

Candidates' high negatives Question: Who gets more negative press? President Obama or Republican challenger Mitt Romney?

Answer: They both do.

A [recent study by Pew Research Center](#) found that Obama and Romney received essentially the same level of negative coverage -- 72 percent for the president, 71 percent for Romney -- from the news media.

That makes this as negative a campaign as Pew has seen since it began monitoring candidates' press coverage in presidential campaigns dating back to 2000.

Pew attributes the high level of negativity on the ability of the two sides to get relatively unfiltered messages in front of the public, particularly through online outlets.

"Journalists themselves now play a smaller role in shaping these media narratives than they once did," Pew said.

Pew looked at the personal portrayal of Obama and Romney in 50 major news outlets over a 10-week period. Some 1,700 assertions about the two candidates were examined. The assertions were made on radio, cable and network TV, newspapers and popular websites.

The study exposed the Achilles' heel for Obama -- the economy. Coverage more often than not talked about his failure to fix it.

Romney, meanwhile, was more often portrayed as a "vulture" capitalist who doesn't care about workers, is out of touch with average Americans and is stiff and prone to gaffes.

The Pew results represent a particularly harsh comedown for Democrat Obama, who received far more positive press than negative in the 2008 presidential campaign (69 percent vs. 43 percent for Republican John McCain).

The high level of negative news coverage this time around is disconcerting, and don't look for a reversal anytime soon.

In fact, with more reliance on unfiltered Web-based sources and less on print reporters and radio and TV talk show hosts -- which had been the traditional drivers of the conversation about candidates' character and positions -- things stand to get even more nasty.

This doesn't bode well for the American political system when the public's perception of candidates is shaped more by partisan voices than objective reporting of the facts.

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