

HAS OBAMA MANAGED TO PAINT ROMNEY BLACK? WILL THE NEGATIVE CAMPAIGN WORK?



The President's ad campaign has just one agenda, Romney-bashing. A major share of his television spending lambasts his presidential opponents track record, his business record, what he feels about abortion rights and his tax plan. Also his bias bent towards the wealthy is a favourite refrain. According to a GOP media tracker since April, a little more than 50 percent of the \$51 million that has been spent on television, by the Obama campaign has been on negative ads. His negative campaigning is on the increase when the economic recovery has suddenly become stationary and seemingly inert. Surveys and statistics all point to a not too hopeful future and gives credence to the Republicans claims that the President is intent on shredding Romney's reputation to tatters, expunging him, from voters' minds as a worthwhile alternative. Romney on the back foot, faced with a barrage of multimillion-dollar negative publicity, released an ad which asks a simple question, "When a president doesn't tell the truth, how can we trust him to lead?" Insinuating, that don't trust him and don't believe everything he says, he is lying. In negative campaigning Romney is equally on par with his presidential adversary, even more so. Since April, about \$16 million of \$24 million ad spending has gone into negative campaigning. Republican supporters have expressed concern that Romney is taking Obama's aggressive stance rather timidly and that a more belligerent and hostile response was called for. Failing which they say, Obama's persistent attacks could imprint an undesirable, harmful and indelible impression of Romney in their minds. Romney's team derides the negative ads saying that they will hardly have any effect as what concerns the people more is the economy, the lack of jobs and an uncertain future. They point to the surveys which point to neck-to-neck raise, with neither candidate having his nose ahead. Obama campaign spokesman Ben LaBolt refuted the perception that the President's ads are all about what Romney did or did not do, he says that in earlier ads he promoted himself taking the credit for bailing out the auto industry, the dramatic killing of America's most wanted fugitive, Osama Bin Laden and the culmination of the war in Iraq. LaBolt says that Obama's current ad censuring Romney's tax plan, is less a criticism of Romney than projecting his goal of taxing the wealthy more, to ease the burden on the middle class. Moreover, he is also airing a Spanish-language ad featuring Cuban-American talk show host Cristina Saralegui that has nothing to do with Romney but endorses his health care re-fixing. Republicans say that Obama's non-negative ads occupy barely a miniscule percentage of his total television time. They say that even in 2008 Obama's "hope" campaign was wrongly branded positive, for along with it, were countless ads that associated Republican nominee John McCain to the much-maligned Bush administration. Then he was a newcomer making a revolutionary bid for the White House, today he is seeking re-election, with four years of work to account for. The contrast between then and now is clearly apparent in two ads, 5 years apart, one from 2007 and the other 2012, both ironically with nearly identical titles. In the first ad titled "Believe," a youngish Obama, not yet grey and wearied by pressures of government, then an Illinois senator, speaking directly into a camera says, "Every time I speak about my hope for America, the cynics in Washington roll their eyes. You see, they don't believe we can actually change politics and bring an end to decades of division and deadlock." He further takes the credit that he "brought Democrats and Republicans together to solve problems that touch the lives of everyday people." Contrast this ad with this current ad, with only an 's' separating the two titles, "Believe" turning to "Believes." The tone is more ominous and threatening. "Mitt Romney's companies were pioneers in outsourcing U.S. jobs to low-wage countries," he alleges. "Mitt Romney's not the solution. He's the problem," claims another. Yet another ad says that he has backtracked on his promise that he would not oppose abortion in cases of rape and incest. Romney however, has backtracked on his oft quoted notion that he did not respond to Obama's negative campaigning because "If you're responding, you're losing." His recent ad saying that the president is lying shows that he no longer wants to live by that adage but has decided to counterpunch. "We see this as opening an offensive front on the president on the fundamental question of trust," said Stuart Stevens, a top Romney strategist, of the new ad. "What became apparent is that the president had gone so far with these false charges, it allows you to go back and question his fundamental qualities." Even though the Republicans took their time in retaliating to Democrat allegations, the Democrats wasted no time in saying that actually it was Romney who was the liar. Its deputy campaign manager Stephanie Cutter told reported that Romney was at Bain's three years more than he claims. "Romney's Big Bain Lie," she says, "Now, we know that he wasn't telling the truth ... It's time for Mitt Romney to come clean." If the Romney camp is misled into believing that anti-Romney ads will make no difference they can be lulled into misplaced complacency. Bain Capital, Romney's former company, was the punching bag for Priorities USA Action, a pro-Obama super PAC, which spent \$10 million on ads that reflected very poorly on the company. Polls showed that following the ads favourable views of Romney weakening in five swing states. The ads featured former employees of companies taken over by Bain Capital, sacked and facing difficult times, whilst the company made millions of dollars from the lucrative deals. "What Romney thinks is an asset is his biggest liability," said Bill Burton, Priorities USA cofounder. "We're seeing erosion in views of Romney's character." However, the Romney team takes strength from national polls, which reflect a very close race and say that the negativity and pessimism is not producing the results the Democrats believe. "It's clear that the attacks have failed to shift the race, despite their outspending us 3-1 in some states," said Stevens of the Romney campaign. "When the presidential campaign is not talking about his responsibility for the economy, he might as well be showing up at the World Series with a tennis racket." To a certain extent Obama's attack on Romney cannot be said to unprovoked. Buoyed by the funds he could generate almost at will, Romney unbridled ads that attacked Obama's leadership and held him responsible for the current economy situation. Political strategists say that Romney's failure to take Obama head on for Bain Capital will make him extremely susceptible and exposed. They advise that he would do well to remember what happened to Democratic nominee John Kerry in 2004. He kept quiet when attacks were being made on his military service from a group called Swift Boat Veterans for Truth. By the time he realized the damage, it was too late. It would serve you right, they say, to tell the people who you really are before your opponent does. "Romney is vulnerable on the Bain front," said Republican consultant Rick Tyler. There's a large group of people who are disgusted with Obama, but they need some reason to hold onto to vote for Romney, and the Bain attacks speak to that.... Some voters are concerned about the capitalist side of the ledger that Romney is on."