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ABC News polling analysis: Persuadable voters

Slightly more than a fifth of registered voters remain persuadable in their preferences for president, little changed from before the party conventions – and a continued sign that the 2012 election retains the potential to break open in either candidate’s direction.

Twenty-two percent of registered voters fit the definition of persuadable – those who express anxiety about the candidate they support and are seeking more information about their choices. That includes essentially equal numbers of Barack Obama’s and Mitt Romney’s supporters.

The number of persuadables in last week’s ABC News/Washington Post poll is similar to its level before the nominating conventions, 25 percent. There are some shifts beneath the surface – less persuadability among Romney supporters and among conservatives, but likewise slightly less among Democrats; and a bit less room to move in the Midwest and the South.

Persuadables are middle-of-the-road types, making it difficult for the candidates to reach them with traditional red-meat appeals to core supporters. For instance, among registered voters who don’t feel strongly about Obama’s work in office (i.e., saying they “somewhat” approve or disapprove), 37 percent are persuadable. That dives to 15 percent among those who feel strongly about Obama, either pro or con.

Similarly, this analysis, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), finds that 26 percent of political moderates or “somewhat” conservatives are persuadable, compared with 16 percent of liberals and “very” conservatives. And while 19 percent of those who currently are “enthusiastic” about their preferred candidate are persuadable, that rises to 36 percent of those who support a candidate, but not enthusiastically.

Among other groups, persuadability is now lowest, by partisanship, among Democrats (16 percent) and highest among independents (26 percent). There was no movement in persuadability pre-and post-convention among independents, customarily a swing voter group.

Persuadability is higher among adults younger than age 50 (27 percent persuadable) than among those 50 and up (17 percent), and higher among less-educated registered voters – 25 percent among those who don’t have a college degree, vs. 17 percent of graduates.

	% Persuadable among registered voters	
	Sept	Aug
All	22	25
Obama supporters	21	24
Romney supporters	22	29
Enthusiastic supporter	19	26
Not enthusiastic*	36	NA
Obama approval:		

Strongly approve or disapprove	15	21
Somewhat approve or disapprove	37	34
Democrats	16	24
Republicans	21	24
Independents	26	26
Liberals or very conservatives	16	21
Moderates or somewhat conservatives	26	29
Conservatives (NET)	20	28
18-49	27	29
50+	17	23
College graduates	17	21
Non-graduates	25	29
Northeast	23	18
West	23	23
South	21	28
Midwest	21	31

*Aug-Sept data combined for adequate sample size

In a regression analysis, holding demographic measures constant, being persuadable is most strongly predicted by being in the middle range ideologically, less educated, younger, lower income, and a Republican or independent rather than a Democrat. When attitudinal variables are added, being persuadable also is predicted by being unenthusiastic, less certain to vote, and in the middle ground in rating Obama's job performance.

ANXIETY AND INTEREST – Overall, 60 percent of registered voters who support Obama or Romney say they're anxious about how their preferred candidate would perform as president, and 32 percent are interested in finding out more information about the candidates. The combination of both groups (plus current undecideds) produces the estimate that 22 percent are persuadable, using the model described [here](#).

One of those two measures – interest in getting more information – has declined, from 41 percent before the conventions to 32 percent after them. If that trend continues, it would close the window through which candidates can make their appeals to persuadable voters.

This definition of persuadables is different from the traditional method of simply asking voters if there's a chance they could change their minds. That produces a lower estimate – 13 percent, including just 4 percent who say there's a good chance they might shift allegiance, with the rest calling it “pretty unlikely.”

Notably, even among registered voters who say their minds are made up, 17 percent appear to be persuadable under the anxiety/information-seeking model. And among those who say they could change their minds, only about half, 49 percent, fit the definition of persuadable voters based on their anxiety and interest in more information about the candidates. (The latter number combines August and September data for an adequate sample size.)

Compared with self-defined movable voters, the larger population of persuadables includes a greater proportion of women and of older registered voters, as well as more who say they're certain to vote in November.