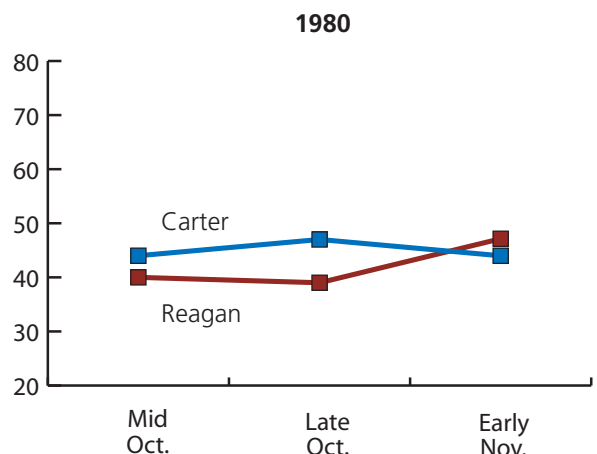
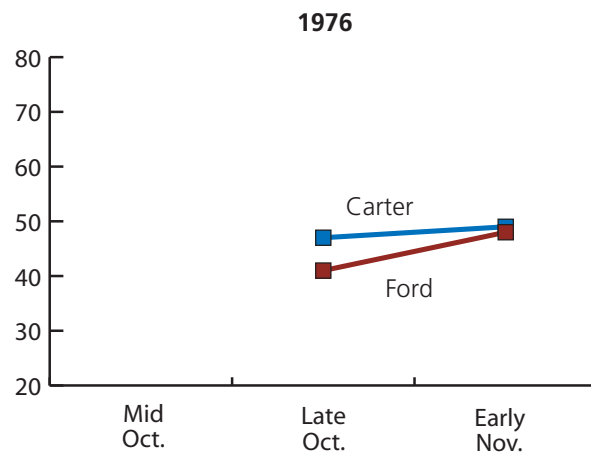
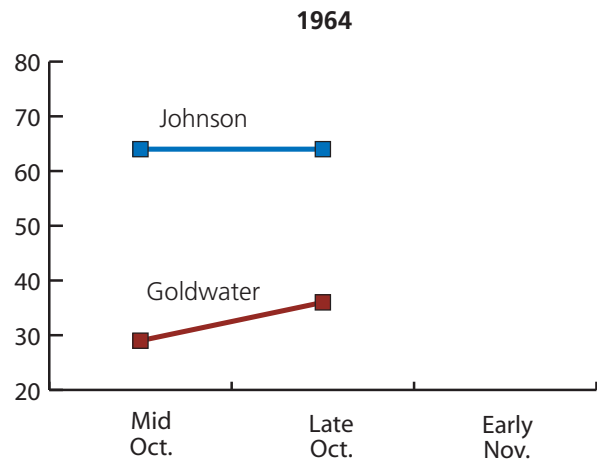
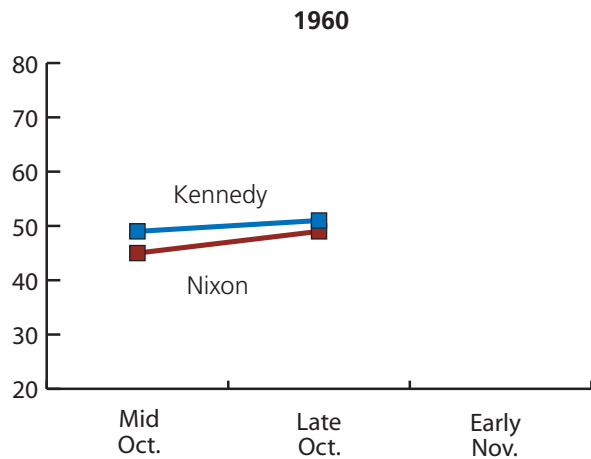


AEI Political Report

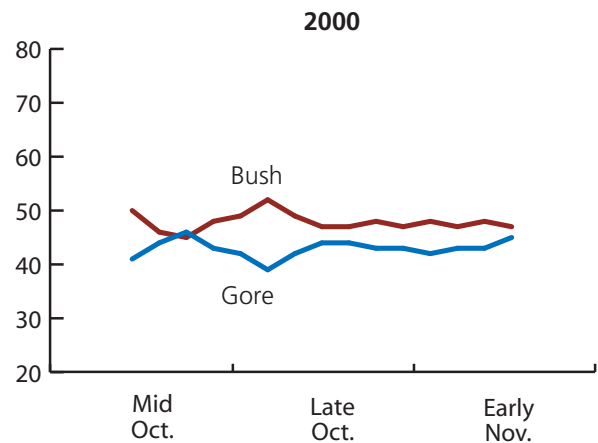
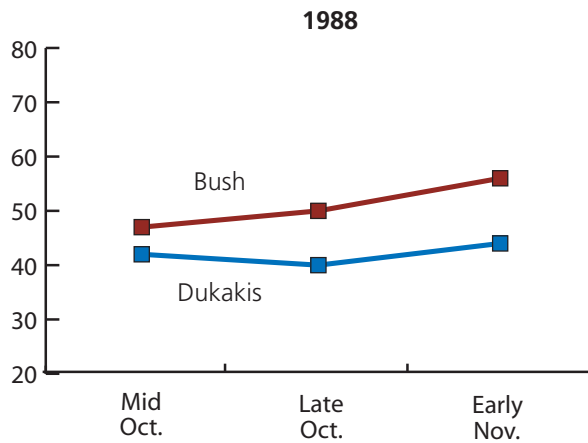
Two Minute Week Warning

The election is heading into the homestretch, and as we go to press, Barack Obama is currently ahead in virtually all national polls and in many battleground states. In the latest Gallup daily tracking poll conducted October 14–16, Senator Obama led John McCain by 50 to 43 percent among registered voters. Is a comeback win still possible for John McCain? A lot can happen in two weeks, but if history is any guide it seems unlikely, but certainly possible. Gallup recently published its trial heat data going back to 1936, and in elections without an incumbent, the candidate who was consistently ahead in the last two weeks usually ended up victorious. Still, there has been considerable fluidity in this unprecedented and historic election. In recent weeks, Senator Obama has improved his image on many personal attributes and issues, while Senator McCain has lost ground. Most Americans think Senator Obama will win. Turnout will be important, and in Gallup's latest poll, 71 percent of Democrats or those who lean to the Democratic Party said they were more enthusiastic than usual about voting. Fifty-one percent of Republicans gave that response.



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Q: As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election?

	Very closely	Fairly closely	Not too closely	Not at all closely
Oct. 3–6, 2008	61%	29%	7%	3%
Election weekends 2004	52	36	8	4
2000	39	44	12	5
1996	34	45	15	6

Note: Sample is registered voters.
Source: Pew Research Center.

Q: So far during this presidential campaign, have you personally . . . ?

	Yes	No
Discussed this election with a friend, spouse, or a relative	94%	6%
Tried to persuade a friend or relative to vote for the candidate you favor	42	58
Contributed money to one of the presidential candidates	25	75
Attended a gathering or rally for one of the candidates	12	87
Worked with one of the presidential campaigns	5	94

Source: Time/Abt SRBI, September 2008.



AEI POLITICAL REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

Karlyn Bowman, Senior Fellow; John Fortier, Research Fellow; Norman Ornstein, Resident Scholar; Michael Barone, Resident Fellow; and Ben Wattenberg, Senior Fellow.

Research Assistants: Adam Foster, Editor; Jessica Leval; Jennifer Marsico. Interns: Kevin Terhorst; Sarah Levey.

Making It to a Majority

Q: Regardless of who you support, and trying to be as objective as possible, who do you think will win the election in November . . . ?

	Will win in November
Barack Obama	60%
John McCain	38

Source: CNN/ORC, October 2008.

Q: Do you think _____ views on most issues are . . . ?

	Too liberal	Too conservative	About right
Barack Obama	37%	4%	55%
John McCain	14	42	39

Note: Sample is registered voters.

Source: ABC News/Washington Post, October 2008.

Q: How much have you heard about . . . ?

	Sep. 29–Oct. 5		
	Heard a lot	A little	Nothing
Latest presidential race polls	50%	39%	11%
Palin skit on Saturday Night Live	42	30	27
Palin-Couric TV interview	41	37	22

Source: Pew Research Center.

Q: Regardless of who you may support, who do you think . . . ?

	Obama	McCain
Would do more to bring needed change to Washington	61%	29%
Better understands the economic problems people in this country are having	58	28
Is the stronger leader	54	40
Would do more to stand up to lobbyists and special interest groups	47	39
Is more honest and trustworthy	44	40

Note: Sample is registered voters.

Source: ABC News/Washington Post, October 2008.

Q: If you had to make the toughest decision of your life, who would you rather get advice from . . . ?

	Oct.	Late Sep.	Early Sep.
Barack Obama	42%	40%	34%
John McCain	41	39	50

Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics.

Truth and Rumors

Q: Now let me ask you about Barack Obama, the Democratic nominee for president. Have you heard the story that Barack Obama is actually a Muslim?

Yes, I've heard that 89 %

Note: The same survey asked if those surveyed had heard the rumor that John McCain was brainwashed as a prisoner in North Vietnam, and 34 percent said yes.

Source: Scripps Howard News Service and Ohio University's Scripps Research Center, October 2008.

Q: Do you happen to know what Barack Obama's religion is?

	Sep. 2008	Jun. 2008
Muslim	13%	10%

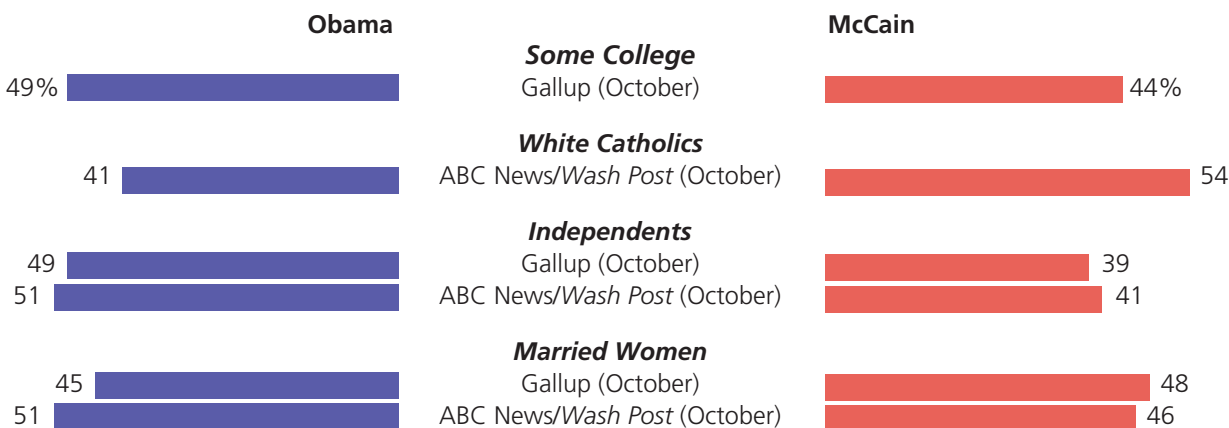
Note: Seventeen percent of Republicans said Obama was a Muslim as did 9 percent of Democrats and 14 percent of independents. In June 2008, 12 percent of both Republicans and Democrats thought Obama was a Muslim as did 11 percent of independents.

Source: Pew Research Center.



Groups We're Watching

Barack Obama is ahead in national polls, but some of the key groups that have gone with the winner in recent elections remain divided in their preferences. These groups have moved back and forth between the two candidates, injecting a note of caution into election predictions.



Note: Gallup sample is registered voters. ABC News/Wash Post sample is likely voters.

A Matter of Great Debate

Thus far, viewership of the 2008 presidential and vice-presidential debates has been somewhat unusual, in comparison to the two preceding presidential election seasons. In 2008, the single vice-presidential debate between Sen. Joe Biden and Gov. Sarah Palin received higher ratings than any of the three presidential debates between Sen. Barack Obama and Sen. John McCain. With nearly 70 million viewers, the Biden-Palin debate became the most watched vice-presidential debate in history. Furthermore, in both 2000 and 2004, the first presidential debate was the most watched of the three presidential debates, garnering close to 47 million viewers in 2000 and about 63 million viewers in 2004. However, the second Obama-McCain debate yielded more viewers than their first matchup.

Presidential and Vice-Presidential Debate Viewership, 2000–2008

2008



2004



2000



Source: Nielsen.

Congress: Another Big Change Election?

The latest polls show the Democrats with a solid lead on the Congressional generic ballot question, and Congress watchers at AEI, such as Norm Ornstein and John Fortier and outside experts including Charlie Cook and Stu Rothenberg, now expect a significant Democratic pickup on Election Day. The public has long had a soft preference for divided government. In a new NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll, 41 percent said it was better if the same party controls Congress and the presidency, but 48 percent opted for divided control.

Q: *In general, do you . . . ?*

Approve of the job Congress is doing	13%
Disapprove	78

Source: NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, October 2008.

Q: *Do you . . . ?*

	Democratic leaders in Congress	Republican leaders in Congress
Approve of the way they are handling their job	34%	27%
Disapprove	64	71

Source: CNN/ORC, October 2008.

Recent Congressional Generic Ballot Tests

	Would vote for	
	Democratic candidate for Congress	Republican candidate for Congress
LAT/Bloomberg (Oct. 10–13)	45%	39%
Gallup (Oct. 10–12)	51	45
Fox News/OD (Oct. 8–9)	44	36
GW/Battleground (Oct. 6–9)	49	38
NBC/ <i>WSJ</i> (Oct. 4–5)	49	36

Q: *In general, do you think . . . ?*

	It is better if the same party controls Congress and the presidency	It is better if different parties control Congress and the presidency
Oct. 2008	41%	48%
2000	41	47
1996	43	44
1992	28	62

Source: NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, October 2008.

Baracking the Youth Vote?

Young people are drawn overwhelmingly to Senator Obama. Sixty-three percent in a new poll of 18–29 year olds from Gallup, MTV, and *USA Today* say they will vote for him on Election Day and 30 percent for McCain. Senator Obama has a chance to cement a generational allegiance with young people if he is elected, and if his administration is successful.

Q: *Which presidential candidate would you most want to . . . ?*

	18–29 year olds	
	Barack Obama	John McCain
Have as a teacher in class	65%	27%
Have as your boss	63	28
Have a beer with	52	27
Ask for advice	51	36
Read his private diary	39	43

Q: *In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a . . . ?*

	18–29 year olds	
Republican		21%
Democrat		40
Independent		36

Q: *How would you describe your political views . . . ?*

	18–29 year olds	
Conservative		29%
Moderate		37
Liberal		29

Q: *What do you think the United States should do in regards to the Iraq War . . . ?*

	18–29 year olds	
Withdraw all troops as rapidly as possible		26%
Set a timetable for withdrawal; stick to it regardless of what is going on in Iraq		44
Keep troops until situation is stable, even if many more years		25

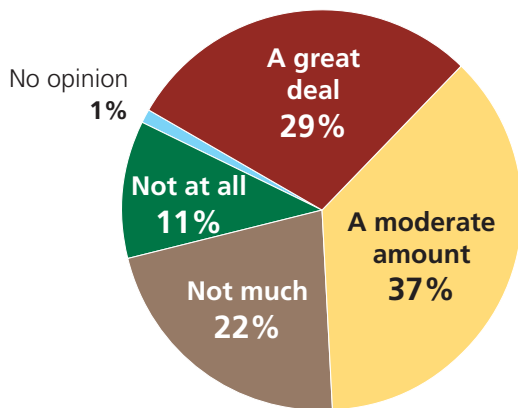
Source: Gallup/*USA Today*/MTV, September 2008.



The Economy

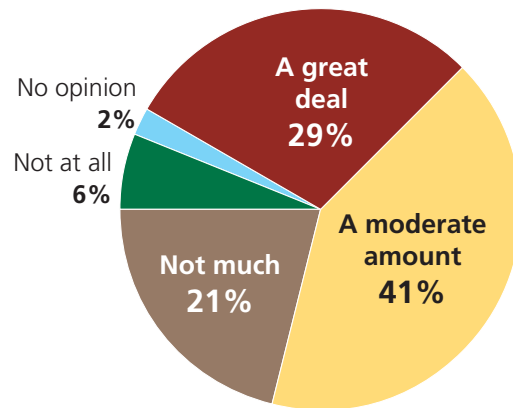
The level of pessimism about the nation's economy is driving this election campaign. In a new Gallup/USA Today poll, 84 percent said that economic conditions in the country are getting worse. Gallup also reports that the proportion saying they are better off financially than a year ago is lower than at any time since 1979. A majority say their financial situation has been harmed by the events of the last month, and in a separate question, 29 percent expect their financial situation to be harmed a great deal in the long run, and another 41 percent expect it to be harmed a moderate amount.

Q: How much do you think your own financial situation has been harmed by the events of the last month . . . ?



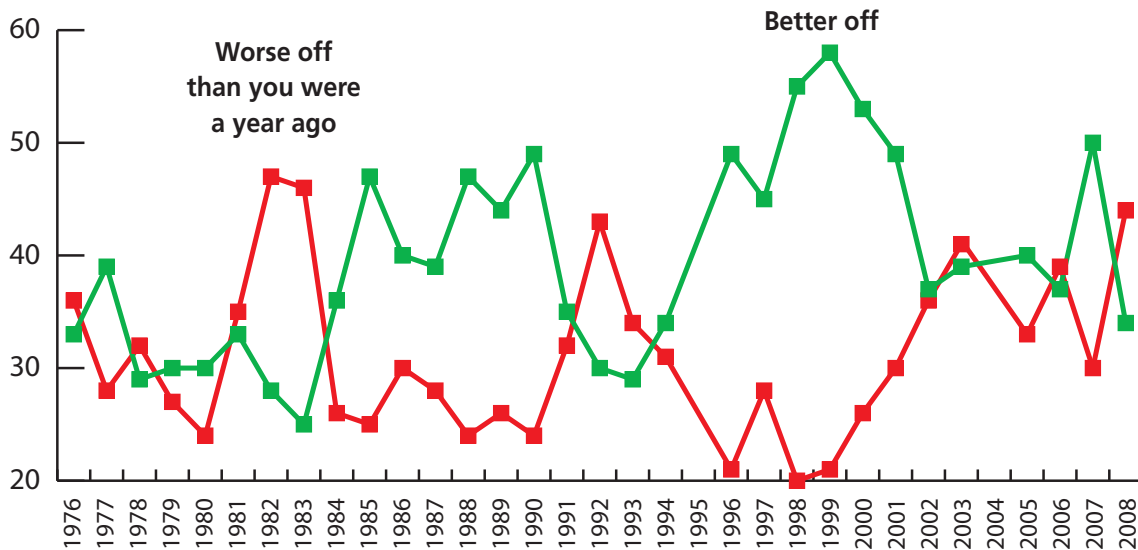
Source: Gallup/USA Today, October 2008.

Q: How much do you think your own financial situation will be harmed in the long run . . . ?



Source: Gallup/USA Today, October 2008.

Q: Would you say that you are financially better off now than you were a year ago, or are you financially worse off now?



Note: There are often multiple askings in each year. The numbers here are the first asking of a year.
Source: The Gallup Organization.

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Q: Thinking about the next 12 months, would you say you feel . . . ?

	Sep. 2008	Dec. 2004	Jun. 2004
Optimistic	43%	58%	64%
Pessimistic	53	40	34

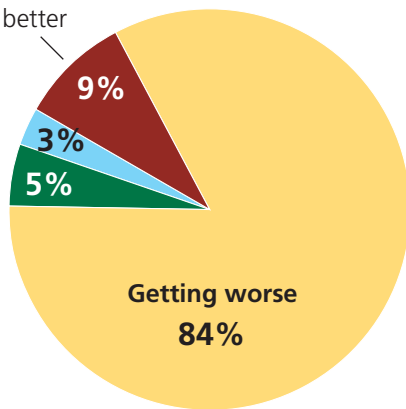
Source: ABC News/Washington Post.

Q: Right now, do you think that . . . ?

Economic conditions in the country as a whole are getting better

No opinion

Same (vol.)



Source: Gallup/USA Today, October 2008.

Q: Is this financial problem something that . . . ?

Affects only people on Wall Street	2%
Affects people throughout the country	92

Source: CBS News, September 2008.

Q: In considering the financial difficulties, of Wall Street institutions, do you feel . . . ?

The worst is behind us	23%
Problem may get worse	73

Source: Gallup/USA Today, September 2008.

Q: As you may know, the government is considering investing billions to try and keep financial institutions and markets secure. As you've thought about this, has it made you feel . . . ?

	Yes, has made me feel	No
Optimistic	29%	68%
Angry	61	37
Scared	50	49
Confused	43	56

Source: ORC/Pew Research Center, September 2008.

Q: Do you think . . . ?

Your federal income taxes will increase as part of a government solution to deal with the problems on Wall Street	72%
No, will not increase	23

Source: Gallup/USA Today, September 2008.



Handling the Crisis

No one is getting very good marks on handling the economic crisis. Both presidential candidates get better marks, however, than Congress and President Bush. Barack Obama has an edge over John McCain in a CBS poll on handling the current crisis, and in a Gallup/USA Today poll on fixing the economy if elected president. Attention to the crisis is high.

Q: Do you . . . ?

	Approve of his handling of the current economic crisis	Disapprove
Barack Obama	44%	32%
John McCain	35	46

Source: CBS News, September 2008.

Q: If _____ is elected president, are you . . . ?

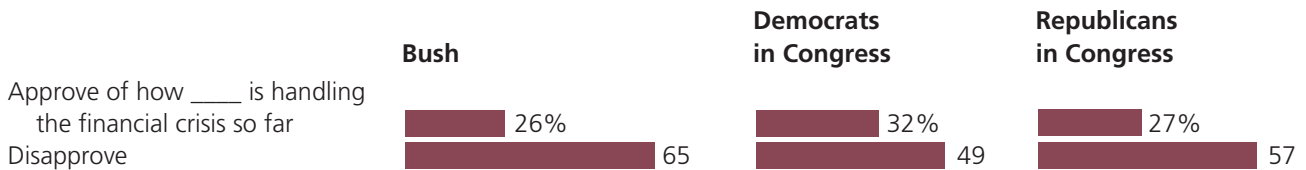
	Confident that he and his economic advisors can fix the economy	Not Confident
Barack Obama	44%	50%
John McCain	31	63

Source: Gallup/USA Today, October 2008.

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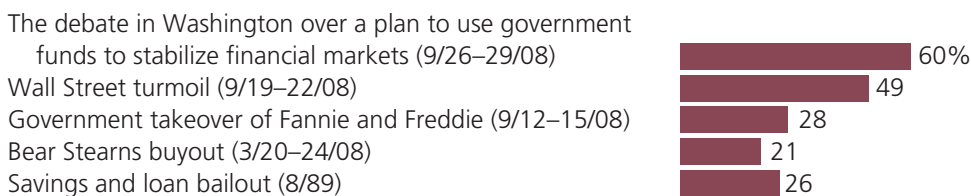
Q: Congress is debating a plan to stabilize the financial industry's bad mortgage debt crisis with a \$700 billion dollar bailout plan. Just based on what you've seen or heard, do you . . . ?



Source: Time/Abt SRBI, September 2008.

Q: As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story . . . ?

Followed very closely

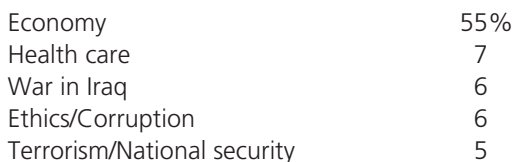


Source: ORC/Pew Research Center.

Sleeper Issues?

The economy is the paramount issue in 2008. But what about other related issues? Issues such as health care and taxes are still on voters' minds. Both candidates have spent a great deal of time discussing them. Until recently neither candidate had a discernible edge on taxes, but Senator Obama appears to have opened up a lead on the issue. This is true even as some polls show that more Americans believe their taxes would go up under a President Obama than a President McCain. Senator Obama maintains a clear advantage on health care in almost all public opinion surveys, but a new Harris/Harvard poll shows a pretty even division on which candidate's health care plan would be better for them personally.

Q: What is the single most important issue in your choice for president?



Note: Sample is registered voters.

Source: ABC News/Washington Post, October 2008.

Taxes

Q: Regardless of who you may support, who do you . . . ?

Trust more to handle taxes



Note: Sample is registered voters.

Source: ABC News/Washington Post, October 2008.

Q: Regardless of which presidential candidate you support, please tell me if you think . . . ?

Would better handle taxes



Source: Gallup/USA Today, October 2008.



Health Care

Q: *Who's stronger on health care?*

Barack Obama	53%
John McCain	34

Source: Ipsos/McClatchy, October 2008.

Q: *Overall, whose health care reform plan—John McCain or Barack Obama's—would be better for you?*

Obama's plan is better for me	33%
McCain's plan	27
No difference	27

Note: Sample is online.

Source: Harris Interactive/Harvard University, September 2008.

Current Commentary

“Presidential Transition Process Is in Need of a Major Upgrade”

AEI resident scholar Norm Ornstein makes key recommendations for improving the perilous period of transitioning to a new president and cabinet.

<http://www.aei.org/publication28777/>

“Taxing Times”

AEI senior fellow Karlyn Bowman contends that taxes might not be the best route to GOP victory this fall.

<http://www.aei.org/publication28773/>

“Bailout Vote May Come Back to Haunt”

AEI research fellow John Fortier analyzes the bailout vote and suggests it could have negative ramifications for either side.

<http://www.aei.org/publication28741/>



Bloomberg in the Big Apple

Q: *Currently, there is an eight year term limit for all elected New York City officials which means they may not run for re-election after serving eight years. Overall, do you . . . ?*

New York City residents

Favor term limits	50%
Oppose	35

Q: *Do you think term limits in New York City should be changed to allow Mayor Michael Bloomberg to run for a third term next year?*

New York City residents

Change rules for Bloomberg	46%
Do not change	44

Q: *How would you rate the job Mayor Michael Bloomberg is doing in office . . . ?*

New York City residents

Excellent/good	68%
Fair	21
Poor	11

Source: Marist College, October 2008.

Upcoming Election Watch: October 23

AEI's [Election Watch series](#), which began in 1982, is the longest-running election program in Washington. The 2008 presidential election campaign has unfolded in unexpected ways. At our next event, Election Watch panelists will continue to focus on the 2008 campaign in its entirety. To sign up for the breakfast sessions please register online at <http://www.aei.org/electionwatch>.

If you have any questions, contact Adam Foster at afoster@aei.org or Jessica Leval at jessica.leval@aei.org.

Other upcoming Election Watch dates:

November 6 (Post-election wrap-up luncheon)