

Are the presidential campaigns convincing voters?

Last night, on 60 Minutes, both President Obama and Mitt Romney were interviewed. Scott Pelley interviewed Romney while Steve Kroft interviewed Obama. At the end of the hour, when both candidates gave few specifics, I don't think anyone's mind was changed. If you supported Romney, you liked what he had to say. Likewise for Obama.

Beliefs are not facts but they are just as immutable

The campaigns are facing a very polarized electorate. People either support the candidate or they actively despise him. Take for example a friend of mine who is a very religious Catholic. She despises Obama because she says he "promotes abortion" She has no evidence to prove this (because there is no evidence and besides, there is a huge difference between supporting the right to get an abortion and promoting it) but she believes it, and also that because he is pro-choice, he is immoral. Someone like her will not be convinced by any campaign ad or speech.

Role of undecided voters

We've been told that the outcome of this election lies in the hands of the "undecided." Campaigns are spending inordinate amounts of money trying to sway these voters (if they do even vote). After seeing a group of undecided voters on the PBS Newshour, which interviewed them after each of the conventions, I am not certain that undecided voters can be swayed. Those PBS undecideds seemed to be seeking the perfect candidate, and neither Obama nor Romney measured up. Undecideds may well be perfectionists who are unable to prioritize issues and accept that neither candidate will be perfect, and therefore can't make up their minds.

In short, I think that very few things that happen between now and Election Day will change voters' minds. Minds are made up, and any "mistakes" candidates make will further solidify opinions not change them. You would think, for example, that there would be outrage about Mitt Romney's manipulation of his tax returns. Instead, those who support him say he has merely complied with the law and those who don't see further proof that he is a rich person trying to protect himself from taxation.

What do you think? What can campaigns do to sway voters?