

A decorative graphic is present on the page. It features a large, thin, light-colored arc that starts near the top right and curves down towards the bottom right. A horizontal line extends from the left edge of the page to the start of the arc. A vertical line extends from the end of the arc down to the bottom edge of the page. At the intersection of these lines, there is a small yellow square. Another small yellow square is located at the bottom right corner of the page, near the end of the vertical line.

# **Undecided Voters in the November Presidential Election**

***a national survey***

September 2008



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*a national survey*

**Report prepared by Jeffrey Love, Ph.D.  
Data collected by Woelfel Research, Inc.**

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## Survey Findings

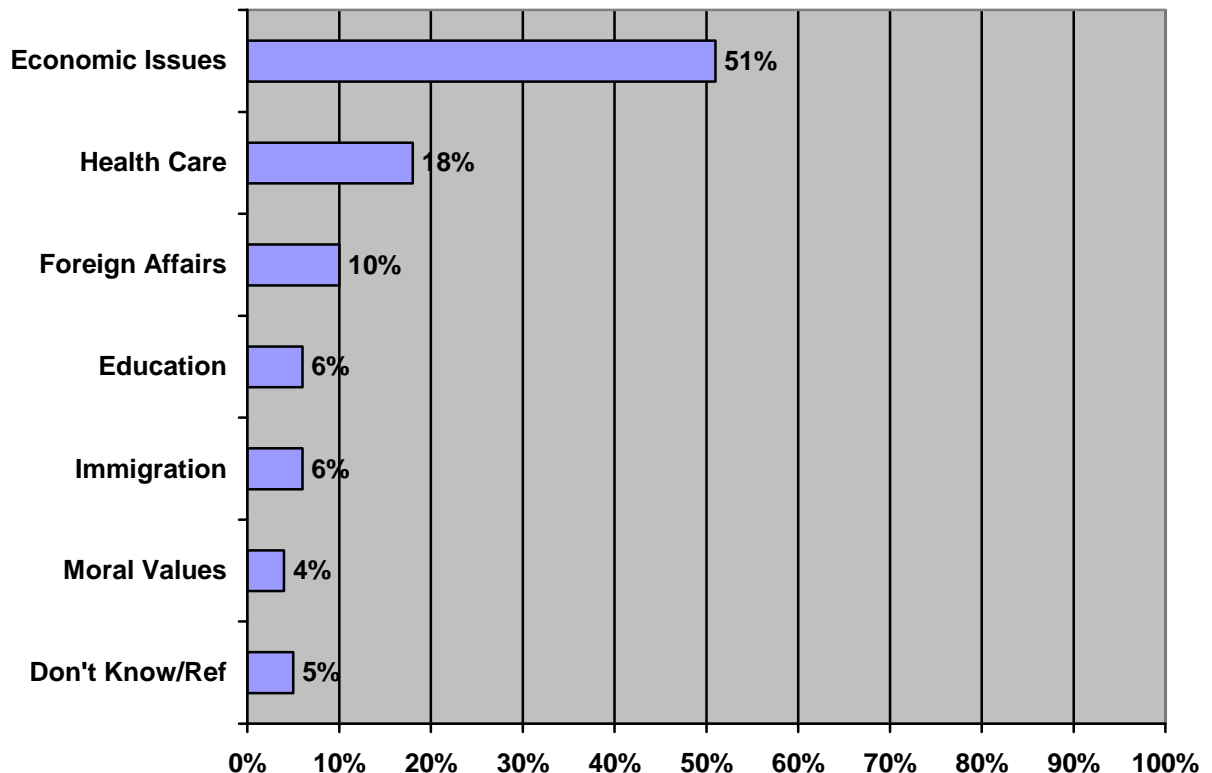
### As the Presidential election enters it's last two months, who are the undecided voters?

Voters who have not completely made up their minds about for whom they plan to vote tend to be older (67% are aged 50 and over), female (67%), married, well educated (26% have at least some college, and 36% have a college degree or more), almost always vote in presidential elections, are relatively well off financially (35% report earning over \$50,000 annually), are largely Caucasian (85% white), are more likely to be a political independent (37%) and consider themselves to be a moderate (47%).

### As evidenced by almost every other public poll conducted in the last year, the economy is the overriding concern among undecided voters.

Over half (51%) of undecided voters say that regardless of who wins the election, economic issues like jobs, the budget, rising prices, and taxes should be addressed by the new President in the first 100 days of his administration. (Chart 1)

**Chart 1: Priorities for the New President**



**The upcoming debates are critical for both Senator Obama and Senator McCain.**

Eighty-one percent of undecided voters say the upcoming debates will be very or somewhat important to their decision about for whom they plan to vote.

**Undecided voters do not feel they have enough information to determine who would be best at tackling the health care and economic crises before us today.**

On the eve of the debate season, the focus of undecided voters is clear. They want answers to pressing questions about health care and a declining economy.

When asked to name the presidential candidate best able to fix the health care system, or strengthen a failing economy, majorities of undecided voters say they do not know enough about the candidates' proposals to be able to decide.

Thirteen percent name Senator Obama, and 7% name Senator McCain as best able to reform health care. Sixty-four percent say they don't know enough about the candidates' proposals to be able to judge.

Similarly, 19% name Senator Obama, and 16% name Senator McCain as best able to strengthen the economy. Fifty-four percent say they don't know enough about the candidates' proposals to be able to judge.

**Many surveys indicate that the public believes gridlock prevents progress on important issues, but there is some optimism among undecided voters.**

When asked who would break through special interests and partisan gridlock to make real progress on the economy and health care, the plurality of undecided voters (40%) again reveal that they do not know enough about the candidates to be able to judge. Twenty five percent mention Senator Obama, and 19% mention Senator McCain.

However, bi-partisanship is clearly a priority among undecided voters. About half (47%) of undecided voters believe the President-Elect should choose members of his cabinet from the opposing party, and 50% think the new President and Congress will work together to pass comprehensive health care reforms in the next few years.

## Conclusions

It is interesting that there are few substantial differences among demographic groups within the undecided voter population. This, as we noted above, is largely because undecided voters are largely older, politically independent, and moderate. That being said, there are few differences among undecided voters by gender, income, and race/ethnicity. Perhaps this means the most telling characteristics of the undecided voter is lack of political party affiliation and the desire for more information before they make a presidential choice.

Clearly, undecided voters are looking to the presidential candidates for information about how they would address health care reform and a slumping economy. While they expect the debates to help them make their voting decision, it is the case that the campaign thus far has not provided sufficient information about these two very important national issues. This underscores both the importance of the debate and the ongoing voter frustration AARP has witnessed throughout this election. Namely, voters are not yet receiving the information they feel they need to make an educated decision.

Also notable among undecided voters is the desire for breaking gridlock and partisanship. It's obvious that a desire for bipartisanship exists and that people believe it is possible. Can the candidates use the debates to convince undecided voters they are able to break Washington gridlock? Possibly, but it is clear that undecided voters know that it's only an aisle that separates the political parties, not an ocean.

## **Appendix 1: Survey Methodology**

AARP commissioned this survey of undecided voters in order to assess which issues are on their minds as the election approaches. The telephone survey was conducted between August 29 and September 14 by Woelfel Research, Inc.

Respondents to the survey were drawn at random, at least 18 years old, likely to vote in the November presidential election, and not firmly committed to any presidential candidate. The margin of error for this sample is  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points.

## Appendix 2: Annotated Questionnaire

**N=1000, Sampling Error =± 3.1 percentage points.**

### *Screeners*

S1. Are you likely to vote in the November Election for President?

- 1. Yes [CONTINUE]
- 2. No [TERMINATE]
- 3. D/K or “Maybe” [CONTINUE]

S2. If the election were held tomorrow, which candidate would you vote for?

- % Base: Total Respondents N=1002
- 25 Barack Obama or John McCain (Go to S3).
- 2 Other Candidate\_\_\_\_\_ (Go to S3)
- 74 Undecided (Go to Q1)

S3. Using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means your support for a candidate is not very strong and 7 means your support is very strong, how strongly would you say that you support a specific candidate?

- % Base: Would Vote Candidate N=261
- 17 Not very strong [CONTINUE]
- 12 2 [CONTINUE]
- 19 3 [CONTINUE]
- 52 4 [CONTINUE]
- 5 [TERMINATE]
- 6 [TERMINATE]
- Very Strong [TERMINATE]
- Don't know [TERMINATE]
- Refused (VOL) [TERMINATE]



## *Main Questionnaire*

Q1. Regardless of who wins the election, which one of the following six issues would you like the new President to address in his first 100 days in office? Is it.....

**[READ LIST - ROTATE]**

|    |   |
|----|---|
| %  | Base: Total Respondents N=1002  |
| 51 | Economic Issues- like jobs, the budget, rising prices, and taxes          |
| 10 | Foreign Affairs Issues- like national defense, the war in Iraq, Terrorism |
| 18 | Health care Issues  |
| 6  | Education   |
| 4  | Moral values Issues   |
| 6  | Immigration   |
| 4  | Don't know (VOL)  |
| 1  | Refused (VOL)   |

2. As you know, the two Presidential candidates will debate each other several times in late September and early October. How important are these debates to your decision about for whom to vote?

**[READ LIST]**

|      |                                |
|------|--------------------------------|
| %    | Base: Total Respondents N=1002 |
| 17   | Not important at all           |
| 38   | Somewhat Important             |
| 43   | Very Important                 |
| 2    | Don't know (VOL)               |
| <0.5 | Refused (VOL)                  |

3. Which presidential candidate do you feel will fix the health care system in the US, or do you not know enough about their positions on health care to make a judgment?

**[DO NOT READ]**

|    |                                  |
|----|----------------------------------|
| %  | Base: Total Respondents N=1002   |
| 13 | Barack Obama                     |
| 7  | John McCain                      |
| 2  | Another candidate                |
| 13 | No candidate                     |
| 64 | Don't know enough to judge (VOL) |
| 2  | Refused (VOL)                    |

4. Which presidential candidate do you feel will strengthen the economy, or do you not know enough about their positions on financial security issues to make a judgment?

**[DO NOT READ]**

% Base: Total Respondents N=1002  
19 Barack Obama  
16 John McCain  
1 Another candidate  
9 No candidate  
54 Don't know enough to judge (VOL)  
2 Refused (VOL)

5. Which presidential candidate do you feel will break through special interest and partisan gridlock to make real progress on healthcare and the economy?

**[DO NOT READ]**

% Base: Total Respondents N=1002  
25 Barack Obama  
19 John McCain  
1 Another candidate  
13 No candidate  
40 Don't know enough to judge (VOL)  
3 Refused (VOL)

6. Which statement is closer to your opinion.....

**[ROTATE ORDER]**

% Base: Total Respondents N=1002  
50 The need for health care reform is so immediate that the new President and Congress will work together to pass a comprehensive reforms in the next few years.  
or  
35 Special interests will prevent any effort by the President and Congress to reform health care.  
13 Don't know (VOL)  
2 Refused (VOL)

7. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Is that strongly or somewhat]

**[ROTATE STATEMENTS]**

| %  | Base: Total Respondents N=1002   | Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Don't Know | Refused |
|----|--|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|---------|
| 7a | The President-Elect should choose members of his cabinet from the opposing party   | 17             | 30             | 22                | 17                | 13         | 1       |
| 7b | It is important for the First Lady to play a strong role in administration   | 27             | 22             | 24                | 22                | 5          | 1       |
| 7c | Washington works better when one party controls Congress and the other party controls the Presidency                       | 11             | 18             | 25                | 32                | 14         | 1       |
| 7d | It is important for the President to communicate regularly by having news conferences with the media at least once a month | 55             | 23             | 10                | 8                 | 3          | 1       |

## Demographics

D1. What is your age as of your last birthday? [RECORD IN YEARS]

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|    |                                |
|----|--------------------------------|
| %  | Base: Total Respondents N=1002 |
| 31 | 18-49                          |
| 31 | 50-64                          |
| 36 | 65+                            |
| 3  | Refused                        |

D2. What is your marital status? Are you currently....

|      |                                   |
|------|-----------------------------------|
| %    | Base: Total Respondents N=1002    |
| 59   | Married,                          |
| 9    | Divorced,                         |
| 1    | Separated,                        |
| 19   | Widowed,                          |
| 10   | Or have you never been married?   |
| <0.5 | Living with partner [DO NOT READ] |
| 1    | Don't know [DO NOT READ]          |
| 1    | Refused [DO NOT READ]             |

D3. What is the highest level of education you have completed? [READ LIST]

|    |   |
|----|---|
| %  | Base: Total Respondents N=1002                        |
| 6  | Less than high school                                 |
| 30 | High school graduate or equivalent                    |
| 26 | Some college or technical training beyond high school |
| 22 | College graduate                                      |
| 14 | Or, Post-graduate or professional degree              |
| 1  | Don't know [DO NOT READ]                              |
| 1  | Refused [DO NOT READ]                                 |

D4. Which of the following best describes your current employment status? Are you currently....[READ LIST]

|      |                                    |
|------|------------------------------------|
| %    | Base: Total Respondents N=1002     |
| 37   | Employed full-time                 |
| 8    | Employed part-time                 |
| 37   | Retired and not working            |
| 3    | Unemployed and looking for work    |
| 5    | Homemaker                          |
| 5    | Disabled                           |
| 1    | Student                            |
| 1    | Self Employed                      |
| <0.5 | Or something else [Specify: _____] |
| <0.5 | Don't Know [DO NOT READ]           |
| 1    | Refused [DO NOT READ]              |

D5. Would you say that you always vote in presidential elections, usually vote, sometimes vote, rarely vote, or never vote)

|    |                                   |
|----|-----------------------------------|
| %  | Base: Total Respondents<br>N=1002 |
| 72 | Always                            |
| 17 | Usually                           |
| 6  | Sometimes                         |
| 2  | Rarely                            |
| 2  | Never                             |
| 1  | Refused [DO NOT READ]             |

D6. For statistical purposes only, please stop me when I get to the category That includes your household's income before taxes in 2004. Was it... [READ LIST]

|    |                                  |
|----|----------------------------------|
| %  | Base: Total Respondents N=1002   |
| 6  | Less than \$10,000               |
| 10 | \$10,000 but less than \$20,000  |
| 8  | \$20,000 but less than \$30,000  |
| 9  | \$30,000 but less than \$40,000  |
| 8  | \$40,000 but less than \$50,000  |
| 13 | \$50,000 but less than \$75,000  |
| 11 | \$75,000 but less than \$100,000 |
| 12 | \$100,000 or more                |
| 5  | Don't know [DO NOT READ]         |
| 16 | Refused [DO NOT READ]            |

D7. Are you Spanish, Latino, or Hispanic?  
 % Base: Total Respondents N=1002  
 4 Yes  
 94 No  
 <0.5 Don't Know  
 2 Refused

D8. Which of the following groups best describes your race? [READ LIST]  
 % Base: Total Respondents N=1002  
 85 White  
 6 Black or African-American  
 2 Asian  
 1 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander  
 2 American Indian or Alaska Native  
 2 Spanish  
 1 Mixed  
 <0.5 Other  
 <0.5 Don't know  
 3 Refused

D9. [RECORD STATE]

D10. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as...?  
 (READ LIST. ENTER ONE ONLY)  
 % Base: Total Respondents N=1002  
 18 1. A Republican  
 33 2. A Democrat  
 37 3. An Independent  
 <0.5 4. Libertarian  
 2 5. None/Vote for person  
 <0.5 4. (DO NOT READ) Other  
 6 5. (DO NOT READ) Don't know  
 4 6. (DO NOT READ) Refused

(SCRAMBLE CODES 1-3)

D11. Generally speaking, would you characterize your political views as being...?  
 (READ LIST. ENTER ONE ONLY)  
 % Base: Total Respondents N=1002  
 30 1. Conservative  
 47 2. Moderate  
 12 3. Liberal  
 3 4. (DO NOT READ) None of the  
 Above  
 7 5. (DO NOT READ) Don't know  
 2 6. (DO NOT READ) Refused

D12. Record gender?

| %  | Base: Total Respondents N=1002 |
|----|--------------------------------|
| 33 | Male                           |
| 67 | Female                         |

D13. Finally, what is your 5-digit zip code?

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D14. Are you or your spouse a member of AARP...?

| %  | Base: Total Respondents N=1002 |
|----|--------------------------------|
| 37 | Yes                            |
| 31 | No                             |
| 1  | Don't know                     |
| 1  | Refused                        |