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## Late-night TV lets White House rivals laugh off campaign trail

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Far from rivals' attacks and reporters' questions, candidates for the White House this year have found a port in the storm that is the campaign trail, in the strange embrace of late-night TV.

In recent weeks, each time Democrat Hillary Clinton has made a misstep on the trail, she has rushed to take the edge of issues heading straight to the couches of Americans' favorite funnymen: the hosts of late-night comedy shows.

After the kerfuffle over her inaccurate claim that her jet took sniper fire in Bosnia, Clinton joked to Jay Leno on NBC "You know, I was worried I wouldn't make it. I was pinned down by sniper fire."

It was her boldest bid to turn the page on the controversy over her claim that she had been forced to land in Bosnia in 1996 under sniper fire.

After being broadsided by 11 consecutive losses in February, Clinton headed over to the youth-oriented Saturday Night Live, on NBC to joke with timing worthy of Woody Allen: "Oh, the campaign is going very well, very very well" -- then adding with a deadpan expression, "why, what have you heard?"

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***The presidential campaign has been a generous source of humor, carefully tracked by the Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA): from January 1 to March 15, Hillary Clinton was the butt of 174 jokes, John McCain 140 and Barack Obama 103.***

***But being the subject of ridicule is not entirely a bad thing, Clinton and her fellow campaigners have learned. The former first lady knows well that she has everything to gain from a stop on late-night TV, Don Riek, the CMPA's executive director, told AFP.***

***"They know they can control the message. They're going to their places, because they know it's safer," he said. "It's a tool politicians are using ... to go around the traditional media."***

But since most candidates hire people to write their jokes, the humor seen from them on television does not really offer a great deal of insight into candidates' personalities, critics said/

That worries Paul Lewis, an English professor at Boston College and author of "Cracking up: American humor in a time of conflict."

He said that when politicians take to the airwaves to joke about their own mistakes, there isn't necessarily much reason to laugh.

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