

Inside the Minds of Undecided Voters

an analysis of the Zogby/Williams Identity Poll

conducted Aug. 11- 16, 2004

by Fritz Wenzel, senior political writer,

Zogby Interactive

As time marches on toward November 2, 2004, the grand question is: who in America is going to decide the outcome of what both major candidates and their surrogates are calling “the most important election in our lifetimes.”

There are several answers.

The political bases of both candidates will decide, by turning out to vote and bringing their friends, relatives, and neighbors. That is why both campaigns have devoted an extraordinary amount of time and money to grass roots organizing. Never in the history of the Republican Party has it devoted so much energy to identifying, registering, and motivating supporters of its presidential candidate.

“The Democrats may have invented grass roots politics, but this year we are perfecting it,” Bush spokesman Kevin Madden recently told an Ohio political reporter. Likewise, the campaign of Democratic challenger John Kerry has mobilized armies of volunteers, relying mainly on the backbone of volunteer support that can be found within organized labor unions, especially in the battleground Midwest.

But beyond turnout, the difference in what has every appearance of being a very close election will be made by those few voters who are, after far more than a year of campaigning and nearly four full years of full-throated acrimony, as yet undecided for whom they will vote.

Undecideds View Kerry and Bush

	% Bush Supporters	% Kerry Supporters	% Undecided
Favorability of Presidential Candidates			
Bush – favorable	99	1	40
Bush – unfavorable	1	99	60
Kerry – favorable	1	97	22
Kerry – unfavorable	99	3	72
Views on President Bush			
Bush – positive job performance	95	0	18
Bush – negative job performance	5	100	81
Bush – deserves re-election	98	0	6
Bush – time for someone new	1	100	37
Direction of the Country			
US – right direction	92	0	20
US – wrong track	4	99	60
What is Bush’s Most Significant Accomplishment?			
War in Iraq	49	4	18
Sept. 11	44	25	44
Health insurance	1	0	1
Unemployment	3	5	1
Not sure	3	66	36
What is Bush’s Most Significant Failure?			
War in Iraq	7	85	57
Sept. 11	1	5	2
Health insurance	18	2	13
Unemployment	7	8	18
Not sure	68	1	10
Personally, Do You Like the Candidates?			
Like Bush as a person	98	7	61
Don’t like Bush as a person	0	81	21
Like Kerry as a person	2	77	18
Don’t like Kerry as a person	90	3	38
Rather have a beer with Bush	91	4	46
Rather have a beer with Kerry	0	77	13
How Will the Election Impact You?			
Winner of election will impact personal life	90	92	67
Outcome of election won’t matter much	7	3	20
Satisfaction with Candidates			
Very satisfied with presidential choices	50	31	1
Somewhat satisfied with presidential choices	31	41	8
Wish for other candidates	18	28	90
	% Bush Supporters	% Kerry Supporters	% Undecided
Will Your Vote Matter?			
Vote for president will count	93	73	67
Vote for president will not count	6	11	23
Self-Interest in Government Control			
Agree government is controlled by few persons looking out for own self interests	38	91	76

Disagree government is controlled by few persons looking out for own self interests	61	9	24
More Important to Have in a President			
President who shares my values	43	65	33
President whose economic policies enhance my finances	2	23	19
President who protects by any means	54	6	39
President should emphasize religious values	75	2	29
President should keep religious values separate	16	96	60
Differences Between Two Major Parties			
Significant differences between two major parties on issues	91	88	41
Difficult to differentiate between two major parties on issues	6	7	33
Significant differences between two major parties, but both are wrong	2	4	22
Presidential Candidates' Values			
Bush more closely shares my values	98	1	33
Kerry more closely shares my values	0	93	13
Bush will better uphold traditional family values	99	4	57
Kerry will better uphold traditional family values	0	77	6
Views on Personal Values			
Individuals can discern right and wrong	92	27	61
Morality is a personal matter	5	65	32
What Did U.S. Learn from 9/11?			
The country needs to be prepared at all costs for a terrorist attack, and therefore should spend as much as necessary on national defense	91	6	41
The U.S. should seek international alliances and promote citizen exchanges and better understandings between different cultures in order to prevent such attacks in the future	2	84	32

Demographics and Attitudes

Who are these people?

The Great Undecideds among us, for the most part, consider themselves moderate (46%, as opposed to 28% of all likely voters), according to a new *Zogby/Williams Identity Poll*, taking positions on most political, civic, or cultural issues that are somewhere between those stances taken by Bush and Kerry supporters.

Half of Protestant undecideds identify as Born-Again or evangelical Christians while 45% of all Protestant voters do. About one-tenth of undecideds (8%) are 18-24, while only about 4% of all likely voters are. One in four undecideds are single and never married (25%), while 19% of all voters are single. Nearly half (46%) have no political

party affiliation compared with about 25% of all voters. One in three undecideds (35%) live in the East, while only 23% of all voters do. Fewer are southerners (17%) or westerners (18%) than voters as a whole – 26% and 20% respectively.

However, when asked a broad range of questions that probe how they live, what they believe, and what other choices they make in their lives – including which French fries they prefer, as was done in the *Zogby/Williams Identity Poll* (McDonalds over Burger King, 51% to 13%) – the “undecided” respondents reveal that, by a narrow five-to-four ratio, Mr. Kerry holds an advantage in the race for the White House.

This analysis is nuanced. It is predicated on that time-tested human quality that we are more willing to support a candidate that seems more like us, or with whom we best identify, or whose supporters are more like us.

Overall, the *Zogby/Williams Identity Poll* shows Mr. Kerry leading in the nationwide poll, 51% to 47% for Mr. Bush. Of the other 3% of respondents in the poll, 2% said they favor other candidates, while just 1% said they are yet undecided.

However, in past elections, most of those who support minor-party candidates tend to re-evaluate as summer turns to fall, and many wind up actually voting for one of the major candidates.

Undecideds: The Vital Center in a Bi-Polar America

More on this year’s crop of undecideds in a moment. First, it is interesting to note that the *Zogby/Williams Identity Poll* clearly highlights the absolute chasm between those already supporting Mr. Kerry and Mr. Bush. For instance, 66% of Kerry supporters said they have seen the anti-Bush documentary film *Fahrenheit 911*, while only 3% of Bush supporters have seen it. Undecideds appear to favor Mr. Bush here, as just 13% have seen

the movie. That 13% have seen it, and still remain undecided should be seen, in and of itself, as a victory for the Bush campaign.

A question about how respondents felt about labor unions offers another good window into the mindset of the electorate. Asked if they are pro-union or favor an open shop, 67% of Kerry supporters were pro-union, while just 6% of Bush supporters agreed – identifying a canyon between Kerry and Bush supporters.

Undecideds in the presidential race were in-between on the question, with 22% saying they were pro-union.

Another example of how the undecideds ride the fence between the Kerry and Bush camps: 89% of Kerry supporters said they would favor the environment over development, while just 20% of Bush supporters agreed with that sentiment. Among those who have yet to choose a candidate for president, 48% favored the environment over development. It is important to note that the question – making a stark choice between development and the environment – may have left undecideds with what they felt was too little information to make a choice, as 30% said they were unsure about an answer.

The bloc of undecided voters is a complicated lot.

Undecideds are much more likely than either Bush or Kerry supporters to be activists to protest for individual freedoms, the *Zogby/Williams Identity poll* shows, but fall somewhere between Bush and Kerry supporters on other key issues facing the nation.

Asked if they could become activists to protect traditional values, 40% of Bush supporters said yes, while just 2% of Kerry supporters agreed. Seventeen percent of undecided voters said ‘yes’.

Asked about becoming activist about protecting civil liberties, 51% of Kerry supporters said they would join the cause, while just 5% percent of Bush supporters would pitch in. Among undecideds, 20% said they would become activists to protect civil rights.

Oddly, with only two months left before the culmination of one of the longest-running and most publicized political races in modern American history, 61% of undecideds said they are “always early.” Not this time

Similarly, while 46% said they tend to make decisions about purchases on about the same timeline as most folks, 32% acknowledged they take “much longer than other people” before they buy. Faced with the biggest political buy in decades, these folks are stuck reading the warning labels in Aisle 9, far from the checkout counter.

And with store hours winding down, half of undecideds said they expect to make up their minds in the week before the election – or in the voting booth itself. Another 32% are going to wait until after the debates. Just 3% said they will do make up their minds after the conventions are done.

Their stalled decision-making process is not all that unusual, as 42% answered that, in previous presidential elections, they had made up their minds on presidential candidates as early as the July before the November vote. Not that they are ignoring the race. More than four of every five undecideds – 79% - said they think about the race either every day (43%) or at least a few times a week (36%).

The undecideds seem to be what is left of the Vital Center that historians Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and James MacGregor Burns wrote about in the 1960s. Two in five (42%) think there are significant differences between the two parties. But compare that

with the 92% and 88% of Bush and Kerry supporters respectively who say the parties differ widely.

However they choose, the poll found that about one in six voters who are now undecided will not vote at all in the election, which narrows an already slim field. More than half undecided respondents said that, in previous presidential elections, they had made up their minds by now. It's not that they are ignoring the Bush/Kerry battle, the poll showed. Undecided respondents, by a wide margin, said they think about the election every day or at least several times a week.

Among undecideds, 90% said they wish there were other candidates in the race, a rather salient clue to their current state of mind.

The Candidates and the Undecideds: Shared Values

Better than two in five (43%) of Bush supporters say they want a candidate who shares "my values." Kerry's supporters are even more adamant on this – 65% want their candidate to share personal values. The Undecideds are less sanguine – only 38% feel this is what they want in their choice for President.

By nearly four to one (47% to 12%), Undecideds feel that Bush would better represent their own values, and by more than ten to one (68%-6%) they feel that Bush would do a better job of "upholding traditional family values."

While 92% of Bush supporters identify with the view that "individuals can discern right and wrong," 65% of Kerry supporters are inclined toward the view that morality is a personal matter." Undecideds lean more toward Bush – 67% favor individuals identifying with right and wrong.

On the volatile wedge issue of gay marriages, Undecideds are like King Solomon. Only 2% of Bush supporters say that the government should recognize a marriage between two persons of the same sex the same way that the government recognizes a marriage of a traditional heterosexual couple. More than two in three Bush voters feel that only marriages between a man and woman should ever be sanctioned and “no other pair should receive equal benefits.” Kerry’s voters are split 48% to 5% on the same issue. The undecideds are split 19% for same sex sanctioning and 38% for man and woman only.

We posed this statement to all voters: “Many things our parents stood for are going to ruin before our eyes.” Eighty-five percent of Bush voters agree, while only 44% of Kerry’s voters agree. But, in further evidence that the undecideds may be a breed unto themselves, 69% agree. That is roughly halfway in between.

We see the same thing when it comes to the greatest of all wedge issues: abortion. Four in five of Bush supporters (79%) are pro-life and 87% of Kerry supporters are pro-choice. The Undecideds? Just over two in five (44%) are pro-life and 37% are pro-choice. A remarkable one in five (20%) are not sure about the issue that it seems everyone has a position on.

On guns, we see the same polarization between the supporters of each candidate: 80% of Bush voters are pro-gun and 81% of Kerry voters are pro gun control. This time we have slight favor toward Bush – 50% of the undecideds are pro-gun vs. 32% who are pro gun control.

And on gay rights, supporters of the two candidates are again split with 60% of Bush voters favoring the policy of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” while 73% of Kerry voters

favor “gay rights.” But the undecideds are evenly split: 30% favor gay rights, 35% prefer don’t ask, don’t tell.

Some of the findings: If people approach the choice of a President the way they approach their work, they would favor Mr. Kerry over Mr. Bush.

What is more important to you – working hard and fulfilling responsibilities, or doing things that give you joy or pleasure?	Bush Supporters	Kerry Supporters	Undecideds
Working hard/fulfilling responsibilities	80%	55%	59%
Doing things for pleasure/joy	16%	37%	33%
Neither/Not sure	4%	8%	8%

If people choose cars the way they choose Presidents, then Mr. Bush has an edge over Mr. Kerry.

Do you drive a foreign or domestic-made car?	Bush Supporters	Kerry Supporters	Undecideds
Foreign car	31%	49%	37%
Domestic car	67%	46%	58%
Neither	2%	6%	5%

The underlying question here is, what are the union implications to ownership of a foreign or domestic car? Typically, Democrats, especially those in the Midwestern battleground states that are dotted with auto assembly and manufacturing plants, overwhelmingly favor “American made” products, and their local party organizations in metropolitan areas are dominated by United Auto Workers members.

This may be a reason why, Zogby Interactive polling shows, among union members in key states like Ohio and Michigan, Mr. Kerry’s support among those who live in households with a union member is not as strong as one would expect it to be.

This may provide confirmation of a complaint in some circles that Mr. Kerry has trouble relating to the “common man” behind the wheel of a Chevy or Buick.

Another clue to this problem: Undecideds who describe where they are most likely to pick a cup of coffee on their way out much more closely match the behavior of Bush supporters, not Kerry supporters.

Among Bush supporters, 31% said they were likely to stop at Starbucks for their morning brew, while 26% said they would stop at Dunkin’ Donuts – percentages nearly identical to those who said they were undecided in the race for President. Meanwhile, 41% of Kerry supporters said they prefer the upscale Starbucks, with just 20% of Kerry supporters saying they would stop at a Dunkin’ Donuts.

A question about theoretical choices in the presidential race reveal that undecideds appear hungry for an intellectual leader, and which could spell the uselessness of “compassionate conservatism” four years after it was a leading theme in the race for the White House. While this hypothetical question clearly evokes a significant amount of uncertainty among respondents, it also illustrates the desire for a President who can master the mental intricacies of the job. Advantage, Kerry.

Who would you more likely vote for President – the Tin Man who is all brains and no heart, or the Scarecrow who is all heart and no brain?	Bush Supporters	Kerry Supporters	Undecideds
	Tin Man	35%	41%
Scarecrow	17%	14%	13%
Neither/not sure	49%	45%	38%

Another clue into this aspect of the mind of the undecided voter is revealed with the following question:

What is more important to you when you vote: your religion or ethnicity?	Bush supporters	Kerry supporters	Undecideds
Religion	56%	10%	36%
Ethnicity	3%	17%	8%
Neither/not sure	41%	73%	57%

Nearly 60% of all respondents said neither their religion or ethnicity is important in selecting a President. This puts the majority of voters, and most of the undecideds, in a category much closer to Mr. Kerry than Mr. Bush, as more than one in every two undecideds said neither factor would be important to them in making a choice for President. Again, the core beliefs of the candidates appear to be a secondary concern to those who have yet to make up their minds about the race.

The Personal as Political

Bad news for America's tea-totaling President: Undecideds prefer to have a beer with Mr. Bush by a factor of six to one (57% to 9%) over Mr. Kerry.

Looking to pick up a member of the opposite sex? If you are undecided on your presidential choice this year, we know who you are looking for: we learned that Libras and Virgos are more likely to be undecided than any of their fellow astrological signs.

Attention Wal-Mart shoppers! George W. Bush is your man, while J.C. Penney shoppers favor John Kerry. But the undecideds are with Wal-Mart, so score one for the President.

Ice cream offers us little clue to voter choice in November. Bush voters favor Hagen Daas 45% to 14%, while Kerry's fold prefer Ben & Jerry's 52% to 24%. The Undecideds? One in three (33%) like the Vermont brand while 35% are decidedly Dutch.

Bush supporters are clearly beefeaters: 59% are more likely to order it in a restaurant. Two in five Kerry voters (43%) are steakeaters too, but by a factor or 31% to 20%, they are more likely than Bush voters to order pasta. If pasta is the gold standard, then score one for Kerry as 28% of undecideds favor pasta.

A whopping 86% of Bush voters watch the Fox Network most often for news. Kerry's people can be found watching CNN (44%). Kerry's people prefer MSNBC 18% to Bush's 2%. Two in five (40%) of the undecideds opt for fair and balanced Fox, but 15% cite CNN, and 13% MSNBC.

Bush voters are evenly split on the question of the greatest President: 43% say George Washington and 46% favor Abraham Lincoln. Not so Kerry voters: Lincoln wins 66% to 19%. Could it be the tall and thin thing?

Kerry's people are slightly more likely to prefer rock (28%) to only 25% among Bush voters. But rock is by far and away the winner among undecideds with 28% stating that as their music of choice.

An unsettling factor in the poll – more than two of every three undecided respondents – 63% - said they think it is either very or somewhat likely that the 2004 presidential election will have a disputed outcome. That compares with 72% of all respondents who expect trouble after the Nov. 2 vote. Among those who support Mr. Bush, 58% expect a dispute, while a shocking 85% of Kerry supporters said they expect controversy after polls close.

Perhaps even more shocking about these undecided voters comes from the answers to a question about whether their undecided status might keep them from polls altogether.

If you have not decided by Election Day, might you choose not to vote at all?	Undecideds
Yes	15%
No	81%
Not sure	4%

The poll also shows that undecided voters are more likely than those who have already made up their minds to be able to accept an outcome in the election that is contrary to the one they might finally wish for. While just 33% of Kerry supporters and 68% of Bush supporters said they could support the new president, even if it is not the person for whom they voted, 77% of undecided voters said they would be willing to go along should the other side win.

Part of this, no doubt, comes from the fact that undecideds will not have invested all the time and devotion to a particular candidate than have those who have made up their minds. But considering the acrimony this nation has suffered since 2000, and in the aftermath of the 2001 terror attacks, this must be seen as a hopeful sign.

Given that they are doubtful about a clean-cut outcome on Nov. 2, it may not be surprising that the poll shows the undecideds have a lack of confidence in American institutions – much less confidence than those who have already chosen a horse in the presidential race. Like Kerry supporters, they have a streak of skepticism about government, no doubt a lingering effect of the debate over the war in Iraq, which was predicated on finding Iraqi weapons of mass destruction that have yet to be discovered in any volume.

Which of the following American institutions do you think is most prepared and able to undertake its mission?	Bush supporters	Kerry supporters	Undecideds
Pentagon	27%	9%	20%
Executive Branch	44%	1%	9%
None	8%	33%	30%

In what is an incredible but understandable transformation of the electorate from four years ago, it is international relations that seems to concern many undecideds, as 17% said they believe there is a need for radical change to address the question of fairness in the worldwide use of resources. More Kerry supporters agree, while just a small percentage of Bush supporters concur.

Finally, undecideds said that, of all things, they would fight first to preserve individual freedoms. This sentiment tracks closely with all respondents in the poll. Late to the game in choosing a new leader for the nation, time will tell whether these undecideds will cherish among those freedoms the right to cast a ballot. The moment they do, they will leave a smallish but important political club whose membership has been pursued with more vigor than almost any in modern history.