

Most Call High School Off-Limits in Evaluating Candidate Character

Most Americans by far dismiss the relevance of accusations that Mitt Romney bullied a high-school classmate, calling it off-point in the election debate – and indicating they’d say the same about Barack Obama’s behavior as a high-school student, as well.

Three-quarters in this ABC News/Washington Post poll say the account of Romney’s high school behavior is not a serious matter, about as many say it doesn’t provide relevant information on his character, and nearly all – 90 percent – say it’s not a major factor in their vote preference.

While those are direct assessments, there could nonetheless be slight indirect impacts. Obama leads Romney on having “the better personal character to serve as president,” and, controlling for other variables, both this view, and vote preference overall, are independently predicted by the belief that the bullying issue is a serious one. But the effect in each case is minor compared with many other predictors.

Most Americans, in any case, see the general approach as inappropriate: Seventy-five percent in this poll, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), say it’s unfair to bring up things a political candidate did in high school. Given the context of the bullying story, 89 percent of Republicans say so; that slips to 73 percent of independents and 66 percent of Democrats.

Further, 72 percent think the specific bullying incident, first reported by The Washington Post, does not provide useful information about Romney’s character. That, too, engenders partisan divisions: Almost all Republicans (94 percent) think the incident isn’t relevant; 71 percent of independents and 59 percent of Democrats agree.

Seventy percent likewise say information about Obama’s high school behavior would not reveal relevant information about his character. Interestingly, again in the context of the current news, Republicans are the most apt to say so, 83 percent; Democrats least, 59 percent. (Republicans, though, are 11 points less apt to say it’s irrelevant for Obama than for Romney; Democrats and independents are constant on both candidates.)

	Behavior in High School:	
	Relevant	Not relevant
All	Romney 25-72%	Obama 24-70%
Democrats	38-59	35-59
Independents	26-71	24-71
Republicans	5-94	11-83

Regardless, as noted, nine in 10 Americans say the bullying incident is not a major factor in their vote preference. And the 8 percent who call it a major reason to oppose Romney look largely predisposed to do so in the first place.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone May 17-20, 2012, among a random national sample of 1,004 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points for the full sample. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by Abt-SRBI of New York, N.Y.

Analysis by Damla Ergun and Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>.

Media contacts: [David Ford](#), (212) 456-7243, and [Julie Townsend](#), (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

1-12, 17-18, 20-21, 23-26, 31a,c previously released.

13-16, 19, 22 held for release.

27. Switching topics, there have been reports recently that Romney bullied another student when he was in high school in the 1960s. Do you think this incident is a serious matter, or not serious?

	Serious	Not serious	No opinion
5/20/12	22	74	3

"Regardless of whether you think this is or is not a serious matter..." followed by 28/29 (rotated).

28. Do you think it is or is not fair to bring up things that a political candidate did in high school?

	Fair	Not fair	No opinion
5/20/12	22	75	3

29. Do you think this incident does or does not provide relevant information about Romney's personal character?

	Does	Does not	No opinion
5/20/12	25	72	3

30. And how about Obama - do you think things he did in high school do or do not provide relevant information about his personal character?

	Do	Do not	No opinion
5/20/12	24	70	6

31. For each item I name, please tell me if it is a major reason for you to (support) that candidate, a major reason for you to (oppose) that candidate, or not a major factor in your vote?

5/20/12 - Summary Table

	Major reason to support	Major reason to oppose	Not a major factor	No op.
b. The report that Romney bullied another student in high school	1	8	90	1

*** END ***