



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
For The People & The Press

OCTOBER 15, 2012

Neither Candidate Viewed as Too Personally Critical

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## Voters Divided Over Who Will Win Second Debate

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# Neither Candidate Viewed as Too Personally Critical

## Voters Divided Over Who Will Win Second Debate

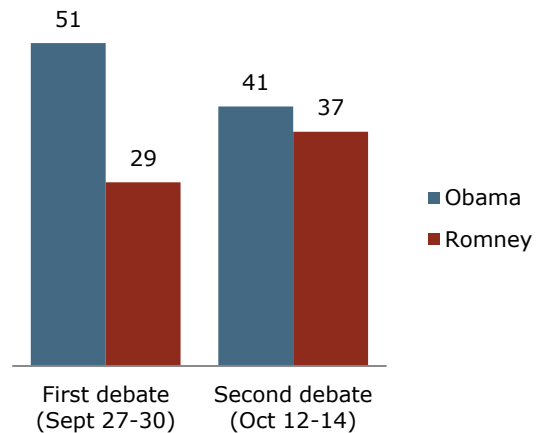
On the eve of Tuesday night's second presidential debate at Hofstra University, voters are divided as to which candidate they think will do the better job: 41% say Obama will do better, while 37% expect Romney to prevail. This stands in stark contrast to expectations prior to the first presidential debate two weeks ago, which voters expected Obama to win by a 51%-29% margin.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted Oct. 12-14, 2012, among 1,006 adults, including 857 registered voters, finds debate expectations for Romney have improved sharply among independents: Two weeks ago more independents thought Obama would win the first debate by a 44% to 28% margin. Today, more independents expect Romney to win the second debate, by a 42% to 31% margin. Expectations for Romney are also up among Republicans (from 64% expecting him to do better than Obama in the first debate to 75% now).

Few Democrats (9%) think Romney will do the better job in tomorrow's debate, but they are less uniformly certain about how Obama will do. Two weeks ago, fully 89% of Democratic voters said they expected Obama to do the better job. That has slipped to 75% of Democrats going into the second debate, as the percentage who do not choose either candidate has about doubled (from 7% to 16%).

### Shifting Expectations for Second Debate

Who do you think will do the better job in the debate?



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Oct. 12-14, 2012. Based on registered voters (N=857).

### Independents Now Expect Romney To Do Better

Who will do the better job in the...	Rep	Dem	Ind
Second debate	%	%	%
Romney	75	9	42
Obama	8	75	31
Both/Neither/DK	<u>16</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>28</u>
	100	100	100
First debate			
Romney	64	4	28
Obama	16	89	44
Both/Neither/DK	<u>20</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>27</u>
	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Oct. 12-14, 2012. First debate expectations from Sept. 27-30 survey. Based on registered voters.

## Neither Candidate Seen as Too Personally Critical

Despite controversy over massive spending by outside groups in the 2012 race, relatively few voters think either candidate has been too personally critical of his opponent. Just 37% say that Romney has been too personally critical of Obama while a comparable percentage (35%) says Obama has been too personally critical of Romney.

In June, more thought Romney was being too critical of Obama (43%) than thought Obama was being too critical of Romney (30%). Independents, in particular, have become less likely to say Romney has been too critical of Obama: Just 31% say this in the current survey, down from 42% in June.

In October 2008, nearly half of voters (48%) said John McCain was too personally critical of Obama. And over five recent presidential election cycles, no Republican candidate has been viewed as less personally critical of their opponent than Romney is today.

More voters say Obama is being too critical of Romney (35%) than said that about Obama's campaign against McCain in 2008 (22%). In 2004, 52% of voters said John Kerry was being too critical of his opponent. In 1996, very few voters (21%)

### Are Candidates Too Personally Critical?

	June	Oct	Change
<i>Obama too critical of Romney ...</i>			
All voters	30	35	+5
Republican	44	59	+15
Democrat	15	13	-2
Independent	33	41	+8
<i>Romney too critical of Obama ...</i>			
All voters	43	37	-6
Republican	22	16	-6
Democrat	61	59	-2
Independent	42	31	-11

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Oct. 12-14, 2012.  
Based on registered voters.

### Romney Viewed as Less Personally Critical than Most Recent GOP Predecessors

	Oct 1988	Sept 1996	Oct 2000	Sept 2004	Oct 2008	Oct 2012
<i>Has _____ been too personally critical of his opponent?</i>						
	<b>Bush Sr.</b>	<b>Dole</b>	<b>Bush</b>	<b>Bush</b>	<b>McCain</b>	<b>Romney</b>
Too critical	52	53	40	49	48	37
Not too critical	43	40	50	47	44	48
Don't know	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>15</u>
	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Has _____ been too personally critical of his opponent?</i>						
	<b>Dukakis</b>	<b>Clinton</b>	<b>Gore</b>	<b>Kerry</b>	<b>Obama</b>	<b>Obama</b>
Too critical	45	21	29	52	22	35
Not too critical	50	70	61	45	69	51
Don't know	<u>5</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>15</u>
	100	100	100	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Oct. 12-14, 2012. Based on registered voters. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

said Bill Clinton was too personally critical of Bob Dole in his re-election campaign.

## Vice-Presidential Debate Reactions

Six-in-ten voters say they watched at least a little of last Thursday night's vice-presidential debate between Joe Biden and Paul Ryan at Centre College in Danville, KY. Among debate watchers, as many say Biden did the better job (47%) as say Ryan (46%). Before the debate, voters were similarly divided as to who they thought would do the better job with about as many saying Ryan (40%) as Biden (34%). For more see: "[\*Biden Viewed Unfavorably, Divided Opinions about Ryan\*](#)," released Oct. 10, 2012.

Republican voters overwhelmingly say Ryan did the better job in the debate (88%); a comparable percentage of Democrats (89%) say Biden did the better job. Among independents, 50% say Ryan did better, 39% say Biden.

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## Assessing the VP Debate

	All voters	Rep	Dem	Ind
<i>Watched VP debate?</i>	%	%	%	%
All	42	47	40	39
Some	13	14	10	16
A little	5	7	6	3
Didn't watch	40	31	43	41
Don't know	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100	100	100
<b>Among debate watchers:</b>				
<i>Who did better job?</i>				
Paul Ryan	46	88	8	50
Joe Biden	47	5	89	39
Neither/Both (Vol.)	5	6	2	8
Don't know	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>
	100	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Oct. 12-14, 2012.  
Based on registered voters. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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## About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted October 12-14, 2012 among a national sample of 1,006 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (605 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 401 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 197 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the March 2011 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2011 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	1,006	3.7 percentage points
Registered voters	857	4.0 percentage points
Republican voters	229	7.8 percentage points
Democratic voters	280	7.0 percentage points
Independent voters	309	6.7 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
**October 12-14, 2012 OMNIBUS**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**N=1,006**

**PEW.1 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**NO QUESTIONS PEW.2-PEW.4**

In the presidential campaign so far...

**RANDOMIZE ORDER OF PEW.5 AND PEW.6**

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.5 (And) Do you think Barack Obama has been too personally critical of Mitt Romney, or not?

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS [N=857]**

		Too personally <u>critical</u>	Not too personally <u>critical</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
	Oct 12-14, 2012	35	51	15
	Jun 7-17, 2012	30	61	9
<b>Obama/McCain</b>	November, 2008 <sup>1</sup> ( <i>voters</i> )	21	76	3
	Early October, 2008	22	69	9
	Mid-September, 2008	28	65	7
	June, 2008	19	73	8
<b>Kerry/Bush</b>	September, 2004	52	45	3
	June, 2004	44	48	8
	Mid-March 2004	48	46	6
<b>Gore/Bush</b>	Early October, 2000	29	61	10
<b>Clinton/Dole</b>	Late September, 1996	21	70	9
<b>Dukakis/Bush, Sr.</b>	October, 1988	45	50	5

**RANDOMIZE ORDER OF PEW.5 AND PEW.6**

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.6 (And) do you think Mitt Romney has been too personally critical of Barack Obama, or not?

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS [N=857]**

		Too personally <u>critical</u>	Not too personally <u>critical</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
	Oct 12-14, 2012	37	48	15
	Jun 7-17, 2012	43	49	9
<b>McCain/Obama</b>	November, 2008 <sup>2</sup> ( <i>voters</i> )	49	48	3
	Early October, 2008	48	44	8
	Mid-September, 2008	42	52	6
	June, 2008	26	65	9
<b>Bush/Kerry</b>	September, 2004	49	47	4
	June, 2004	33	58	9
	Mid-March 2004	33	58	9
<b>Bush/Gore</b>	Early October, 2000	40	50	10
<b>Dole/Clinton</b>	Late September, 1996	53	40	7
<b>Bush, Sr./Dukakis</b>	October, 1988	52	43	5

<sup>1</sup> Question in November 2008 was worded "... was too personally critical ..."

<sup>2</sup> Question in November 2008 was worded "... was too personally critical ..."

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.7 Did you happen to watch the vice-presidential debate between **[RANDOMIZE: Joe Biden and Paul Ryan]** on Thursday night, or didn't you get a chance to see it? **[IF YES, ASK: How much of the debate did you watch: all of it, some of it, or only a little?]**

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS [N=857]:**

		NET <u>Yes</u>	Yes, <u>all</u>	Yes, <u>some</u>	Yes, <u>a little</u>	No, <u>didn't watch</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
<b>Ryan/Biden</b>	Oct 12-14, 2012	60	42	13	5	40	1
<b>Palin/Biden</b>	Oct 3-6, 2008	76	53	18	5	24	*

**TREND FOR COMPARISON:****Romney/Obama**

Oct 4-7, 2012	69	43	20	6	31	*
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**McCain/Obama**

Sep 27-29, 2008	60	34	20	6	39	1
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**Bush/Kerry**

Early Oct, 2004	69	41	22	6	31	*
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**Bush/Gore**

Early Oct, 2000	63	32	24	7	37	*
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**ASK ALL:**

PEW.8 **[IF WATCHED DEBATE (PEW.7=1-3):** Regardless of who you support; **IF DID NOT WATCH DEBATE (PEW.7=4,9):** From what you've heard or read], which vice-presidential candidate do you think did the better job in the debate **[RANDOMIZE: Joe Biden or Paul Ryan]**?

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS [N=857]:**

Oct 12-14

2012

41	Joe Biden
38	Paul Ryan
5	Neither/Both <b>(VOL.)</b>
16	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>

**ASK ALL:**

The next PRESIDENTIAL debate is on Tuesday night...

PEW.9 How likely is it that you will watch the upcoming debate between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama this coming Tuesday – very likely, somewhat likely or not likely?

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS [N=857]**

	Very <u>likely</u>	Somewhat <u>likely</u>	Not <u>likely</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
October 12-14, 2012	68	15	16	*
September 27-30, 2012	62	21	17	0
October 3-6, 2008 <sup>3</sup>	70	18	12	*
September 19-22, 2008 (GP)	58	24	18	*
Early October, 2004	59	29	11	1
Early September, 2004	61	27	11	1
Early October, 2000	49	31	19	1
Late September, 2000	43	31	22	4
September, 1996	43	34	22	1
CBS/NYT: 1992	67	24	8	2
CBS/NYT: 1988	55	27	17	1
CBS/NYT: 1984	55	27	16	2

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.10 Regardless of which candidate you support, who do you think will do the better job in the presidential debate [READ AND RANDOMIZE]?

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS [N=857]**

Oct 12-14 <u>2012</u>		Sep 27-30 <u>2012</u>
37	Mitt Romney	29
41	Barack Obama	51
1	Both will do equally well (VOL.)	2
3	Neither (VOL.)	2
18	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	16

**NO QUESTIONS PEW.11-PEW.12****PEW.13-PEW.14 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

<sup>3</sup> October 3-6, 2008 asked about the debate between John McCain and Barack Obama. September 19-22, 2008 asked about the upcoming foreign policy debate between John McCain and Barack Obama, and figures are based on general public results. In early October, 2004 the question asked: "How likely is it that you will watch either of the upcoming presidential debates between Bush and Kerry this coming Friday, or next Wednesday?" In early September, 2004 the question asked: "How likely is it that you will watch the upcoming presidential debates between John Kerry and George W. Bush?" In late September and early October, 2000 the question asked: "How likely is it that you will watch the upcoming presidential debates between Al Gore and George W. Bush?" In September, 1996 the question asked: "How likely is it that you will watch the upcoming Presidential debates between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole?" The CBS/NYT surveys asked, "How likely is it that you will watch next/this Sunday's debate between ...?" The 1988 survey is based on the probable electorate.