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## Why some voters can't decide

With only two days left until Election Day, a small cluster of holdouts — 4 to 6 percent, according to most polls — still is wrestling with the "Who are you voting for?" question.

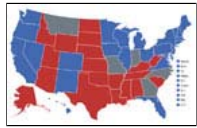
By The New York Times and Los Angeles Times

Barack Obama and John McCain have stood (or sat) for 36 debates, endured thousands of interviews and spent hundreds of millions of dollars and the better part of two years trying to convince voters they are worthy of the presidency, or at least a vote.

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But with only two days left until Election Day, a small cluster of holdouts — 4 to 6 percent, according to most polls — still is wrestling with the "Who are you voting for?" question.

Which raises a follow-up: What's up with these people? They are, after all, faced with two different men, from different generations, with different ideas, revealed and vetted in the longest campaign cycle ever.

"I do not like being an 'undecided,'" said Doug Finke, 66, an executive at an international relocation service in Louisville, Ky. "Last time at this point, I definitely was decided. Not this time. I find it unnerving."

Finke, a Republican, voted twice for George W. Bush. Finke describes himself as an economic conservative and said he had been "very impressed" with McCain. It sure sounds as if Finke is leaning toward the Arizona Republican, right?

Not so fast.

"I'm socially more liberal," Finke said. "I think Obama is bright and has been very steady in this campaign." He added that it would be "very exciting for the United States to elect a black president." Besides, he does not think McCain's running mate, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, would be ready to step into the top job if something happened to McCain (who, Finke noted, "is pretty old").

Where does this leave Finke? "I plan on doing a lot of reading this weekend," he said.

There is little research on undecided voters because they are an ever-changing population; those who equivocate in one election cycle might not in another. A study of presidential elections at the State University of New York, Buffalo, found that the last time wafflers made a difference was 1960.

But they may be significant this year. A Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg poll last week showed that this wavering wing of the electorate — 6 percent in Florida, 8 percent in Ohio — was large enough to make the difference in those states.

### He likes McCain, but ...

Presidential elections don't always rise to the level of monumental decisions, but with two wars, a crippled economy and an energy crisis, this one does, and the undecided mind swings back and forth, amassing evidence, unwilling — unable? — to rush it.

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"I might flip a coin," said Vasilios Gerovasiliou, 64, of Concordville, Pa. His wife, Helen, said she was "disgusted with both sides."

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Gerovasiliou, who emigrated from Greece 35 years ago, said there were things he liked about Obama and McCain. But he also thinks that "neither of the candidates always speaks the truth" and that "none of them will be able to do all of the things they are promising."

Gerovasiliou supported Hillary Rodham Clinton, loved former President Clinton and pretty much vowed to support anyone not named Obama after he defeated Clinton in the Democratic primaries. But the Clintons' endorsement of Obama went a long way. "Time healed things," Gerovasiliou said.

Plus, he likes Obama's running mate, Sen. Joseph Biden of neighboring Delaware, who is "friends with a lot of the Greeks around here" and patronizes local Greek diners. Gerovasiliou likes McCain, too, however. He admires his service, patriotism and grit, and he likes that Palin comes from a small town, just as he did in Greece.

Would Gerovasiliou really flip a coin? No, he would not. "I will just have to make a decision," he said. By the end of a 15-minute phone interview, he sounded a little closer to making one. "I think I am leaning a little bit to someone now," he said.

And that would be?

"Biden."

**She has misgivings**

Talking does not necessarily bring undecideds closer to deciding. "The more I chat, the more confused I get," said Laura Wolpo, a Brooklyn native who lives in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

Wolpo, 76, usually has picked a candidate by the end of the conventions: Democrats Al Gore in 2000 and John Kerry in 2004.

Obama?

"I have great misgivings," she said.

"We are of the Jewish faith," she said, "and I don't really know his stance on the Middle East and Israel." She also worries about his "share-the-wealth ideas" and said Michelle Obama comes on a little too strong. ("And someone should teach her how to dress, too.")

McCain? "I like the man," she said. "I have a great deal of respect for him."

But she has problems, too, some big ones. First, she is a strong believer in abortion rights (which McCain is not). "The government does not belong in our bedroom," she said. And then there is Palin.

"Oh, my God," Wolpo said. "Some of what she says is very stupid."

When pressed, Wolpo said there probably was a 60 percent chance she would support McCain. She does not buy the Obama campaign argument that McCain is like Bush. "McCain knows in his heart that Bush is a loser," she said.

Either way, Wolpo said her decision did not keep her awake at night. "I have enough to worry about," she said, adding that her youngest son, in his 40s, had a stroke last spring, and that puts everything else in perspective.

"This other thing is just an election," she said.

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