



# *Signals and Patterns:*

## Research from SP Labs & Signal Patterns

### **Election Patterns Findings**

**October 23, 2008**

**Undecided voters resemble Obama supporters, personality-wise.**

- **Openness, Conscientiousness are best predictors of candidate preference**
- **Democrats for McCain (2% of Democrats) and Republicans for Obama (9% of Republicans) have unique personality patterns**
- **Obama wins in a landslide among voters high in Openness; McCain closes the gap among Conscientious voters**


There are some clear differences between Obama and McCain voters. Obama voters are 3 times as likely as McCain voters to identify Openness as their top trait<sup>1</sup>—over half of Obama voters do so. McCain voters, on the other hand, are more than twice as likely to be Conscientious; 37% of McCain voters show Conscientiousness as their top trait, while only 17.5% of Obama voters do. McCain voters are also 67% more likely than Obama voters to have Stability as their top trait; Stability was the least common top trait for Obama voters, but the second-most common (to Conscientiousness) among McCain voters. Conscientiousness has generally been associated with right-wing parties, while Openness has historically predicted an affiliation with left-leaning groups. Our results, then, are consistent with past research.

There are some clear similarities as well. People in the two candidate's camps were equally likely to have a top trait of Agreeableness (18% of both candidates' backers) and Extraversion (13%). But these voters have made their selections. Both the media and the candidates themselves have focused a great deal of attention on voters who have yet to make up their minds. Who are these undecided voters?

Not surprisingly, the majority of undecideds (60%) identify as independents. Republicans make up 22% of the undecided voters, with Democrats accounting for the remaining 18%. Personality-wise, however, undecideds resemble Obama voters. The plurality (45.2%) of undecideds are more Open than anything else, and they are also just as likely as Obama supporters to be Stable (12%) over all other traits. Undecideds are also far less likely (21%) than McCain supporters evince Conscientiousness. Like supporters of both candidates, they only show Extraversion as their top trait 13% of the time, and they do not differ greatly from either camp in their likelihood to be Agreeable (21%).

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<sup>1</sup> Since some voters have two traits that are tied as the top trait, these numbers will not add up to 100%. If two traits are tied for the top-trait position, both are counted as a top trait.



Undecided voters could decide the election, but so could voters who cross party lines. Only 2% of Democrats plan on voting for McCain, while 9% of Republicans support Obama. What traits define these crossover voters? Unsurprisingly, Democrats who support McCain are very likely to be Conscientious, and the prevalence of Openness is commensurate with Openness among McCain supporters. These voters are also far more likely to rank highly on Agreeableness, when compared both to other Democrats and to other McCain supporters.

Republicans who support Obama are just as likely to show Conscientiousness as their top trait as McCain supporters are, and they are far less likely than any group to rank Stability highly. Their levels of Openness are high, relative to the prevalence of Openness in their McCain-endorsing colleagues.

Republicans, it seems, should target Democrats who are Conscientious and Agreeable, but not Open. Democrats should target Republicans who are Open, but who tend to be emotional (the opposite of Stable).

What about that other highly-examined group, Independents? Of voters who do not identify with either of the two major parties, 51% support Obama, 17% support McCain, and 32% remain undecided. They are similar to Democrats, in that they are very likely to show Openness as their top trait, and not likely to rate as Conscientious. Independent McCain supporters are somewhat more likely to show Conscientiousness than the typical Independent, but the prevalence of Conscientiousness in that population is low, relative to its prevalence among McCain supporters in general.

How do the candidates fare among people with different traits? In our sample, Obama beats McCain irrespective of the voter's prevailing trait, but his margin of victory is greatest among those who are Open (71%-14%). Obama and McCain poll closely among Conscientious voters (45% to 42%, respectively).

### **About Signal Patterns**

Signal Patterns develops social web applications that characterize and connect users to each other based on their interests, personality and preferences. With these scientific-based applications, consumer can discover more about themselves as well as make valuable connections to like-minded individuals, while publishers, advertisers and social networks can increase their own user engagement. Signal Patterns' patent-pending technology results from a unique combination of in-house behavioral science research and data mining expertise. Founded in 2006, Signal Patterns is based in Pleasantville, NY. For more information: <http://www.signalpatterns.com>

### **About SP Labs**

SP Labs is the research arm of Signal Patterns and consists of a team of top scientists from different disciplines: personality psychology, machine learning, biometrics, social psychology and neuroscience. SP Labs focuses on developing research techniques, surveys and studies that look across seemingly unrelated areas to discover connections and patterns. Through rigorous science and sheer computational power, the SP Labs team's research is able to identify patterns emerging from the data, making connections between disparate subject areas with the goal of helping people learn more about themselves, their relationships and the people around them. For more information visit: [http://www.signalpatterns.com/corporate\\_labs.html](http://www.signalpatterns.com/corporate_labs.html)