



Marist College Institute for Public Opinion

Poughkeepsie, NY 12601 • Phone 845.575.5050 • Fax 845.575.5111 www.maristpoll.marist.edu

Face Off: The First Presidential Debate?

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Thursday, September 25, 2008

Contact: Lee M. Miringoff
Barbara L. Carvalho
Mary E. Azzoli
Marist College 845.575.5050

This Marist Poll reports:

- **The Show Must Go On?** John McCain proposed yesterday that he and Barack Obama postpone tomorrow night's debate so that lawmakers may focus on handling the nation's economic crisis. Obama wants to have the debate to discuss the issues. 42% of the national electorate agrees with the Arizona senator while 53% agrees with Obama that the debate should go on as planned.

Question Wording: A presidential debate between John McCain and Barack Obama is scheduled for this Friday night. John McCain wants to postpone the debate to work on the 700 billion dollar bill before Congress to bailout the financial industry. Barack Obama wants to have the debate on Friday so both he and McCain can talk about their positions on the economic crisis. Should the debate be postponed or should the debate go on as scheduled?

Registered voters	Postpone	Go On As Scheduled	Unsure
September 2008	42%	53%	5%
Democrats	15%	80%	5%
Republicans	76%	21%	3%
Independents	40%	53%	7%

- **Debates... the Deciding Factor?** While 71% of registered voters nationally report they have made up their minds on the presidential race, 28% say the debates will help them decide. This includes 38% of Independent voters and 87% of undecided voters who expect the debates to influence their decision. There is little difference between the parties. 24% of Republicans and 21% of Democrats believe the debates will guide them in their choice for president.

Question Wording: Will the debates help you decide whom to vote for president or have you already made up your mind?

Registered voters	Debates Will Help Decide	Already Made Up Mind	Unsure
September 2008	28%	71%	1%
Democrats	21%	77%	2%
Republicans	24%	75%	1%
Independents	38%	60%	2%
Undecided voters	87%	8%	5%

- **It's All About Foreign Policy...Or, Is It?** The focus of tomorrow's scheduled debate is foreign policy. But, with the nation under an economic cloud, do more voters want to hear about the economy or about international issues? Slightly more registered voters nationwide -- 48% -- want the candidates to talk about the economy while 45% would prefer they discuss foreign policy. Voters split along party lines. 53% of Democrats want the candidates to discuss the current economic climate; 54% of Republicans would like the debate to stick to the original subject matter of foreign policy.

Question Wording: The first presidential debate this Friday is on the topic of foreign policy. Do you want to hear the candidates talk about the current economic crisis in this Friday's debate or stick to the original format of just foreign policy?

Registered voters	Talk About Economic Issues	Stick with Original Format	Unsure
September 2008	48%	45%	7%
Democrats	53%	40%	7%
Republicans	41%	54%	5%
Independents	51%	41%	8%

- **And, the Winner Is?** 48% of voters nationwide expect Barack Obama to win the first debate between the presidential candidates while 37% believe John McCain will be victorious. Voters divide over which presidential candidate will be better informed on the issues during tomorrow night's scheduled debate. 46% think Barack Obama will appear more knowledgeable compared with 42% who report John McCain will present a greater understanding of the issues. 46% of voters nationally expect Barack Obama will look more presidential during the debate while 44% believe John McCain will.

Question Wording: If there is a debate between John McCain and Barack Obama on Friday, regardless of whom you support, who do you expect to win? Do you think John McCain or Barack Obama is more likely to do each of the following in the debate: be better informed on the issues/be more presidential?

Registered voters	John McCain	Barack Obama	Unsure
Expect to win	37%	48%	15%
Democrats	16%	74%	10%
Republicans	69%	19%	12%
Independents	30%	48%	22%
Be better informed	42%	46%	12%
Democrats	14%	76%	10%
Republicans	78%	12%	10%
Independents	41%	44%	15%
Be more presidential	44%	46%	10%
Democrats	20%	71%	9%
Republicans	78%	16%	6%
Independents	40%	46%	14%

- **Who's Better Beyond Our Borders...It Depends:** By a wide margin of 24 percentage points, 59% of voters think John McCain is more adept at handling the war on terror while 35% say Barack Obama is the better candidate to keep our nation safe. There's a narrower gap on which candidate will better handle the war in Iraq. Half of the national electorate believes McCain is more capable while 45% thinks Obama is. But, when it comes down to who is the better diplomat, a slim majority -- 51% -- sees Obama as the better candidate in this role.

Question Wording: Do you think John McCain or Barack Obama will better handle security against terrorism/the war in Iraq/relations with other countries?

Registered voters	John McCain	Barack Obama	Unsure
Security against terrorism	59%	35%	6%
Democrats	27%	65%	8%
Republicans	92%	4%	4%
Independents	62%	31%	7%
The war in Iraq	50%	45%	5%
Democrats	18%	79%	3%
Republicans	88%	8%	4%
Independents	50%	42%	8%

Registered voters	John McCain	Barack Obama	Unsure
Relations with other countries	44%	51%	5%
Democrats	16%	82%	2%
Republicans	80%	15%	5%
Independents	42%	52%	6%

- **Tuning In for the Presidential Debate:** Most registered voters nationally plan to either watch or listen to the first debate between Senator John McCain and Senator Barack Obama. 82% of the electorate says they will watch or listen to a great deal or some of the debate compared with just 17% who say they will not.

Question Wording: Do you plan on watching or listening to a great deal, some, not too much, or none of the presidential debate this Friday night between John McCain and Barack Obama?

Registered Voters	A Great Deal/ Some	A Great Deal	Some	Not Too Much	None	Unsure
September 2008	82%	54%	28%	6%	11%	1%

Nature of the Sample: 1,005 Americans

This survey was conducted on September 22nd and 23rd, 2008. 1,005 adults 18 years of age or older within the continental United States were interviewed by telephone. Telephone numbers were selected based upon a list of telephone exchanges from throughout the nation. The exchanges were selected to ensure that each region was represented in proportion to its population. The results of the entire survey are statistically significant at $\pm 3\%$. There are 879 registered voters. The results for this sub-sample are statistically significant at $\pm 3.5\%$. A follow-up survey of 507 adults 18 years of age or older within the continental United States was conducted by telephone on September 24th. There are 435 registered voters. The results for this sub-sample are statistically significant at $\pm 5\%$. The margin for error increases for cross-tabulations.