

The Problem of Undecided Voters

As the 2008 election campaign drags into its final two months, expect to hear more and more about how undecided voters hold the key to victory.

This should scare the pants off you.

Consider this: the election campaign has been going on for two years. The two main parties have been slugging it out in Washington, in each state, in many cities, and on the airways almost daily. We identified the two main nominees months ago. The daily media is full of stories and advertisements about both presidential and vice presidential candidates.

And yet we are told that many voters are still undecided.

What does it mean to be a voter undecided about the differences between Obama/Biden and McCain/Palin at this date? It could mean:

- you haven't paid attention to anything in the news for the last two years;
- you can't tell the difference between the candidates;
- you're uncertain about what the candidates and their parties represent;
- you haven't figured out that voting for one rather than the other will matter for the economy, the Supreme Court, the environment, the future of international relations, your children and grandchildren's future, your health and healthcare, your savings and retirement, and the future of the United States in the world.

In other words, being an undecided voter at this date means being the least informed, most clueless, laziest and most irresponsible of citizens. By being so uninterested in issues that will determine the future course of this country, undecided voters are susceptible to having their minds influenced in the last weeks of the campaign by campaign lies, appeals to distracting emotional trigger issues, and trivial hot-button slogans.

What should we think about undecided voters' inability to distinguish differences or come to a decision, even after exposure to all the available information about this election? Should they be discouraged from voting? Or should they have the distinction of being courted by the candidates so their last-minute preference sways the 2008 election? Does their irresponsibility mean they aren't good citizens, or does their delay make them the most qualified people to decide the presidency?

What makes these voters undecided? Uninformed? Haven't focused on the elections yet? Don't care? May not even vote? Too busy to think about it? Don't see what difference their vote makes? Waiting to see what their friends/family/religious leaders say? Will pick someone on election day? Thinking about whose looks they like best? Don't know what to think about the candidate's past? Can't decide?

No matter: they are determined to cast the deciding ballots in the most critical election in decades.

Is American democracy great, or what?

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August 9, 2017