

# Comedian's political humor affects potential voter's attitudes about candidates

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Comedians publicly ridiculing a presidential candidate may cause audiences to have negative attitudes toward that individual, according to a study by Amy Bree Becker, Assistant Professor at Towson University.

The study, set to be published in the November 2012 issue of *Mass Communication and Society*, found that [attitudes](#) about a candidate were affected by viewing critical comedy content, irrespective of whether the viewer self-identified as a Republican or Democrat. In the study which focused on the 2008 presidential election between Barack Obama and John McCain, some participants watched a video clip from The Colbert Report mocking the McCain campaign, while other participants viewed a clip of [John McCain](#) mocking himself on an episode of Saturday Night Live. While both Democratic and Republican participants appreciated McCain's self-deprecating humor, viewing the SNL clip did not result in a significant change in attitudes towards the Republican candidate. Viewing Colbert's hostile humor, however, resulted in significantly more negative evaluations of McCain.

"The results of this research point out both the [negative consequences](#) of being the constant target of political satire programming and the potential benefit of appearing on political comedy programs to engage in self-ridicule," Dr. Amy Bree Becker, the article's author said.

As the 2012 election nears, television shows such as The Colbert Report, Saturday Night Live and The Daily Show with Jon Stewart will continue to mock the presidential candidates. For example, Saturday Night Live

has received heavy media coverage because of the show's humorous portrayals of [Barack Obama](#), [Mitt Romney](#), and Republican vice-presidential candidate, Paul Ryan. This research suggests that candidates may win over voters' attitudes if they can handle the ridicule, and even joke about it, rather than going on the defense.

"In reality, the critical comedy people are used to from programs like The Colbert Report and The Daily Show promotes [negative attitudes](#) toward the comic target, while self-directed humor may actually prove to be a very useful and strategic tool for candidates looking to appeal to voters," Dr. Becker said. "Moving forward, politicians will need to become more skilled at deflecting humor directed at them and also be able to tell a good joke."

Dr. Becker's study featured over 400 college-aged participants. The study measured their political interest, partisanship, and feelings toward politicians. The article entitled, "Comedy Types and Political Campaigns: The Differential Influence of Other-Directed Hostile [Humor](#) and Self-Ridicule on Candidate Evaluations," was researched and written by Dr. Amy Bree Becker, Towson University.

Provided by Taylor & Francis

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