



The Impact of the Presidential Debates on Undecided and Persuadable Voters in the 2012 Election

The Initial Findings

Curtiss L. Cobb III



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Do Presidential Debates Matter?

Posted at 04:10 PM ET, 10/04/2012

Romney wins debate on style and substance, changing the election

By [Jordan Sekulow](#) and [Matthew Clark](#)



President Obama walks away from Republican presidential candidate, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney after the presidential debate at the University of Denver on Oct. 3, 2012 in Denver. (GETTY IMAGES)

October 8, 2012

Romney Narrows Vote Gap After Historic Debate Win

By record-high margin, debate watchers say Romney did better

by Jeffrey M. Jones

PRINCETON, NJ – Registered voters' preferences for president are evenly split in the first three days of Gallup tracking since last Wednesday's presidential debate. In the three days prior to the debate, Barack Obama had a five-percentage-point edge among registered voters.

Comparison of Registered Voters' Presidential Preferences, Before and After First Presidential Debate

	Obama	Romney	Gap
	%	%	(Pct. pts.)
Post-debate (Oct 4-6)	47	47	Even
Pre-debate (Sep 30-Oct 2)	50	45	Obama, +5

Gallup Daily tracking

GALLUP®



Do Presidential Debates Matter?

LOCAL NEWS

Impact of presidential debates on election questionable

Presidential Debates Rarely Have Much Effect on Election Outcomes

by *Miranda Green* | Sep 29, 2012 4:45 AM EDT

Nixon's flop sweat may have cost him the 1960 election, but in most cases presidential debates such the one coming up on Oct. 3 don't have much effect on an election, writes Miranda Green.

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From Al Gore's loud sighing to Jimmy Carter saying he consulted his 12-year-old daughter on nuclear proliferation, presidential debates are full of memorable moments. But despite the fanfare that surrounds each election cycle's televised events, historical data shows the debates are rarely game changers.

0 Comments

**Do presidential debates usually matter?
Political scientists say no.**

Presidential Debates Rarely Have Effect On Elections, Data Shows

Questions

Did U&P voters re-evaluate their impressions of the debate over time?

Did InstaPoll evaluations matter more than later evaluations?

What is the impact of evaluations on vote share?



50,000+ members

Probability-based ABS recruitment
Recruitment takes place throughout the year
Representative of U.S. adults

Includes:

Adults with no Internet access (24% of adults)

- KP provides laptop and free ISP

Cell phone only (30% of adults)

Spanish-language

Extensive profile data maintained on each member

- demographics, attitudes, behaviors, health, media usage, etc.

Samples from the panel are assigned to projects

- e-mail invitations and a link to the online survey questionnaire



Methods

Screened KnowledgePanel prior to debates for registered voters that were:

- Undecided and persuadable voters

- Intention to view debate

- Agreement to participate in a follow-up survey immediately after the debate

Debate Yields

- Debate 1: 673 respondents (58%)

- Debate 2: 631 respondents (62%)

- Debate 3: 653 respondents (58%)

Respondents were asked about their debate impressions and overall impressions of candidates.

Follow-up Survey (November 4-6)

- Re-asked impressions of debates and candidates

- Asked political knowledge and media use questions

- Asked vote intent/vote

- Augmented by also surveying those that did not qualify for the Post Debate Insta-Polls.

- 83% cooperation rate from Insta-Poll respondents and 61% cooperation rate from the augments.

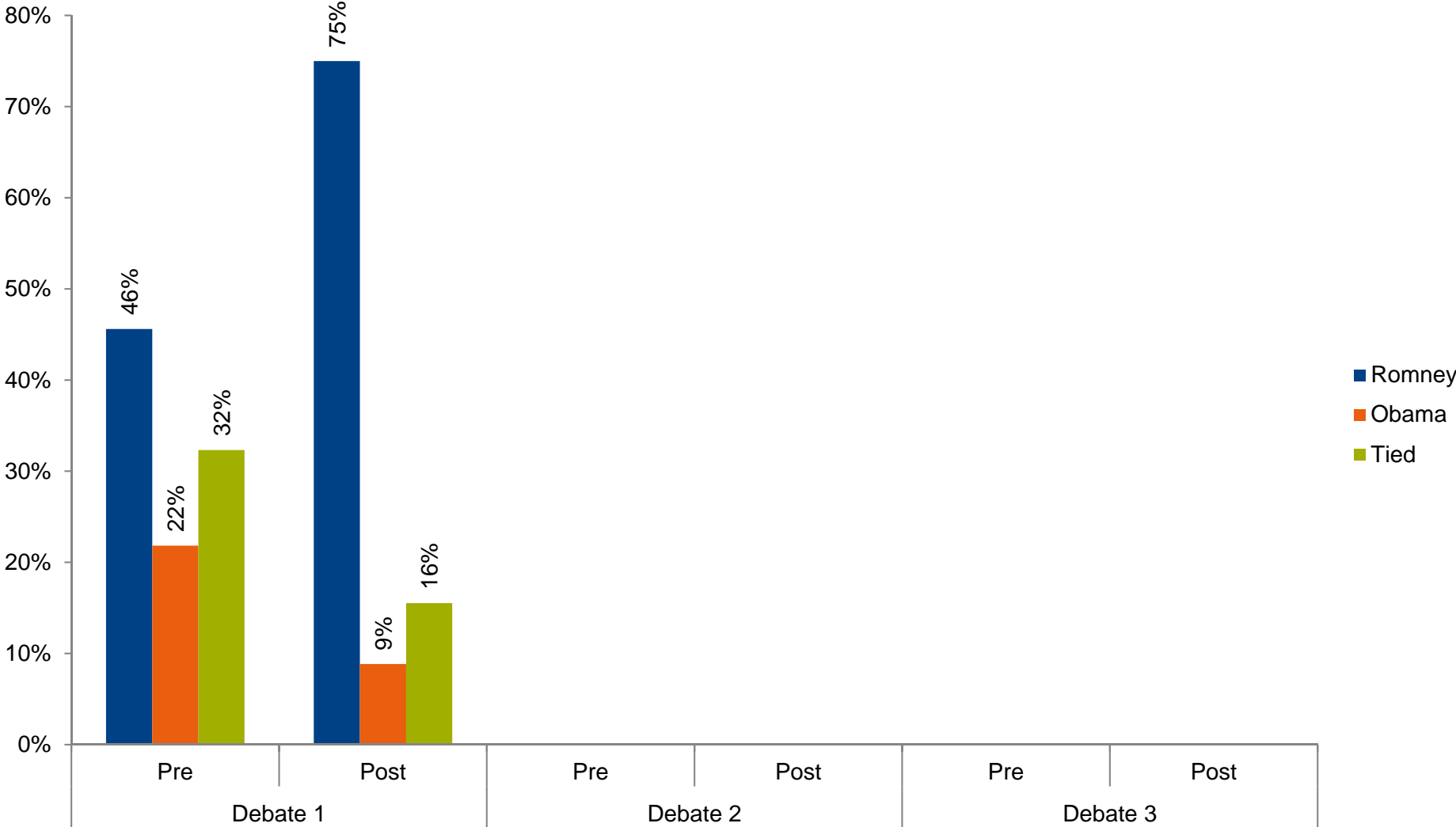
Questions



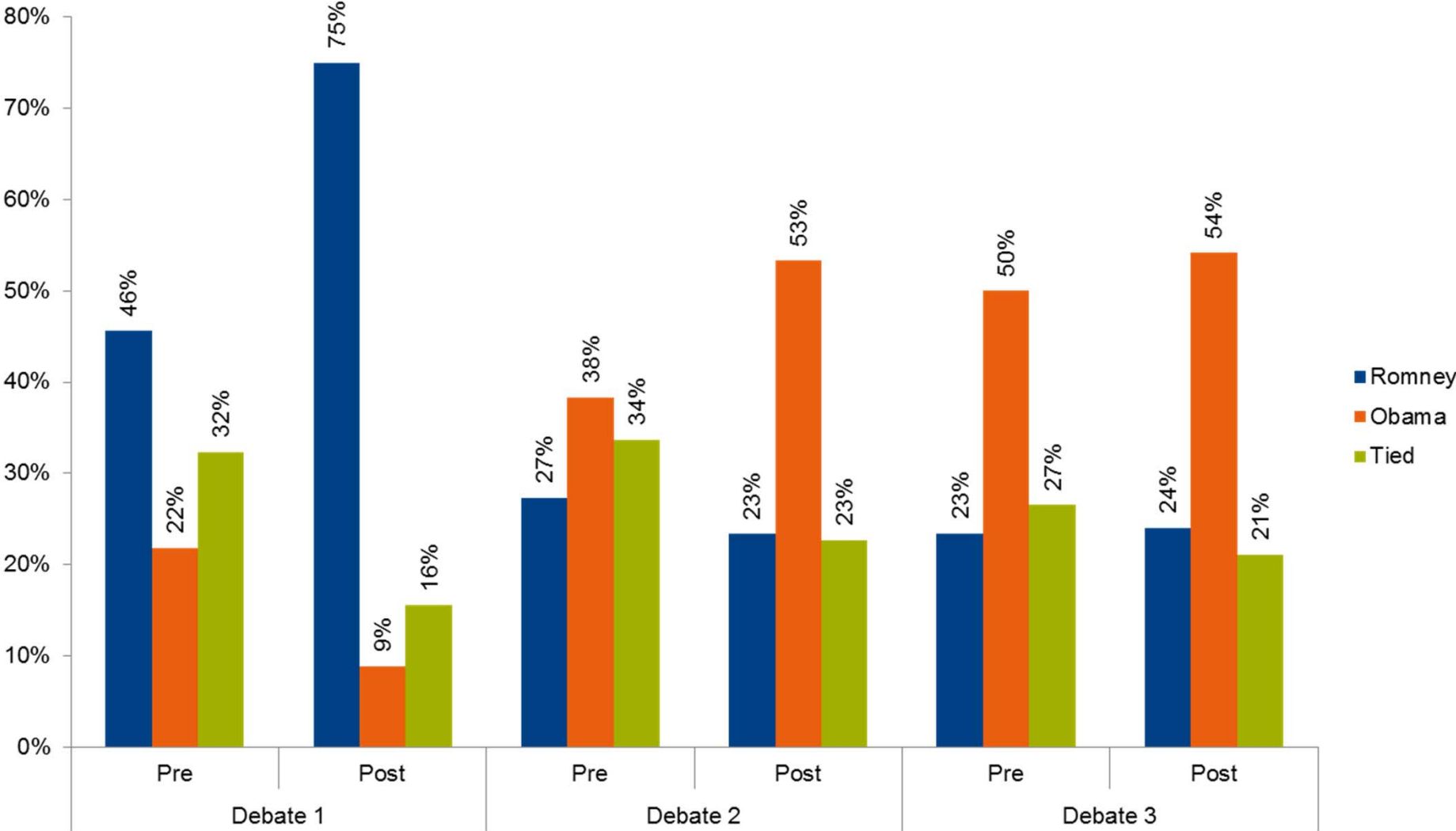
Did U&P voters re-evaluate their impressions of the debate over time?



Re-Evaluating Winners and Losers



Re-Evaluating Winners and Losers





Re-Evaluating Winners and Losers

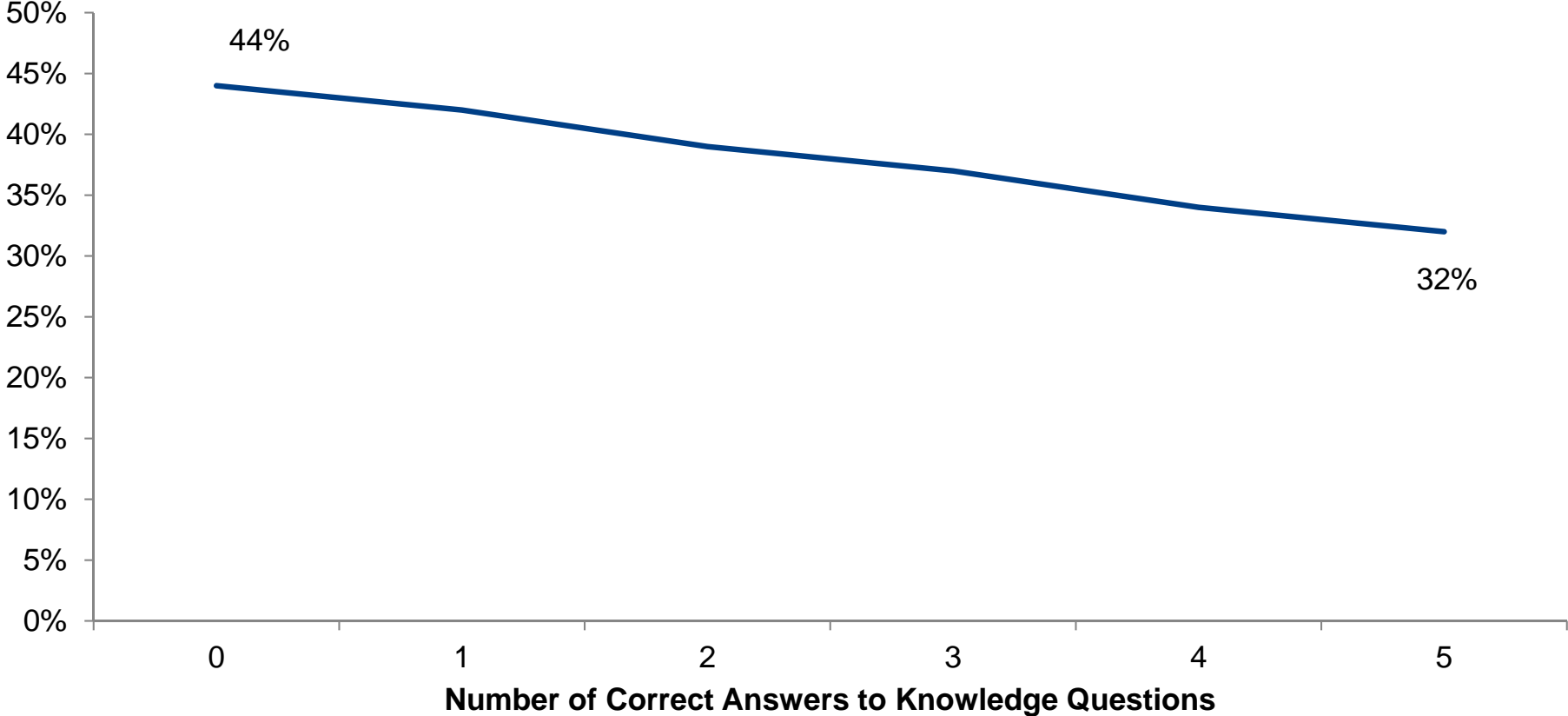
Post Debate 1 InstaPoll

Election Day Survey—Debate 1

	Barack Obama	Mitt Romney	Tie
Barack Obama	25%	2%	7%
Mitt Romney	48%	95%	66%
Tie	28%	2%	26%

Who Re-Evaluates?

Probability to Switch Evaluations



Questions



Did InstaPoll evaluations matter more than later evaluations?

Were InstaPoll evaluations more predictive than Election Day Poll evaluations?



	InstaPoll	Election Day Poll	Chi-Square
Romney	16%	32%	13.19***
Tie	36%	29%	0.53(ns)

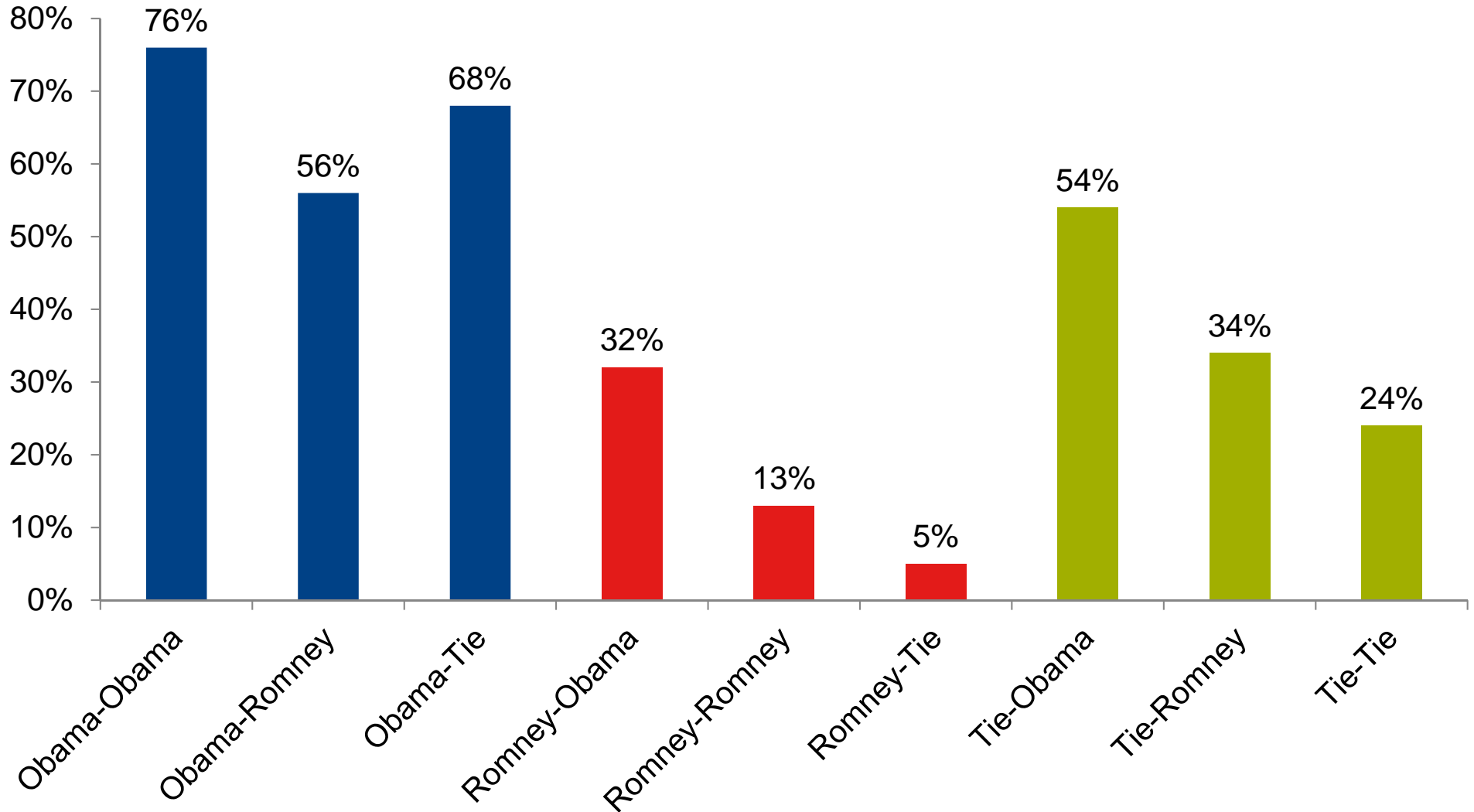
Questions



What is the impact of evaluations on vote share?

Impact of Evaluation on Vote Share

Obama Vote Share





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