

Laughing at the Presidential Election

President Obama may not know it, but he has a nice advantage in the world of late night TV. A new study by the Center for Media and Public Affairs at George Mason University says that in 2011 late night comedians mocked Republicans three times more than they did Democrats. The biggest ideological difference was between David Letterman and Jay Leno. Letterman did 77 jokes at the expense of President Obama while Leno did 156—about 100% more.

The Republican presidential candidates got whacked across the board in late night precincts. Herman Cain was mocked 191 times; Rick Perry, 186; Michele Bachmann, 128; and Newt Gingrich, 110.

Interestingly, Mitt Romney was only singled out for teasing 79 times, perhaps signifying a certain blandness on the part of the governor.

The George Mason survey doesn't count the GOP mocking by Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, possibly because researchers would have collapsed trying to chronicle that. The fact is that every late night comedian is liberal and so are most of their writers. Leno is the most neutral; Letterman, Stewart, Colbert, and Jimmy Fallon are the furthest left.

The question is, how much will this matter in the election of 2012? Tough to answer, but one thing is certain: the late night shows are not as well watched as they used to be. However, popular culture does have an effect on the distracted voter, those people who do not pay much attention to the news. They often pick up the political narrative from entertainment programs and stuff they read on the 'net. There is no question that Barack Obama's rock star status in 2008 was largely

defined by Oprah and other entertainers, while that stodgy old John McCain was not exactly dominating the rundown of Entertainment Tonight.

If Mitt Romney is the Republican nominee, boring jokes will rule the day. If a committed conservative like Rick Santorum were to run, the writers would go wild. I can see a Santorum impersonator on Saturday Night Live now wearing a sleeveless sweater and a "Re-elect John Adams" button. Huey Lewis once sang, "It's hip to be square." Not on late night TV, it isn't.

Americans should expect the media to back President Obama again, although the enthusiasm can't possibly match 2008. We live in sobering times, and even though many believe it's all George W. Bush's fault, that punch line is not working anymore. There will be a new narrative and it will most likely be highlight the dumbness of the GOP guy, not the accomplishments of the president.

In the end, the election will not be decided on late night TV. Republicans have already lost there. Luckily for them, the Electoral College is a daytime operation.