



HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

CONTACT: Pam Haynes
Media Relations Manager
336-841-9055; phaynes@highpoint.edu

UNC/HPU POLL: N.C. VOTERS SAY CAMPAIGN ADS ARE TOO NEGATIVE

HIGH POINT, N.C., Oct. 16, 2012 – A UNC/HPU Poll, conducted on the High Point University campus with support and collaboration from the UNC School of Journalism and Mass Communication, finds that a large majority of North Carolina registered voters agree that the country would be better off if election campaigns were not so negative. However, voters are split on who to blame and what to do about the negativity in campaigns.

A cell phone and landline telephone survey of 605 registered voters conducted between Sept. 29 and Oct. 10 found that more than 80 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that “the country would be better off if election campaigns were not so negative.” But a majority – 53 percent of registered voters – also stated that they believe that the negativity of advertisements in the 2012 elections is about the same as past elections, while 41 percent said that 2012 advertisements were more negative than those in past elections.

And while 40 percent of respondents said that former Gov. Mitt Romney’s advertising was more negative, an almost identical 39 percent said President Barack Obama’s advertising was more negative.

Meanwhile, voters were also split on what to do about negative ads with a total of 46 percent agreeing with the statement that “laws should be passed to keep candidates from being so negative in their campaign ads” and 43 percent disagreeing with that statement.

“Voters in 2012 are concerned about negativity in campaigns, but are not united on taking strong steps like passing laws to prohibit negative advertising,” says Dr. Sadie Leder, associate director of the HPU Poll. “This highlights one facet of the negative advertising issue – as long as there is no consensus on what to do to stop negative advertising, candidates face few disincentives to engage in it.”

"No matter how unhappy voters may be with negative campaign advertising, the research evidence shows that people learn from the ads," says Dr. Daniel Riffe, the Richard Cole Eminent Professor in UNC's School of Journalism and Mass Communication. "It's not always about learning facts or allegations from the negative ads, though that happens of course, but people form impressions of candidate competency and integrity from negative advertising. More important, the research on negative advertising shows that the people most affected are the otherwise 'undecided' voters – the very ones that can swing an election."

Statements about negative ads in the 2012 campaigns – Registered voters

Now I want you to tell me whether you agree or disagree with some statements. Do you Strongly Agree, Agree Somewhat, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree Somewhat, or Strongly Disagree with the statement?

The country would be better off if election campaigns were not so negative.

Strongly Agree – 60 percent
Agree somewhat – 21 percent
Neither agree nor disagree – 7 percent
Disagree somewhat – 6 percent
Strongly disagree – 4 percent
(Don't know/refuse) – 3 percent

Laws should be passed to keep candidates from being so negative in their campaign ads.

Strongly Agree – 28 percent
Agree somewhat – 18 percent
Neither agree nor disagree – 8 percent
Disagree somewhat – 18 percent
Strongly disagree – 25 percent
(Don't know/refuse) – 3 percent

(For registered voters, Sept. 29 to Oct. 10, n = 605, margin of sampling error is approximately 4 percent, percentages may not total 100 due to rounding)

Comparing negativity of presidential candidate ads – Registered voters

Based on what you've seen, do you think the advertising for the 2012 presidential campaign has been more negative than in past elections, less negative, or about the same?

Less negative – 5 percent
About the same – 53 percent
More negative – 41 percent
(Don't know/refused) – 2 percent

(n= 575, based on respondents who had seen political advertising)

Based on what you've seen, which candidate's advertising do you think has been the most negative?

Obama – 39 percent

Romney – 40 percent

(Don't know/refuse) 21 percent

(n= 575, based on respondents who had seen political advertising)

With support and collaboration from Riffe at the UNC School of Journalism and Mass Communication and the High Point University Survey Research Center, the survey was fielded from Sept. 29 to Oct. 4 and Oct. 6 to Oct. 10, 2012. The responses came from 605 registered voters with landline or cellular telephones in North Carolina selected by a Random Digit Dial (RDD) method giving the overall survey a margin of sampling error of approximately 4 percentage points. Registered voters were identified as responding "yes" to this question: *These days, many people are so busy they can't find time to register to vote, or move around so often they don't get a chance to re-register. Are you NOW registered to vote in your precinct or election district here in North Carolina or haven't you been able to register so far?* For smaller subsamples, including those before and after the debate, the margin of sampling error is larger. The data are weighted toward population estimates for age and race. The population estimates for race were taken from North Carolina Board of Elections data for the week of Oct. 6. The population estimates for age were taken from the U.S. Census estimates of registered voters for North Carolina. In addition to sampling error, factors such as question wording and other methodological choices in conducting survey research can introduce additional error into the findings of opinion polls..

Further results and methodological details from the survey and can be found at the Survey Research Center website at <http://src.highpoint.edu/> or from Dr. Martin Kifer, director of the HPU Poll, at mkifer@highpoint.edu or 336-841-9333. Dr. Sadie Leder, assistant professor of psychology, serves as the associate director of the HPU Poll.

Dr. Daniel Riffe, the Richard Cole Eminent Professor in the UNC School of Journalism and Mass Communication, is at driffe@email.unc.edu or 919-962-4082.

UNC's School of Journalism and Mass Communication trains the next generation of media professionals, including journalists, strategic communicators, teachers and researchers, while serving journalism and communication professionals. It retains the core principles of journalism and mass communication education while leading the transformation in the digital communications environment and harnessing technology to enhance its mission of teaching, research and service. The result is a highly engaged school with a significant voice in the evolving issues of our time. In 2009, the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications said the school "has earned a reputation as one of the premier programs in journalism and mass communication." The school offers bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees, and administers a variety of professional development and distance learning programs.

Enrollment includes about 650 undergraduates and 135 graduate students in addition to professional development and distance education students. The school's website is jomc.unc.edu.

At High Point University, every student receives an extraordinary education in an inspiring environment with caring people.SM HPU, located in the Piedmont Triad region of North Carolina, is a liberal arts institution with over 4,200 undergraduate and graduate students. It is ranked by U.S. News and World Report at No. 1 among Regional Colleges in the South and No. 1 among Up and Coming Regional Colleges in the South. Parade Magazine lists HPU in the top 25 private schools in the nation. HPU was selected in the 2012-2013 list of "Colleges of Distinction." The university offers 44 undergraduate majors, 43 undergraduate minors and 11 graduate degree programs. It is a member of the NCAA, Division I and the Big South Conference. Visit High Point University on the Web at highpoint.edu.

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