



**UNCOMMITTED VOTERS AND THE DEBATE: OBAMA WINS ON ECONOMY,
MCCAIN WINS ON IRAQ**
September 26, 2008

The first presidential debate helped uncommitted voters learn about the candidates - and it appears that Democrat Barack Obama benefited the most. Uncommitted voters said Obama won the debate against McCain, and more of those voters improved their opinion of the Democrat. But while 66% think Obama would make the right decisions about the economy, 56% think John McCain would do so about Iraq.

Immediately after the debate, CBS News interviewed a nationally representative sample of nearly 500 debate watchers assembled by Knowledge Networks who were "uncommitted voters" - voters who are either undecided about who to vote for or who say they could still change their minds. 39% of these uncommitted debate watchers said Obama won the debate. 24% said McCain won, and another 37% thought it was a tie.

WHO WON THE DEBATE?

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

Obama	39%
McCain	24
Tie	37

Nearly half of those uncommitted voters who watched the debate said that their image of Obama changed for the better as a result. Just 8% say their opinion of Obama got worse, and 46% reported no change in their opinions.

THE DEBATE'S EFFECT ON OPINIONS OF THE CANDIDATES

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Obama	McCain
Better	46%	32%
Worse	8	21
No change	46	47

McCain saw less improvement in his image. 32% have improved their image of McCain as a result of the debate, but 21% said their views of him are now worse than before.

Why did voters' image of Obama improve? Many volunteered that they were impressed by his poise and knowledge about the issues, that he was more knowledgeable about the issues than they thought previously. When it came to John McCain, those same voters said he "didn't control

himself well under pressure", that he was "angry and bad-tempered", and that he "talked too much about the past".

On the other hand, voters who thought McCain won the debate felt he showed more experience and understanding of the issues - particularly foreign policy. Many felt he exceeded their expectations in how he presented himself tonight, saying he was a "better debater" and a "skilled speaker."

Although much of this debate addressed foreign policy issues, the candidates talked about the economy for about 30 minutes - which is after all what voters say is their most important concern. Uncommitted debate watchers saw Barack Obama as the clear winner on handling the economy; 66% felt he would make the right decisions about the economy, while 42% felt McCain would do so.

WOULD MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS ABOUT THE ECONOMY

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Obama	McCain
Yes	66%	42%
No	33	57

But when it came to the war in Iraq, McCain was the stronger candidate. Before the debate, 44% said that McCain would make the right decisions about the war; that rose to 56% after the debate. Fewer thought Obama would make the right decisions on Iraq.

WOULD MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS ABOUT THE WAR IN IRAQ

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Obama		McCain	
	Pre-debate	Post-debate	Pre-debate	Post-debate
Yes	44%	48%	44%	56%
No	53	51	53	43

Both candidates made some gains in presenting their respective visions for the country. 65% said that Obama made it clear what he would do as president; 64% said that of his rival, McCain.

MADE IT CLEAR WHAT HE WOULD DO AS PRESIDENT

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Obama		McCain	
	Pre-debate	Post-debate	Pre-debate	Post-debate
Yes	37%	65%	36%	64%
No	61	35	62	35

In national polls of registered voters overall, one of McCain's strengths has been the perception that he is ready for the presidency, while Obama's has been the perception that he is empathetic to voters' needs. Uncommitted voters who watched the debate share those perceptions.

OBAMA AND MCCAIN QUALITIES

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Obama		McCain	
	Pre- Debate	Post debate	Pre debate	Post- debate
Is prepared to be president				
Yes	44%	60%	79%	78%
No	53	39	20	21
Understands your needs and problems				
Yes	58%	79%	36%	41%
No	40	21	64	58

But while eight in 10 uncommitted voters who watched the debate think McCain is prepared to be president, six in 10 now think Obama is prepared as well - a significant improvement from his standing among these same voters before the debate. The percentage of watchers who think Obama understands their needs and problems has also increased by 21 points, while a majority still say McCain does not.

Uncommitted voters include those who say they have a preference, but also say they could still change their minds. Before the debate, 36% favored Obama and 34% favored McCain. Obama now leads by 12 points among uncommitted debate watchers -- 41% to 29% -- in their choice for president in November. But nearly three in 10 remain undecided, and most of those with a choice now say their minds could still change.

PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE AMONG DEBATE WATCHERS

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Pre-debate	Post-debate
Obama	36%	41%
McCain	34	29
Someone else	1	1
Depends	29	29

This CBS News poll was conducted online by Knowledge Networks among a nationwide random sample of 483 uncommitted voters - voters who don't yet know who they will vote for, or who have chosen a candidate but may still change their minds - who have agreed to watch the debate. Knowledge Networks, a Silicon Valley company, conducted the poll among a sample of adult members of its household panel, a nationally representative sample given access to the Internet via Web TV. The questions were administered using the Internet.

This is a scientifically representative poll of undecided voters' reaction to the presidential debate. The margin of sampling error could be plus or minus 4 percentage points for results based on the entire sample.

CBS NEWS/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL
1st Presidential Debate
September 26, 2008

PostQ1. Which candidate do you think did the best job – or won – tonight's debate?

UNCOMMITTED VOTERS WHO WATCHED THE DEBATE

John McCain	24%
Barack Obama	39
Tie	37

PostQ3. After tonight's debate, has your opinion of John McCain:

Changed for the better	32
Changed for the worse	21
Not changed	47

PostQ4. After tonight's debate, has your opinion of Barack Obama:

Changed for the better	46%
Changed for the worse	8
Not changed	46

PostQ6. Now that the debate is over, do you think **John McCain...**

Understands the needs and problems of people like you?

UNCOMMITTED VOTERS WHO WATCHED THE DEBATE

	After Debate	Before Debate
Yes	41	36
No	58	64

Would make the right decisions about the war in Iraq?

Yes	56	44
No	43	53

Is prepared for the job of President?

Yes	78	79
No	21	20

Has made it clear what he would do as President?

Yes	64	36
No	35	62

Now that the debate is over, do you think **John McCain...**

Would make the right decisions about the economy?

UNCOMMITTED VOTERS WHO WATCHED THE DEBATE

Yes	42%
No	57

PostQ7. Now that the debate is over, do you think **Barack Obama...**

Understands the needs and problems of people like you?

	After Debate	Before Debate
Yes	79%	58%
No	21	40

Would make the right decisions about the war in Iraq?

Yes	48	44
No	51	53

Is prepared for the job of President?

Yes	60	44
No	39	53

Has made it clear what he would do as President?

Yes	65	37
No	35	61

Would make the right decisions about the economy?

Yes	66
No	33

PostQ8. If the 2008 presidential election were being held today would you vote for...?

John McCain and Sarah Palin	29	34
Barack Obama and Joe Biden	41	36
Other	1	1
Depends/Undecided	29	29

Total Respondents: 483