



US ELECTION 2012



The State of Play

What is it about elections these days, asks Sir Robert Worcester

It's a great time for psephologists, the nerds (like me), who live for the excitement of elections. Especially when they're close run things. In the London Mayoral election there was a cliff hanger on 3rd May, 52% to Boris Johnson over 48% for former Mayor Ken Livingstone. On Sunday 6th May the French elected Francois Hollande, the Socialist candidate, by a narrow 52% to 48% over incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy. And the French electorate, just having had a two-round election for the Presidency, are being asked to go to the polls again for the French Assembly elections, on the 12th and 17th of June. And of course the American election, now more than a year old already, tumbles on.

At the last American Presidential Election, held in 2008, Barack Obama won the popular vote by 53% to 46%. It looks to be closer this year. The two principal tracking polls, Rasmussen and Gallup, have the candidates neck and neck. Rasmussen has the current state of play as Obama 47%, Romney 45% while Gallup has Romney at 46% and Obama at 45%, in other words, level pegging.

The key states are where it counts, as when you look at the map of the USA coloured red for the Republicans and blue for the Democrats, there's a sea of red across the southern, mid-western and mountain states, geographically greater, but in terms of electoral votes based on electors

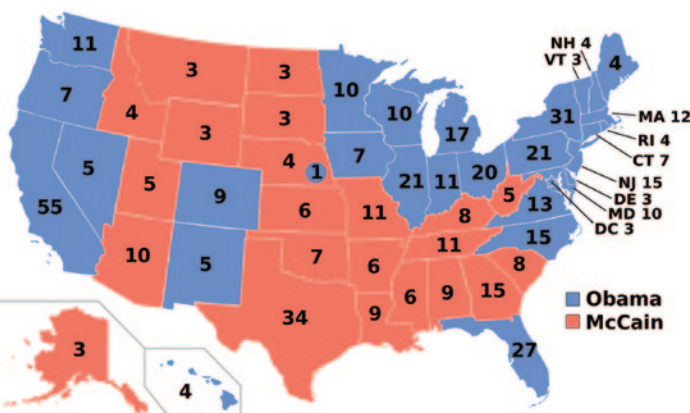
(those eligible to vote) there are greater numbers in the east and western coastal states. California has 55 electoral votes, cancelling out Washington (12), Oregon (7), Idaho (4), Utah (6) Montana (3) North and South Dakota (3 each) Nebraska (5), Kansas (6) and Colorado (9) all by itself – and California's solid for Obama. Texas is likely to vote its 38 electoral votes for Mitt Romney, and counter Minnesota (10), Michigan (16), and Illinois (20).

In 2008, California's 55 voted 61% for Obama and 37% for McCain. I can't see that swinging into the Romney camp, nor Texas' 38 votes going for Obama when four years ago they voted 55% to 45% for the Republican.

The likely 'swing' states which for the moment are too close to call include Arizona (11), Colorado (9), Florida (29), Iowa (6), Missouri (10) – closest last time – New Hampshire (4), North Carolina (15), Ohio (18) and Virginia (13). In 2004 the bellwether states were Florida (remember the fight over the 'chads?'), Ohio and Pennsylvania. Four years ago it was those three plus North Carolina, Missouri, Indiana, Georgia and Montana, Arizona and Virginia.

Our old friends economy and jobs are of concern to the greatest numbers of potential voters no matter where they live and who they are in terms of gender, age, religion and the other demographics which we use to dissect the electorate. Issues of second rank include, now as in 2008, health care,

Electoral College Voting, 2008



education and the budget deficit, the last overlapping in people's minds with the economy. Obama's health care bill, passed by the Congress with difficulty during his first term is still a contentious issue with the American electorate, with a majority of Americans saying that if they could, they'd vote to repeal it. Romney is bound to make this and the President's record on the economy and jobs his three main talking points as the campaign settles down to a slug fest over the summer up to the party conferences and the start, finally, of the election proper, on the first Monday in September, Labor Day.

Some of the so-called 'hot button' issues, gun control, abortion and gay marriage are 'single-issue' voters' dividing lines, but are now so embedded in the two-way, Republican v. Democrats, allegiances, they are no longer game changers to the mass of the electorate. Afghanistan has dropped significantly as an issue for now, as has terrorism, but should Iran erupt or a major terrorist attack succeed, these issues could ignite public concern, and much will depend on how the President responds as to how they will affect the election.

There are four hurdles to jump for issues to 'bite' in electoral terms, causing a supporter of one party to defect to another: first, they have to care about the issue, think it important to them and their family; second, they have to differentiate between the parties on the issue(s) they think important, for if it is not salient to them, or they think that the parties' policies overlap, they won't transfer their vote at the voting machine; third, they have to believe that the party if in power would do something about the issue; and fourthly, that the party if in power could do something about it.

Clinton is often quoted saying 'It's the economy, stupid', but when the world is in recession, the public may give the President some slack and not switch from supporting him in November unless the American economy stops bucking the trend of the world's economic muddle. Health care is a different case and could indeed switch some votes. ★

Sir Robert Worcester is the Founder of MORI. Follow him for updates on Twitter: @RobertWorcester.

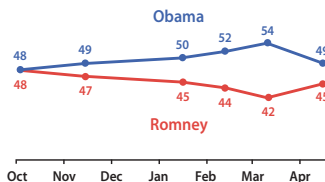


If Romney can claim Arizona – which John McCain won – it'll be worth one more electoral college vote than in '08

PHOTO: GAGE SKIDMORE

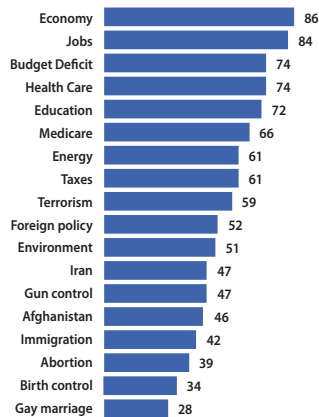
Obama's Electoral Lead Narrows

If the 2012 election were today, would you vote for...



Economic Issues Top Voters' Agenda

Percent rating each as "very important" to their vote



PEW RESEARCH CENTER APR. 4-15, 2012. BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS

Electoral College Votes by State, 2012

