



CBS NEWS POLL
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THE UNCOMMITTED VOTERS
September 5-7, 2008

In this poll CBS News re-interviewed voters who said they were uncommitted (those who had a candidate but said their minds could change, along with those who were completely undecided) from a CBS News/New York Times poll conducted in mid-August. In that poll these voters made up 34% of all registered voters. Now, some of those voters have made up their minds; while most of them remain uncommitted, about a third of them have made a firm choice.

However, during the same period, 12% of those who said in August their commitment to a candidate was firm became less sure.

Those who are now uncommitted have differing views of the two candidates: Obama is seen as the candidate who connects with voters, while uncommitted voters see John McCain as the more experienced candidate and stronger commander in chief.

MAKING UP THEIR MINDS

Among voters who were uncommitted in August, Barack Obama and John McCain run even now -- but some of those voters remain uncommitted because they say their minds could still change. Among previously uncommitted voters, a third have made up their minds: 20% for McCain, and 14% for Obama. Two thirds of previously uncommitted voters remain uncommitted.

VOTE CHOICE AMONG PREVIOUSLY UNCOMMITTED VOTERS

(Among voters who were uncommitted in August)

Obama	14%
McCain	20
Still uncommitted	64

Many of these voters have tuned into the campaign recently. 39% say they have paid a lot of attention to the campaign in the last few weeks, and 46% have paid at least some. When they were originally interviewed in August, just 21% of these same voters said they had been paying a lot of attention to the campaign in recent weeks.

RECENT ATTENTION TO THE CAMPAIGN

(Among same voters who were uncommitted in August)

	NOW	Last month
A lot	39%	21%
Some	46	49
Not much/not at all	15	30

Of course, the last few weeks have been packed with political and non-political events - conventions, vice presidents and hurricanes. The uncommitted voters have tended to follow news less than voters with set opinions.

MOVEMENT IN THE RACE

Among voters who had not chosen a major candidate at all in August - who were completely undecided -- there has been more movement toward McCain than toward Obama. 31% have moved in the direction of McCain, and 23% in Obama's direction (however, their support of either candidate is not necessarily firm yet). A plurality (45%) has not moved toward either candidate.

MOVEMENT IN THE RACE

(Among voters who had not chosen a candidate in August)

Toward Obama	23%
Toward McCain	31
No change	45

McCain's choice of Sarah Palin as his running mate may have influenced these voters. While in August just 38% of the voters who have moved toward McCain said that the vice presidential choices would be important in their vote, that has risen to 81% among these same voters in this poll.

WILL VP CHOICES BE INFLUENTIAL IN VOTE?

(Among voters re-interviewed who have moved toward McCain)

	NOW	Last Month
Yes	81%	38%
No	18	56

Most voters who moved toward McCain since August have a much-improved opinion of him now; while most were undecided or had no opinion about him last month, most now have a favorable view. There is evidence that this is firming up the base: many of those who have moved toward McCain expect that he will enact policies that are more conservative than those of President Bush.

EXPECT MCCAIN WILL CONTINUE BUSH POLICIES?

(Among voters re-interviewed who have moved toward McCain)

	NOW	Last Month
Yes	6%	31%
Change to more conservative	50	23
Change to less conservative	22	27

Voters who have moved toward McCain now feel they can relate to him.

CAN RELATE TO MCCAIN

(Among voters re-interviewed who have moved toward McCain)

	NOW	Last Month
Yes	70%	44%
No	21	43

NO LONGER UNCOMMITTED: HOW THEY MADE UP THEIR MINDS

The events of the past two weeks - the two parties' conventions and the selection of vice presidential running mates -- may have helped many of these voters decide. Majorities of them watched the acceptance speeches of the two parties' nominees as well as Sarah Palin's speech. The latter was especially well-received by these voters: 54% said they watched Palin's speech and it made them feel more positively toward her.

More of the formerly uncommitted voters who have firmly committed to a candidate now have chosen McCain than have picked Obama.

VOTE CHOICE AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE DECIDED IN LAST MONTH

(Among voters who were uncommitted in August but became committed now)

Obama-Biden	41%
McCain-Palin	59

The candidates' vice presidential choices might have helped some of these voters decide. Previously uncommitted voters who've now made a choice view Palin quite positively; 52% have a favorable image of her, and just 18% are unfavorable. Joe Biden is much less-known: 54% don't have an opinion of him yet (compared to just 31% for Palin). And fewer have a favorable opinion of Biden than Palin: 32% have a positive impression of Joe Biden, with 14% negative.

VIEWS OF THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

(Among voters who were uncommitted in August but are committed now)

Biden:

Favorable	32%
Not favorable	14
Undecided/haven't heard enough	54

Palin:

Favorable	52%
Not favorable	18
Undecided/haven't heard enough	31

And when asked directly what helped them to choose a candidate, 28% of these previously uncommitted voters volunteered Sarah Palin, making her the top reason. 16% volunteered the speeches at the conventions.

54% of voters who used to be uncommitted but now have made their decision are glad McCain chose Palin as his running mate. Just 39% say the same about the choice of Joe Biden.

FEEL ABOUT CHOOSING HIM/HER AS VP?

(Among voters who were uncommitted in August but are committed now)

	Biden	Palin
Glad	39%	54%
Wish chosen someone else	39	29

Three quarters of them say Biden is prepared for the job of Vice President -- far higher than the 47% who say that about Sarah Palin. But these voters find it much easier to relate to Palin: 71% can relate to her; half as many, 36%, can relate to Biden.

PREPARED FOR JOB OF VICE PRESIDENT?

(Among voters who were uncommitted in August but are committed now)

	Prepared for VP job	Can relate to him/her
Palin:		
Yes	47%	71%
No	39	25
Biden:		
Yes	73%	36%
No	11	48

And their views of the presidential candidates may have influenced their candidate choice as well. These voters see Barack Obama and John McCain as equally understanding their needs and problems. Among all voters, Obama has a large advantage on this.

UNDERSTANDS YOUR NEEDS AND PROBLEMS

(Among voters who were uncommitted in August but are committed now)

	Obama	McCain
Does	60%	61%
Does not	36	36

And for these voters, both tickets are seen as able to bring about change, something that the Democrats have a lead with among all voters.

WOULD BRING ABOUT REAL CHANGE IN WASHINGTON

(Among voters who were uncommitted in August but are committed now)

	Obama- Biden	McCain- Palin
Would	54%	52%
Would not	30	44

Here are some thoughts from previously uncommitted voters who now back a candidate on what helped them make their decision, based on follow-up interviews conducted Monday:

Susan, 44 and from Virginia, says that "Palin is the right kind of conservative." Rebecca, who is leaning toward Obama, thinks "Palin is positive politically. But can she take care of her family and be VP?" Catherine, 86 and from Ohio, thinks "Palin's speech was very positive.

She can help." David is 43 and from Oklahoma; he thinks McCain chose Palin in a last ditch effort to get the Clinton vote." He wonders if "he would have chosen her if he had more of the popular vote."

CURRENTLY UNCOMMITTED VOTERS - THOSE STILL WAITING TO DECIDE

But not all of last month's uncommitted voters have made up their minds. Voters who remain uncommitted are more likely to be women (55%). 46% describe themselves as independents. 48% say they are moderates. 53% are age 45 or older. Some of these voters support one of the candidates, but their support is not yet firm.

Uncommitted voters have very different views of the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate, which if anything have been reinforced in the past month. They resemble all voters. Obama's strength is his ability to connect with voters and demonstrate he understands their concerns. For McCain, it is perceptions of his leadership and experience.

Obama now has an even greater edge over McCain among currently uncommitted voters on how well they relate to him. 72% of uncommitted voters now say they can relate to Obama, up from 64% among those same voters last month. Views of McCain on this measure have not changed since August, and far fewer can relate to him than to Obama.

CAN RELATE TO HIM

(Among voters who are uncommitted now)

	NOW	Last month
Can relate to Obama	72%	64%
Can not	23	29
Can relate to McCain	38%	37%
Can not	55	56

But far more uncommitted voters say that John McCain is prepared for the presidency than say Barack Obama is, and Obama has not improved on this measure in the past month among these same voters.

IS PREPARED FOR PRESIDENCY

(Among voters who are uncommitted now)

	NOW	Last month
Obama:		
Is	31%	29%
Is not	55	60
McCain:		
Is	82%	72%
Is not	11	22

One of McCain's strengths among voters overall has been the perception that he would be an effective commander in chief. McCain has improved

on this measure among these same uncommitted voters since last month; 51% now say he would be very effective in that role, up from 44% among those same voters last month.

Obama has had some success among these uncommitted voters on this measure, but still lags far behind his rival. Just 7% now say he would be very effective as commander in chief, but 66% now say he would be at least somewhat effective -- up from just 56% among these same voters in August.

EFFECTIVE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

(Among voters who are uncommitted now)

	NOW	Last month
Obama:		
Very effective	7%	5%
Somewhat effective	66	56
Not very/not effective	25	34
McCain:		
Very effective	51%	44%
Somewhat effective	34	45
Not very/not effective	11	9

Here are some thoughts from uncommitted voters, based on follow-up interviews conducted Monday:

Bridget, 44 and from Alabama, says she is "worried about Sarah Palin." She wants to hear what she has to say about women's rights. Deborah, 46 and from Oregon, says McCain has to "not just tell us what a great war hero he is." She wants to hear some specifics from him on the economy, health care, the environment and foreign affairs. Rhonda, 58, from Washington state, doesn't really like either McCain or Obama, but likes both Biden and Palin. Doris, 76 and from Texas, thinks they have all made good speeches but she doesn't know if they can do what they say. Richard is 60 and also from Texas; he is disabled and would like to hear something about plans for people like him.

This poll was conducted by telephone September 5-7, 2008 among 738 respondents first interviewed by CBS News and the New York Times August 15-19, 2008. CBS News re-interviewed 655 registered voters for this poll, including 208 uncommitted voters. The error due to sampling for results based on the entire sample and registered voters could be plus or minus four percentage points. The error on measures of individual change is much smaller.