

# The Star-Ledger/**Eagleton-Rutgers Poll**

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RELEASE: (EP128-1)

*A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Tuesday, October 17 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll."*

## **GORE'S LEAD TRIMMED BUT STILL SOLID GOING INTO FINAL DEBATE**

Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore has dropped a few points from his double-digit lead of September, but still leads Republican George W. Bush by a margin of 46 to 37 percent among registered voters in New Jersey. Twelve percent say they are undecided, and the remainder say they intend to vote for minor party candidates such as Ralph Nader (4%) or Pat Buchanan (1%). The lead among those deemed most likely to vote in the November 7 election is a similar margin of 46 to 38 percent.

Bush has done well for himself among New Jerseyans in the first two presidential debates—a narrow plurality see him as having done better than Gore. The Republican has made inroads on the character traits of honesty and trustworthiness. He has also cut into Gore's large margins as the candidate thought better able to handle various issues, such as education, health care and the budget surplus, although Bush still trails Gore on almost all issues asked about.

In addition, more voters see Gore rather than Bush as the candidate better able to handle "the tense situation between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East" by a margin of 45 to 32 percent.

These are some of the main findings of the latest Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll, conducted with 500 registered voters between Thursday, October 12 and Sunday, October 16. The sampling error for registered voters is  $\pm 4.5$  percentage points; it is  $\pm 5$  percentage points for the 389 voters deemed "most likely" to vote in the election.

Cliff Zukin, director of the poll, commented: "Bush has closed a little ground in New Jersey, but Gore still holds a pretty significant lead that is just slightly less than the

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number of undecided voters. Bush would have to win almost all of them, or have a number of voters actually change their minds, for him to win New Jersey. He could move partway toward that goal with a strong performance in tonight's debate. New Jersey's Independent voters generally keep an open mind until late in the election."

Gore's 9-point-lead is down from his 13-percentage-point lead in September, when he out-pollled Bush by 47 to 34 percent among New Jersey registered voters. At that time far more New Jerseyans held favorable than unfavorable views of the Vice President, by an enthusiastic margin of 63 to 30 percent. The October figures for Gore are 58 favorable to 37 percent unfavorable, still quite positive and ahead of Bush's more balanced numbers of 50 percent favorable to 42 percent unfavorable. New Jerseyans offer the same overall assessment of Bush now as they did in October.

Seven-in-ten registered New Jersey voters say they saw part or all of one of the first two presidential debates. Most in the state viewed the debates through partisan prisms: 57 percent of Democrats thought Gore won; 69 percent of Republicans thought Bush had done better. Independents gave the nod to Bush by a margin of 42 to 33 percent, with the remaining quarter feeling neither had clearly done better.

The Rutgers-based survey asked about seven issues and six personality characteristics that it had first asked about in September, prior to the first two presidential debates. The latest survey shows Gore still leading on most attributes asked about, although Bush has clearly narrowed the gap. Here are some of these findings:

- X In September, Gore was viewed as more "honest and trustworthy" than Bush by a margin of 43 to 30 percent. Bush now holds a 2-percentage-point advantage (38% to 36%) over Gore--a 15-percentage-point increase since September.
- X In September, more voters thought Gore cared "about the needs of people like you" by a 54 to 32 percent margin. This is a much narrower 48 to 36 percent margin in October.
- X The public was divided between which of the two candidates "is a strong and decisive leader" in September; they remain so in October.

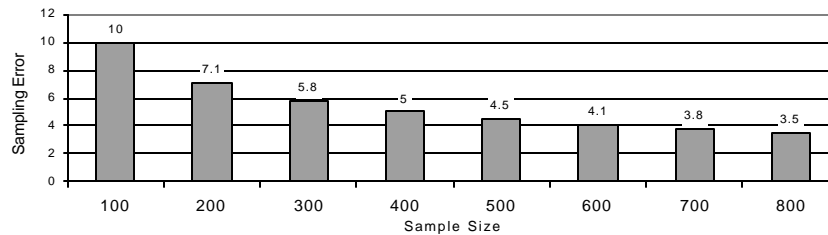
- X In September, Gore was widely preferred as the candidate who would better handle “the budget surplus” by a margin of 51 to 34 percent. This is a narrower 46 to 39 percent margin in October.
- X In September, Gore held a 24-percentage-point advantage as the candidate better able to handle education in September; that advantage is now reduced to 15 points.
- X Gore now holds a 16-point-advantage on the issue of “health care.” However, his margin was 29 percentage points in September.
- X Gore continues to be the candidate better trusted to deal with “abortion” by a margin of 52 to 29 percent, essentially unchanged from September.
- X Bush continues to hold an advantage over Gore on only one of the issues asked about, “national defense and the military.” However in the wake of recent terrorism and unease in the Mideast, Bush is now preferred on this score by a margin of 49 to 39 percent, down from a 54 to 35 percentage point margin in September.

Finally, the context for the election has changed little since September. The current survey finds 63 percent saying they have “a lot” of interest in the presidential election, and just 36 percent saying they think the outcome of the election will make a great deal of difference in “the way the government is run over the next few years.” These numbers are virtually identical to those reported in last month’s survey.

**BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP128-1), TUESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2000**

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers* Poll was conducted between October 12-15 with a scientifically selected random sample of 500 New Jersey adult residents interviewed by telephone. The figures in this release are based on this sample size. All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for registered voters is  $\pm 4.5$  percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey registered voters were found to have a favorable opinion of Presidential candidate George W. Bush, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 45.5 and 54.5 percent ( $50 \pm 4.5$ ) had all New Jersey registered voters been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported for Republicans, Independents or Democrats, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error.

Sample Size and Sampling Error



Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. The verbatim wording of all questions asked is reproduced in this background memo. The sample has been stratified based on county and the data have been weighted on age and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. In this release we also refer to 'likely voters.' These figures are based on the 72% of New Jersey registered voters deemed most likely to vote based on a combination of reported voting intention, reported past voting behavior and interest in the election. Turnout in the 1996 Presidential election was approximately 72% of all those registered. Turnout in 2000 may, of course, be somewhat higher or lower. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

“As you know, there will be an election for President this fall. How much interest do you have in this election--a lot, some, a little or none at all?” (Q4)

	<u>A Lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>A Little/None</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Registered Voters</b>						
<b>Oct. 2000</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--Sept. 2000	61	25	13	--	99	(707)
--June 2000	52	30	16	2	100	(618)
--Sept. 1996	61	28	10	1	100	(627)
--Sept. 1992	64	22	13	1	100	(663)
--Sept. 1988	48	33	18	1	100	(505)
<u>Likely Voters, October</u>	76	22	2	--	100	(389)
<u>Vote Choice</u>						
--Gore	61	29	10	1	101	(222)
--Bush	66	26	8	--	100	(184)

In your opinion, how much of a difference will the outcome of this election make in the way the government is run over the next few years—a great deal of difference, some, or not very much difference? (Q5)

	<u>Great deal</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not very much</u>	<u>Depends</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Registered Voters</b>							
<b>Oct. 2000</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--Sept. 2000	36	35	23	4	2	100	(707)
--Sept. 1996	36	36	24	--	4	100	(627)
--Sept. 1992	34	34	25	--	7	100	(663)
--Sept. 1988	28	40	24	--	8	100	(505)
Likely Voters	43	43	11	3	1	101	(389)

“Now, suppose the 2000 presidential election were being held TODAY. If you had to choose between [ROTATE ITALICS] *Al Gore, the Democrat; George W. Bush, the Republican; Pat Buchanan, of the Reform Party; and Ralph Nader, of the Green Party* — who would you vote for?” (Q6)

	<u>Gore</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Buchanan</u>	<u>Nader</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Undecided/ DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Registered Voters</b>								
<b>Oct. 2000</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--Sept. 2000	47	34	1	4	1	13	100	(670)
<u>October By Party</u>								
--Democrat	83	5	--	3	--	9	100	(177)
--Independent	35	39	3	9	1	12	99	(143)
--Republican	10	81	1	1	1	6	100	(126)
<u>September By Party</u>								
--Democrat	83	8	1	3	--	6	101	(256)
--Independent	41	30	2	8	1	19	101	(182)
--Republican	6	54	2	1	1	7	101	(163)
<u>Likely Voters, October</u>	46	38	1	4	1	10	100	(389)
--September	46	36	1	3	1	12	99	(542)
<u>Debate Watchers</u>	45	39	1	4	1	10	100	(357)
<u>Gender</u>								
--Men	42	43	1	5	1	8	100	(233)
--Women	49	31	1	3	1	15	100	(261)

## THE FOLLOWING TABLE IS A COMPOSITE OF RESPONSES TO THREE QUESTIONS:

(1)“ Now, suppose the 2000 presidential election were being held TODAY. If you had to choose between [ROTATE ITALICS] *Al Gore, the Democrat; George W. Bush, the Republican; Pat Buchanan, of the Reform Party; and Ralph Nader, of the Green Party* — who would you vote for?” \* (Q6) IF RESPONDENT CHOSE A CANDIDATE, (2) “Are you very sure about voting for (Bush/Gore), or might you change your mind before the election?”(Q10). IF RESPONDENT WAS UNDECIDED, (3): “At this moment do you lean more towards Bush or more towards Gore?”(Q7).

	<u>Initially Undecided</u>							<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
	<u>Sure About Gore</u>	<u>Picks Gore, but may change</u>	<u>Leans Gore</u>	<u>Does Not Lean</u>	<u>Leans Bush</u>	<u>Picks Bush, but may change</u>	<u>Sure about Bush</u>		
<b>Registered Voters</b>									
<b>October 2000</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>(464)</b>
--September 2000	40	11	3	7	3	8	28	100	(633)
--June 2000	30	14	3	9	3	13	26	98	(578)
<u>Party ID</u>									
--Democrat	77	8	3	6	--	2	4	100	(172)
--Independent	31	10	3	9	1	13	32	99	(123)
--Republican	5	5	--	5	2	10	74	101	(122)
<u>Likely Voters, October</u>	43	6	2	7	2	6	35	101	(389)
--September	39	9	3	7	3	7	31	99	(513)

\*Those choosing Nader, Buchanan or other are excluded.

## CATI RANDOMIZE QUESTION 12:

“I’d like to learn a little more about your opinions of the candidates. After I read each name, please tell me if your general impression of him is favorable or unfavorable, or if you don’t really have an opinion about him. First (RANDOMIZE...) Favorable or unfavorable? (IF FAVORABLE OR UNFAVORABLE, PROBE: Is that very (favorable/unfavorable) or somewhat (favorable/ unfavorable)?” (Q12)

	<u>Very Favorable</u>	<u>Somewhat Favorable</u>	<u>Somewhat Unfavorable</u>	<u>Very Unfavorable</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>BUSH</b>							
<b>Registered Voters</b>							
<b>October 2000</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	24	26	18	24	8	100	(670)
--June 2000	12	28	16	14	30	100	(618)
<u>Debate Watchers</u>	27	26	17	25	5	100	(357)
<b>GORE</b>							
<b>Registered Voters</b>							
<b>October 2000</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	35	28	15	15	6	99	(670)
--June 2000	14	32	14	14	25	99	(618)
<u>Debate Watchers</u>	29	28	16	24	4	99	(357)

“Regardless of which presidential candidate you support, please tell me if you think Al Gore or George W. Bush would better handle each of the following issues. How about... (RANDOMIZE... Gore or Bush?)” (Q13)

	<u>Gore</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Both/Same</u>	<u>DK/Refuse</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>The budget surplus</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	51	34	3	12	100	(337)
<b>Taxes</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	45	39	2	15	101	(337)
<b>Social Security</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	50	33	3	14	100	(337)
<b>Health care</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	57	28	4	11	100	(337)
<b>Abortion</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	53	28	4	15	100	(333)
<b>National Defense and the Military</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	35	54	3	8	100	(333)
<b>Education</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	56	32	3	9	100	(670)
<b>The tense situation between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(494)</b>

“Thinking about the following characteristics and qualities, please say whether you think each one applies more to Al Gore or more to George W. Bush. How about... [RANDOMIZE] Gore or Bush?” (Q14)

	<u>Gore</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Both/Same</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>DK/Refuse</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Cares about the needs of people like you</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	54	32	5	5	4	100	(337)
<b>Is a strong and decisive leader</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	44	40	4	7	5	100	(337)
<b>Is honest and trustworthy</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	43	30	9	10	8	100	(333)
<b>Understands complex issues</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	52	25	13	4	7	101	(333)
<b>Shares your values</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	48	37	6	5	5	101	(670)
<b>Has a vision for the country's future</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(494)</b>
--September 2000	49	28	13	5	4	99	(670)

“Did you watch either of the two televised debates between the presidential candidates, or not?” (Q15)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Total %</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Registered Voters</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(494)</b>
Likely Voters	77	23	100	(389)

“Who do you think did better in the presidential debates – Gore or Bush?” (Q16)\*

	<u>Gore</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Neither/ Same/Tie</u>	<u>Don't Know/Care</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Registered Voters October 2000</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(357)</b>
<u>Likely Voters</u>	35	43	19	3	100	(303)
<u>By Party</u>						
--Democrat	57	17	21	5	100	(126)
--Independent	33	42	23	3	101	(108)
--Republican	16	69	13	2	100	(95)

\*Asked only of those respondents who said that they watched one of the two presidential debates.