



McCain Getting Hammered on Late-Night TV

McCain, Palin overwhelmingly the butt of late-night jokes

By DAVID BAUDER AP Television Writer | NEW YORK October 27, 2008 (AP)



As if sinking poll numbers and political attacks weren't enough, the McCain-Palin ticket has been taking it on the chin from late-night comics.

They've provided a rich vein of material — lipstick on pigs, bridges to nowhere, expensive wardrobes, seeing Russia over the horizon and simply McCain's white hair. Yet the degree to which the Republicans have been the butt of jokes this fall, compared to Barack Obama, is astonishing.

From Sept. 1 through Friday, the Republicans were the target of 475 jokes by Jay Leno and David Letterman alone. The Democratic team of Obama and Joe Biden were the victim 69 times, according to the **Center for Media and Public Affairs**, which has been tracking such data since 1988. That's nearly a 7-to-1 ratio.

In no other campaign over the last 20 years has one party's ticket been jabbed more than the other by even a 2-to-1 ratio, said **Robert Lichter**, a George Mason University professor and head of the center.

Comedy Central's Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert have a similar imbalance. The center doesn't even consider Jimmy Kimmel, Conan O'Brien, Craig Ferguson and others — including the season's breakout comedy star, Tina Fey imitating Sarah Palin.

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Some of the Obama-directed jokes clearly stay safe: "In an interview, Barack Obama forgot which wedding anniversary he celebrates this year," Ferguson said. "Michelle Obama just changed their slogan to "yes you can ... sleep on the couch."

Obama has also been relatively bland during the campaign, more difficult to caricature, Hughley said.

"If you only depended on the Obama-Biden ticket for jokes, you'd go out of business," **Lichter** said. "There's nothing there."

On HBO's "Real Time with Bill Maher" Friday, the host joked — or was he joking? — that Obama shouldn't be so near perfect, since comics will then have fallow ground to reap.

Hughley's CNN debut was a rarity: He had more jokes about Obama. One was about Obama's 173 cholesterol level — Hughley said he doesn't know any black man with a number that low. He thinks comedy humanizes people, and if Obama is elected president, the late-night comics better get used to joking about him.

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During September, Stewart and Colbert joked about McCain and Palin 211 times, versus 29 for the Democratic ticket. **Lichter** doesn't have October numbers for Comedy Central, but they weren't likely to change much.

People don't stay up to watch the late-night comics as much as they used to. But with digital video recorders and video clips distributed on the Internet, they may make up for that lack of live audience — and more.

Since being chosen as the GOP vice presidential candidate, Palin has been a comic's dream. She was the target of 77 more jokes than McCain by Leno and Letterman the last two months; not even Dan Quayle could outpace the top of his ticket, **Lichter** said.

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