbers of partisans tuned in – 35 percent of viewers were Democrats, 32 percent Republicans and 29 percent independents. And few minds were changed: Viewers divided in their vote preference by 50-47 percent between Kerry and Bush before the debate, and by an almost identical 50-48 percent after it.

That's customarily the case in immediate post-debate polls; debates, at least in the first blush, tend more to reinforce viewers' pre-existing perceptions than to change them.

	Vote Preference Among Viewers	
	Before debate	After debate
Kerry	50%	50%
Bush	47%	48%
Nader	<.5%	<.5%

This poll was conducted only among registered voters who watched the debate, in order to measure their opinion of who won. Debate watchers are a different group from all registered or likely voters nationally.

PARTISANS – Among Kerry supporters, 85 percent said he won the debate; among Bush supporters, 84 percent said Bush won. Almost no one on either side gave the win to the candidate they oppose.

	Who won?		
	Kerry	Bush	Tie
Among Kerry supporters	85%	2	12
Among Bush supporters	1	84	13

In terms of political allegiance, the 35-32 percent Democratic-Republican division among debate watchers was similar to the even 35-35 percent division among viewers of last week's first presidential debate. The audience for Tuesday night's vice presidential debate, by contrast, was a bit more Republican, 38-31 percent.

Friday night, 77 percent of Democrats called Kerry the winner and an identical 77 percent of Republicans said Bush won. Independents divided by 44-34 percent between Kerry and Bush – within the margin of sampling error for the number of independents surveyed.

UP NEXT – So far none of the debates has resulted in as decisive a win as Bush scored in the second presidential debate in 2000, when viewers picked him over Al Gore as the winner by a 16-point margin, 46-30 percent, partly because that debate drew a more Republican audience. Bush and Gore essentially drew their first and third debates.

Bush and Kerry meet for their third and final debate Wednesday in Tempe, Ariz.

METHODOLOGY - This survey was conducted by telephone among a random-sample panel of 515 registered voters who watched the presidential debate. Respondents were initially interviewed Oct. 5-7. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

Here are the full results:

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

	Kerry	Bush	Tie	No opin.
10/8/04	44	41	13	2
9/30/04	45	36	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
10/8/04:						
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.
10/8/04	35	32	29
10/5/04 (VP)	31	38	27
9/30/04	35	35	24

* = less than one percent

END