



CBS NEWS/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS  
For Immediate Release: October 15, 2008

**UNCOMMITTED VOTERS AND THE FINAL PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE**

October 15, 2008

Barack Obama continues to fare well with uncommitted voters watching this election's presidential debates. Uncommitted voters think Obama defeated John McCain in the first two presidential debates, and 53% of them name him the winner of the third and last debate as well, and by an even wider margin.

Immediately after the debate, CBS News interviewed a nationally representative sample of 638 debate watchers assembled by Knowledge Networks who were "uncommitted voters" - either undecided about who to vote for or who could still change their minds. 53% said Obama won the debate, 22% said McCain won, and another 25% thought it was a tie.

**WHO WON THE DEBATE?**

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Third debate	Second debate	First debate
Obama	53%	40%	39%
McCain	22	26	24
Tie	25	34	37

Democrats are usually perceived as better than Republicans at handling health care (a topic discussed in detail during the debate) -- and that was true for Obama. Before the debate, 61% of uncommitted voters said that Obama would make the right decisions about health care; that rose to 68% after the debate. Only 27% thought McCain would do so before the debate; afterwards it was just 30%.

**WOULD MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS ABOUT HEALTH CARE**

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Obama		McCain	
	Pre-debate	Post-debate	Pre-debate	Post-debate
Yes	61%	68%	27%	30%
No	36	30	70	69

Despite McCain's observations that Obama's policies would raise taxes, half of these voters after the debate think McCain would raise taxes if elected. However even more, 64%, think Obama would.

**WOULD RAISE YOUR TAXES**

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Obama		McCain	
	Pre-debate	Post-debate	Pre-debate	Post-debate
Yes	67%	64%	57%	50%
No	30	35	40	49

The economy continues to be a critical issue for voters overall, and both before and after the debate more uncommitted debate watchers thought Obama more than McCain would make the right decisions on the economy. Before the debate, 54% said Obama would make the right decisions about the economy; that rose to 65% after the debate. 38% said before the debate McCain would make the right decisions about the economy; that increased to 48% after the debate.

**WOULD MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS ABOUT THE ECONOMY**

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Obama		McCain	
	Pre-debate	Post-debate	Pre-debate	Post-debate
Yes	54%	65%	38%	48%
No	42	33	59	50

However, far more uncommitted debate watchers trust John McCain to handle a crisis.

**TRUST TO HANDLE CRISIS**

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Obama		McCain	
	Pre-debate	Post-debate	Pre-debate	Post-debate
Yes	50%	63%	78%	82%
No	47	36	19	17

Before the debate, 78% trusted McCain to handle a crisis; afterwards, 82% trust him. Obama's ratings also rose on handling a crisis after the debate, but remain much lower than McCain's.

Far more uncommitted voters continue to think Obama understands their needs and problems than think that about McCain. Both before and after the debate, majorities of uncommitted voters felt Obama understood their needs and problems; fewer said the same about McCain.

Both candidates are viewed similarly on sharing voters' values; Obama increased a bit more than McCain did after the debate.

**OBAMA AND MCCAIN QUALITIES**

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Obama		McCain	
	Pre-debate	Post-debate	Pre-debate	Post-debate
Understands your needs				
Yes	66%	76%	36%	48%
No	31	23	61	51
Shares your values				
Yes	54%	64%	52%	55%
No	43	34	45	44

46% of the uncommitted voters said that their image of Obama changed for the better as a result of this debate. Just 10% say their opinion of Obama got worse, and 44% reported no change in their opinions.

McCain's image improved, but not nearly as much. 30% said their image of him improved as a result of the debate, but nearly as many -- 26% - said their views of him are now worse than before.

**THE DEBATE'S EFFECT ON OPINIONS OF THE CANDIDATES**

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

	Obama	McCain
Better	46%	30%
Worse	10	26
No change	44	44

Debate watchers who thought Obama won the debate thought he was a better communicator and has a better grasp of the problems the country has to face. Some used words like "eloquent" and "confident" to describe him. In contrast, some said McCain was defensive and spent too much time attacking Obama - using words like "rude", "mean", and "caustic" to describe McCain's performance in the debate.

Debate watchers who thought McCain won the debate were impressed by his experience, and many were unsure about Obama's sincerity and credibility. Many were also concerned that Obama's solutions all required spending money.

As we have found in previous debates, most uncommitted voters' minds have not changed. But more went Obama's way after this debate: 30% of uncommitted voters who watched this debate said they are now committed to Obama, twice as many as the 14% are now committed to McCain. Most - 57% - remain uncommitted.

**PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE AMONG DEBATE WATCHERS**

(Among uncommitted voters who watched debate)

Committed to Obama	30%
Committed to McCain	14
Still uncommitted	56

---

This CBS News poll was conducted online by Knowledge Networks among a nationwide random sample of 638 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 market and public policy research firm based in Menlo Park, CA, conducted the web poll among a sample of adult members of its panel, who are provided web access if they don't already have it. More technical information is available at <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp/reviewer-info.html>.

This is a scientifically representative poll of uncommitted 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**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Presidential Debate**  
**October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

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

	UNCOMMITTED VOTERS WHO WATCHED THE DEBATE	2 <sup>nd</sup> Debate	1 <sup>st</sup> Debate
John McCain	22%	26%	24%
Barack Obama	53	40	39
Tie	25	34	37

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

Changed for the better	30%	32%	32%
Changed for the worse	26	16	21
Not changed	44	52	47

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

Changed for the better	46%	42%	46%
Changed for the worse	10	13	8
Not changed	44	45	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	Post	Post
Yes	48%	36%	44%	41%
No	51	61	56	58

Would make the right decisions about the economy?

Yes	48%	38%	48%	42%
No	50	59	51	57

Can be trusted to handle a crisis?

Yes	82%	78%
No	17	19

Would raise your taxes?

Yes	50%	57%
No	49	40

Shares your values?

Yes	55%	52%
No	44	45

Would make the right decisions about health care?

Yes	30%	27%
No	69	70

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

Understands the needs and problems of people like you?

	UNCOMMITTED VOTERS WHO WATCHED THE DEBATE		2 <sup>nd</sup> Debate	1 <sup>st</sup> Debate
	After Debate	Before Debate	Post	Post
Yes	76%	66%	80%	79%
No	23	31	20	21

Would make the right decisions about the economy?

Yes	65%	54%	68%	66%
No	33	42	31	33

Can be trusted to handle a crisis?

Yes	63%	50%
No	36	47

Would raise your taxes?

Yes	64%	67%
No	35	30

Shares your values?

Yes	64%	54%
No	34	43

Would make the right decisions about health care?

Yes	68%	61%
No	30	36

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

Committed to Obama	30%	15%
Committed to McCain	14	12
Still Uncommitted	56	72

Total Respondents: 638