# "Did Obamacare create new jobs?" — An analysis of Mitt Romney's use of rhetorical questions in the 2012 US presidential election campaign

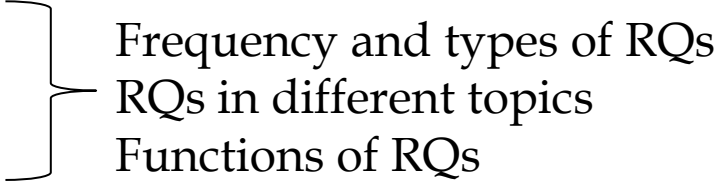Steven Ming Chiu WONG and Foong Ha YAP
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# Objectives

- To elucidate how politicians use effective communication strategies to compete for votes in election campaigns.

- To examine how Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney's use of rhetorical questions (RQs) in the 2012 US presidential election varies with different target audience:
  - (1) safe states for the Democratic Party,
  - (2) safe states for the Republican Party,
  - (3) Swing states.

- To further examine Romney's use of RQs in his 48 speeches delivered to 18 states in terms of their:
  - (1) frequency,
  - (2) question type,
  - (3) topic,
  - (4) function.

# Outline of the presentation

- **Introduction**
- **Literature Review**
  - Previous analyses of rhetorical questions (RQs)
  - Four types of RQs
  - Functions of RQs in political discourse
- **Methodology**
- **Mixed quantitative-and-qualitative data analysis**
  - Swing states
  - Democrat-safe states
  - Republican-safe states

  Frequency and types of RQs
  RQs in different topics
  Functions of RQs
- **Conclusion**

# Introduction

- Political speeches, especially those delivered to the public in election campaigns, are primarily designed for motivating followers or gaining power through persuasion (Helms, 2012: 149).

- Two ways in which the persuader may seek to influence the receiver of a persuasive message (Charteris-Black, 2005: 10):
  - To confirm
  - To challenge     "existing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours"

- In the 2012 US presidential election, Mitt Romney had to challenge President Barack Obama against the following odds:
  - Obama had an obvious incumbency advantage (73.68% success rate since 1900);
  - Obama's eloquence and charismatic image continued to leave a fairly favorable impression on the American public despite a difficult first term in economic terms.

# **Introduction** (contd.)

- Despite these significant political challenges, Romney still made the election one of the fiercest presidential elections in American history (with only 3% difference in the nationwide popular vote between them).

- Romney strategized and competed against Obama through the use of rhetorical questions.

- In particular, he adopted the following two strategies:
  - Criticizing his opponent via demagogy (Ephratt, 2007: 1922)
  - Enhancing the persuasiveness of his speeches

# Literature Review

1.  **Previous analysis of rhetorical questions**

    1.1  Translatability of rhetorical questions (RQs)

    1.2  Linguistic features & socio-cultural factors

# Literature Review

## 1.1  Translatability of rhetorical questions (RQs)

- e.g. the translation equivalences of all RQs in the New Testament of the Bible; rather than obtaining information as ordinary questions do, the RQs are used instead "to convey or call attention to information" and "to express the speaker's attitudes, opinions, etc." (Beekman and Callow, 1979: 229):
  - e.g. Lord of the vineyard: "Why cumbereth it the ground?" Dresser: "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it." (Luke 13:7-8)
    - The question indirectly states that the fig tree should no longer encumber the ground.
    - The statement is **a plea** that it should be given another year of care before being cut down.

# Literature Review

- 1.2  Linguistic features & socio-cultural factors

  - e.g. RQs in Mandarin Chinese (Alleton 1988)
    - Applies "intersubjective pressure":
      - e.g. the Mandarin *nan²dao⁴ (< 'hard to say') RQ
        *Nandao* ta hui zuode-dao?
        'Do you really think that he can do it?'

  - Essentially, RQs are often used to strengthen an unspoken assertion and help convey the hidden message in the question (Alleton, 1988).

# Literature Review (contd.)

**2. Four types of rhetorical questions**

- 2.1 Yes/no question

  - Demands only an acceptance or a denial of the proposed fact from the addressee (usually involving a simple "yes" or "no" answer);

  - Enables speakers to follow up with more detailed information, or to use the question as an assertion by implicating the speaker's expectations towards the answer (Han, 1998).

# Literature Review (contd.)

## 2. Four types of rhetorical questions

- *2.2  Wh*-question

    - The ***wh*-**question allows for a wider range of possible answers, and this provides the speaker with the advantage of simply leaving the question to the listener to interpret the intended meaning (Monzoni, 2008).

    - The speaker can thus use *wh-* RQs in the following ways:

        - To convey the speaker's knowledge base since RQs function like an assertion rather than a real question (Quirk et al, 1985);
        - To make a criticism;
        - To throw a challenge.

# Literature Review (contd.)

## 2. Four types of rhetorical questions

- ### 2.3  Alternative question

  - To offer a choice between alternative responses; however, the alternative question is "not always neutral" with respect to the speaker's desire (Van Rooy & Šafářová, 2003: 304 ).

  - e.g. in Bill Clinton's alternative questions "Will we be one nation, one people, with one common destiny, or not? Will we all come together, or come apart?"

    - Although two options are offered, it is obvious that Clinton wanted the listeners to select the first option, which is consistent with his ideology (Nguyen, 2010: 16).

# Literature Review (contd.)

**2. Four types of rhetorical questions**

- 2.4  Declarative questions

    - To emphasize or establish the truthfulness of a known fact (Balogun, 2011);

    - Two types of declarative questions:

        - Structurally identical to declarative statements but uttered with interrogative prosody; its final rising intonation can signal surprise or disbelief rather than a true interest in getting information.

        - Question tag (especially in a falling tone),  e.g. "She dances well, doesn't she?"
            - The speaker is sure of the fact in the declarative question, and the question tag is used to urge the hearer to agree with the assumption(s) in the declarative question (Balogun, 2011: 44).

# Literature Review (contd.)

## 3. Functions of rhetorical questions in political discourse

- Persuasion
  - An effective means of persuasion to get the approval and support of the listeners by affecting their attitude, emotion and psychology in political speeches (Nguyen, 2010).

- Self-Promotion
  - Politicians can more aggressively "self-promote" themselves and therefore gain immediate political power and credibility (Edwards, 2007)
    - especially by calling attention to their work on certain issues via the strategic use of RQs

- Challenge
  - RQs are often used as a challenging statement to solicit the listeners' commitment to its implicit answer, essentially by inducing mental recognition of its obviousness and its logical acceptability (Ilie, 1999: 128).

- Doubt-inducing
  - RQs could be used to "induce doubt" inside the mind of the audience more subtly by giving the addressee more freedom to consider the implied message, allowing the speaker to play a more neutral role by avoiding the use of more leading and value-loaded declarations (Bendahmane & McDonald, 1992).

# Methodology

We compared the results of the last 6 elections from 1992 to 2012, and categorized all states in the US into the following 3 types:

1) **Democrat-safe states** (the Democratic Party won most of the time) e.g. they won all elections in Washington since 1992

| Year / State | 2012 | 2008 | 2004 | 2000 | 1996 | 1992 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| California | D | D | D | D | D | D |
| Illinois | D | D | D | D | D | D |
| Iowa | D | D | R | D | D | D |
| Massachusetts | D | D | D | D | D | D |
| Michigan | D | D | D | D | D | D |
| New Hampshire | D | D | D | D | D | D |
| New York | D | D | D | D | D | D |
| Pennsylvania | D | D | D | D | D | D |
| Washington | D | D | D | D | D | D |
| Wisconsin | D | D | D | D | D | D |

**Table 1:** The results of the Democrat-safe states from 1992 – 2012

\* **D**: won by the Democratic Party, **R**: won by the Republican Party

# Methodology (contd.)

**2) Republican-safe states** (the Republican Party won most of the time) e.g. they won Texas in all of the last 6 elections

| State \ Year | 2012 | 2008 | 2004 | 2000 | 1996 | 1992 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Missouri | R | R | R | R | D | D |
| South Carolina | R | R | R | R | R | R |
| Texas | R | R | R | R | R | R |

**Table 2:** The results of the Republican-safe states from 1992 – 2012

\* **D**: won by the Democratic Party, **R**: won by the Republican Party

# Methodology (contd.)

## 3) Swing states

- No certain trend

| Year / State | 2012 | 2008 | 2004 | 2000 | 1996 | 1992 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Colorado | D | D | R | R | R | D |
| Florida | D | D | R | R | R | D |
| Nevada | D | D | R | R | D | D |
| Ohio | D | D | R | R | D | D |
| Virginia | D | D | R | R | R | R |

**Table 3:** The results of the swing states from 1992 – 2012

- The margin of victory is very small
  e.g. In the election between Al Gore and George W. Bush in 2000, the margin in Florida was just **0.0092**%.

| State / Year | Florida | Ohio | Virginia | Colorado | Nevada |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2012 | 0.88% | 2.98% | 3.87% | 5.37% | 6.68% |
| 2008 | 2.82% | 4.59% | 6.30% | 8.95% | 12.50% |
| 2004 | 5.01% | 2.11% | 8.20% | 4.67% | 2.59% |
| 2000 | 0.01% | 3.51% | 8.03% | 7.36% | 4.54% |
| 1996 | 5.70% | 6.36% | 1.96% | 1.37% | 1.02% |
| 1992 | 1.89% | 1.83% | 4.38% | 4.26% | 2.57% |
| **Average %** | **2.72%** | **3.56%** | **5.46%** | **5.33%** | **4.98%** |

**Table 4**: The vote difference percentage of swing states form 1992 - 2012

**Final election results in the 2012 US presidential elections**
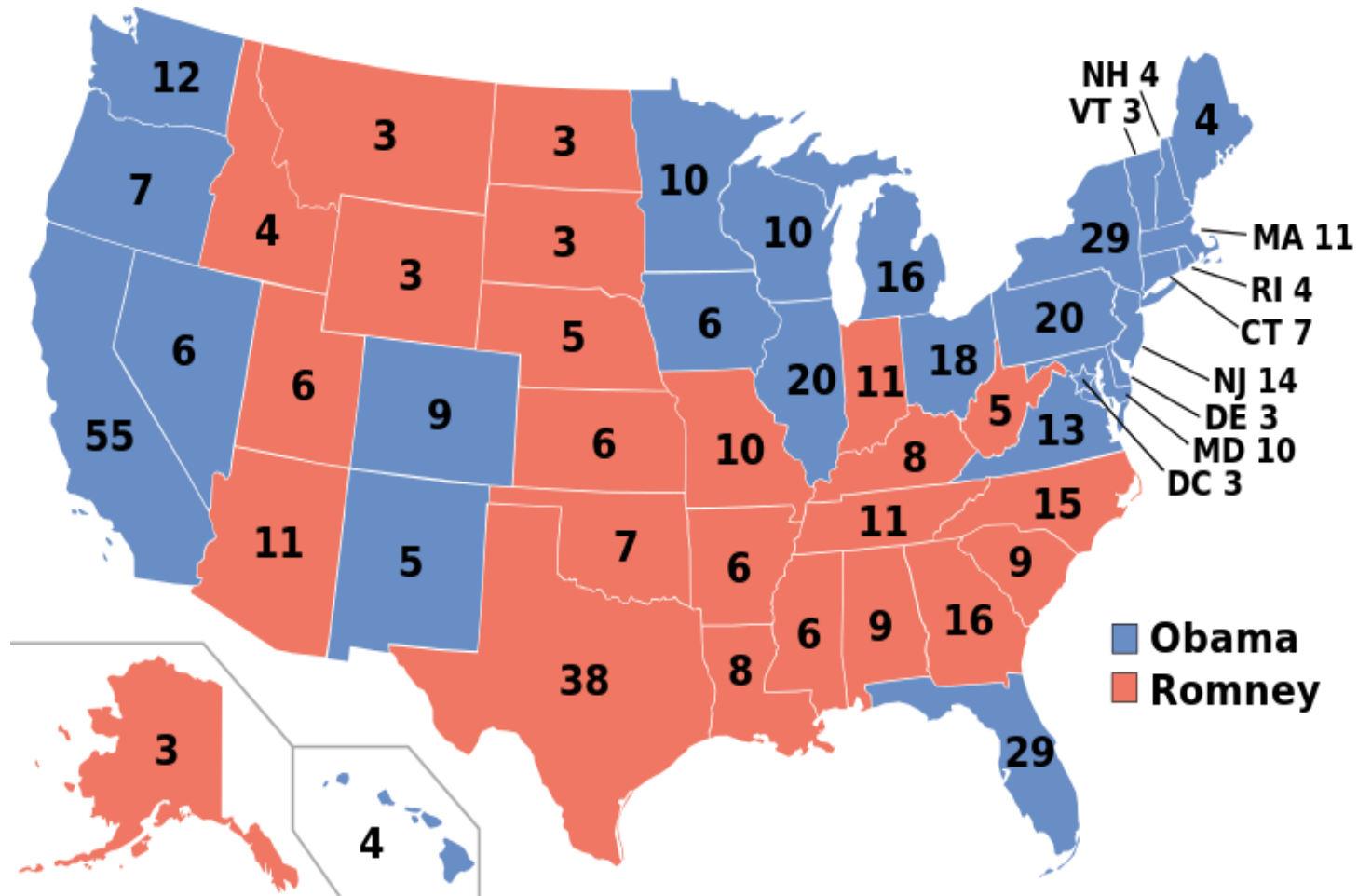
# **Methodology** (contd.)

No. of election campaign speeches by Romney analyzed in this study

(i)    Democrat-safe states:                    **29**      (California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Washington, Wisconsin, and Iowa)

(ii)   Republican-safe states:                   **5**       (Arizona, Texas, Missouri)

(iii)  Swing states:                            **14**      (Colorado, Florida, Nevada, Ohio, and Virginia)

                                               _____

Total no. of selected speeches:                 **48**

# **Methodology** (contd.)

- Procedure for examining how the frequency, features and functions of Romney's use of RQs varied in the 3 different types of states.

1. Counted the **number** of RQs in every speech
2. Classified each token into one of the following 4 types:
   - **Yes/No** question
   - *Wh*-question
   - **Alternative** question
   - **Declarative** question
3. Classified Romney's choice of RQs according to topics:
   - **Economics**
   - **Politics**
   - **Society**
4. Classified each RQ token into types of functions:
   - **Self-promotion**
   - **Persuasion**
   - **Challenge**
   - **Doubt-inducing**

# Mixed quantitative-and-qualitative data analysis

- Within Romney's 48 election campaign speeches, and his use of **125** rhetorical questions:

    - Both **quantitative** (frequency-count) and **qualitative** (discourse-context) analyses were used to evaluate how Romney used RQs to mount a strong and feisty challenge to Barack Obama in the presidential election.

    - Provision of **specific examples** for comparison and discussion in terms of the distinctive features and functions of these RQs when Romney addressing to different target audiences.

# Number of RQs in different states

**Table 5. Frequency of RQs in the safe states and swing states**

| RQs State | No. of speeches | No. of RQs | No. of RQs per 1000 words |
|---|---|---|---|
| Democrat-safe states | 29 | 76 | 1.26 |
| Republican-safe states | 5 | 3 | 0.28 |
| Swing states | 14 | 46 | 1.51 |
| Total | 48 | 125 | n/a |

- Romney asked RQs most frequently in the swing states with an average of 1.51 RQs per 1000 words,

- He asked RQs almost as frequently in the Democrat-safe states, averaging 1.26 RQs per 1000 words,

- However he only asked 0.28 RQs per 1000 words in the Republican safe states.
  - Note: The number of RQs for the Republican-safe states are too small for the percentages to make a meaningful distinction, hence our analysis mainly focuses on the Democrat-safe states and the swing states.

❖ Romney is inclined to ask more RQs in states with more potential Obama voters.

# Swing states

- **Frequency and types of rhetorical questions:**
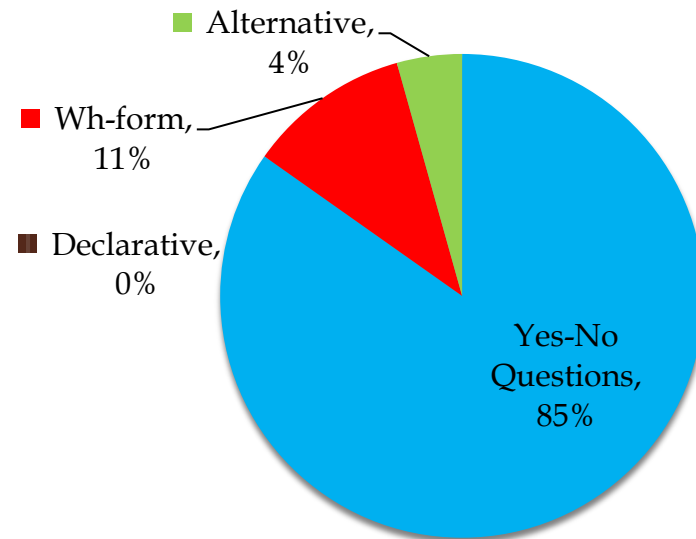


- Of the 46 RQs, **yes/no** questions dominated at 85% (39 tokens), while the *wh-*questions and alternative questions accounted for only 11% (5 tokens) and 4% (2 tokens) respectively.

- ❖ The high incidence of **yes/no** RQs is noteworthy. Generally, Romney adopted this more combative strategy in the swing states to distinguish himself as a worthy challenger).

# Swing states (contd.)
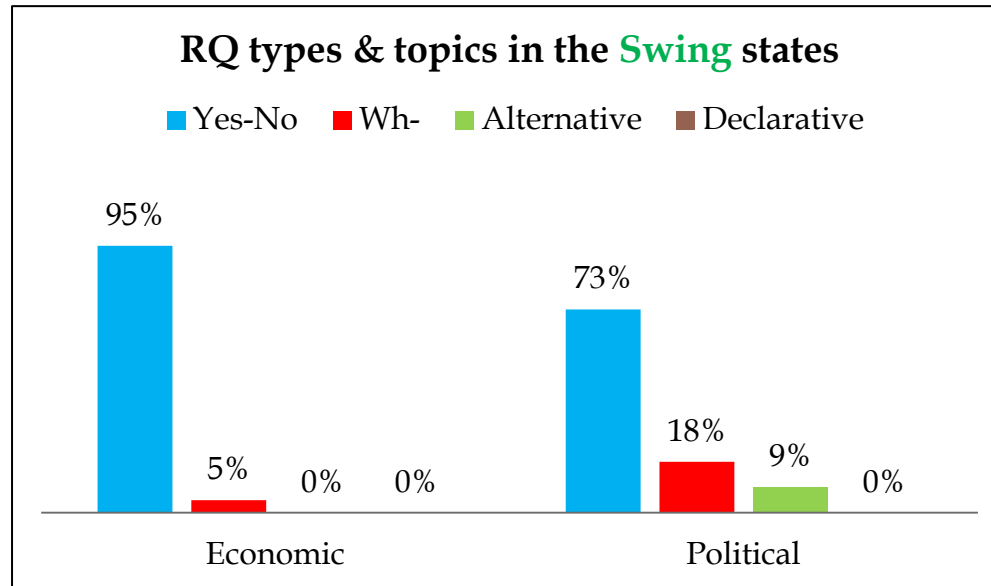
- **Rhetorical questions in different topics**

| RQs / Issues | Total | Yes-No | *Wh-* | Alternative | Declarative |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Economic | 22 | 21 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Political | 22 | 16 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| Social | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total no. of RQs** | **46** | **39** | **5** | **2** | **0** |

Note: The number of RQs for the Social issues are too small for the percentages to make a meaningful distinction, hence our analysis is focused on Economic & Political issues.

- Romney deployed equal numbers of RQs (22 tokens each) to both **economic** and **political** issues, but particularly for the **economic** issues, he tended to favor the more direct **yes/no** question type RQ.

- But even when raising **political** issues, Romney also greatly favored the more direct **yes/no** question over the less face-threatening *wh-*question (he was more feisty and aggressive, and more intent in engaging his swing-state audience).

# Swing states (contd.)

- **Rhetorical questions in different topics**

### RQ types & topics in the Swing states

■ Yes-No   ■ Wh-   ■ Alternative   ■ Declarative

**Economic:** 95% (Yes-No), 5% (Wh-), 0% (Alternative), 0% (Declarative)

**Political:** 73% (Yes-No), 18% (Wh-), 9% (Alternative), 0% (Declarative)

- For **economic** issues, Romney asked a very high percentage of RQs in the form of **yes/no** questions (95%).
- For **political** issues, he asked fewer **yes/no** questions (73%) but included a higher percentage of *wh-*questions (18%).
- ❖ Romney was very confident and direct in criticizing Obama's record on the economy and job creations in the swing states.

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# Swing states (contd.)

- **Functions of rhetorical questions**

| States / Functions | Swing states | | Democrat-safe states | | Republican-safe states | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Self-Promotion | 5 | 11% | 1 | 1% | 0 | n/a |
| Persuasion | 10 | 22% | 30 | 39% | 1 | n/a |
| Doubt-Inducing | 11 | 24% | 26 | 34% | 2 | n/a |
| Challenge | 20 | 43% | 19 | 25% | 0 | n/a |
| **Total no. of RQs** | **46** | | **76** | | **3** | |

Note: The number of RQs for the Republican-safe states are too small for the percentages to make a meaningful distinction, hence n/a (i.e. not applicable) for analysis.

# Swing states (contd.)

- **Functions of rhetorical questions**

  - **Self-promoting** RQs
    - enable Romney to gain support or agreement from the audience (by embedding an explicit message that he is the best candidate for U.S. president)
    - e.g. "Do you want a president who will celebrate success, not attack it?"

  - **Challenging** RQs
    - aimed at criticizing Obama with great **explicitness**
    - e.g. "Did he fix the economy?" (Romney pointed out Obama's incapability directly)

# Swing states (contd.)

(**Example 1**: Romney's speech made in Florida on August 30, 2012)

**RQ1**.　"Does the America we want borrow a trillion dollars from China?
(AUDIENCE: No!)"

**RQ2**.　"Does it fail to find the jobs that are needed for 23 million people and for half
the kids graduating from college?
(AUDIENCE: No!)"

**RQ3**.　"Are its schools lagging behind the rest of the developed world?
(AUDIENCE: No!)"

**RQ4**.　"And does the America we want succumb to resentment and division?
(AUDIENCE: No!)"

# Swing states (contd.)

(**Example 1**: Romney's speech made in Florida on August 30, 2012)

- In RQ1, RQ2 and RQ4, Romney used the frame "**Does the America we want do X?**":
  - *X* represents a socio-economic failing or socio-cultural breakdown which Romney subtly and implicitly attributed to Obama.
  - RQ3: "Are its schools lagging behind the rest of the developed world?"
    - similarly framed to "**Should the schools of the America we want** *be in condition Y?*",
    - leads the audience to focus on some negative aspect of the state-of-the-nation under the incumbent President.
  - Highly effective Y**es/no** RQ format:
    - The audience 4 times promptly answered with an immediate "**No**":
      - Romney's criticism on Obama was amplified, leaving a stronger negative impression of Obama in the minds of the audience and other swing voters.

# Swing states (contd.)

(**Example 2**: Romney's speech made in Ohio on August14, 2012)

**RQ6**.      "Do you want a president who believes that your rights come from God, not from government?
(AUDIENCE: Yes!)"

**RQ7**.      "Do you want a president who honors your right to pursue happiness, not as government commands, but as you choose?
(AUDIENCE: Yes!)"

**RQ8**.      "Do you want a president who will work every day to bring us together, not tear us apart?
(AUDIENCE: Yes!)"

**RQ9**.      "Do you want a president who will celebrate success, not attack it?
(AUDIENCE: Yes!)"

**RQ10**.      "Do you want a president who will never, ever apologize for the greatest nation on earth?
(AUDIENCE: Yes!)
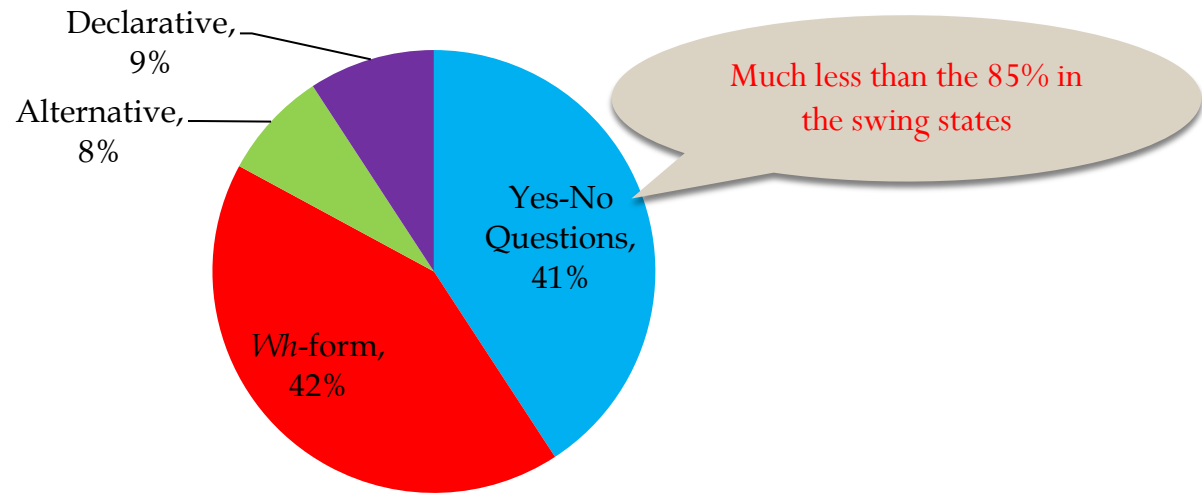With your support, I will be that president."

# Swing states (contd.)

(**Example 2**: Romney's speech made in Ohio on August14, 2012)

- The 5 RQs induce the audience to mentally and silently respond with a "**Yes**":
    - enabling Romney to stimulate the swing voters to look into what he can do in comparison to Obama,
    - providing Romney with an excellent opportunity to express his determination to make changes to the country.

- By answering "With your support, I will be that president" at the end of this series of 5 yes/no RQs, Romney actively sought to:
    - establish common ground with the audience,
    - move the swing voters from hesitation to stand on his side.

- ❖ Yes/no RQs allow the speaker to unfold his grand vision and at the same time throw an underbelly punch at his opponent:
    - It is not surprising that Romney favored this strategy over the others, particularly in swing states where he needed to accomplish both tasks.

# Democrat-safe states

- **Frequency and types of rhetorical questions:**



Declarative, 9%
Alternative, 8%
*Wh*-form, 42%
Yes-No Questions, 41%

Much less than the 85% in the swing states

- Of the 76 RQs, Romney asked 31 **yes/ no** questions, 32 *wh*-questions, 6 **alternative** questions and 7 **declarative** questions:
  - Fewer direct **yes/no** question
  - More indirect and less face-threatening forms: **wh-**questions, **alternative** questions, and **declarative** questions

- ❖ More mindful of diverse opinions, and more tentative rather than forceful in his rhetoric, and hence more polite.
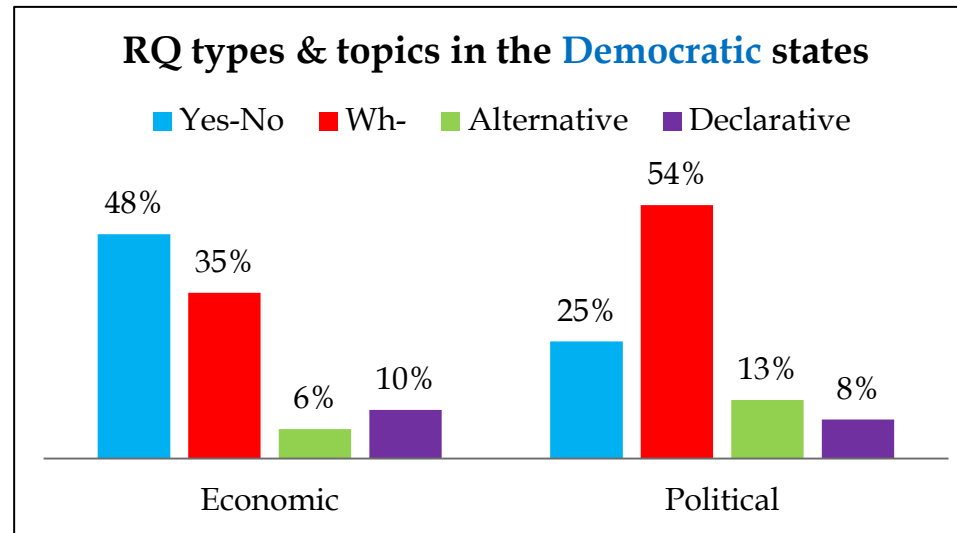
# Democrat-safe **states** (contd.)

- **Rhetorical questions in different topics**

| RQs / Issues | Total | Yes-No | Wh- | Alternative | Declarative |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Economic | 48 | 23 | 17 | 3 | 5 |
| Political | 24 | 6 | 13 | 3 | 2 |
| Social | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total no. RQs** | **76** | **31** | **32** | **6** | **7** |

- Romney focused more on the **economy**, which is his forte, when addressing a pro-Democrat audience that tended to favor the politically more experienced incumbent President Obama.
  - Twice as many rhetorical questions for **economic** issues compared to **political** ones (48 vs. 24 questions respectively)
  - More **yes/no** questions when raising **economic** issues than **political** ones (23 vs. 6 questions)
- ❖ Consistent with the general impression among pundits and the public alike that Romney was casting himself as an **economic whiz.**

# Democrat-safe states (contd.)

- **Rhetorical questions in different topics**

### RQ types & topics in the Democratic states

■ Yes-No  ■ Wh-  ■ Alternative  ■ Declarative

| Economic | | | | Political | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 48% | 35% | 6% | 10% | 25% | 54% | 13% | 8% |

- Many of Romney's RQs related to **political** issues took the *wh-*question form (54%), but when he dealt with **economic** issues, Romney asked more **yes/ no** questions (48% of the time).

- A prudent approach:
  - ***Wh-***questions are more open-ended than a yes/no question, allowing Romney to avoid direct conflict with the supporters of Obama in the Democrat-safe states.
  - As political issues are more complex and abstract, it would be challenging to respond within the black-and-white confines of a yes/no question. However, by using a *wh-*question, Romney side-stepped the need to provide a clear response.

# Democrat-safe states (contd.)

- **Functions of rhetorical questions**

| States \ Functions | Swing states | | Democrat-safe states | | Republican-safe states | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Self-Promotion | 5 | 11% | 1 | 1% | 0 | n/a |
| Persuasion | 10 | 22% | 30 | 39% | 1 | n/a |
| Doubt-Inducing | 11 | 24% | 26 | 34% | 2 | n/a |
| Challenge | 20 | 43% | 19 | 25% | 0 | n/a |
| **Total no. of RQs** | **46** | | **76** | | **3** | |

Note: The number of RQs for the Republican-safe states are too small for the percentages to make a meaningful distinction, hence n/a (i.e. not applicable) for analysis.

# Democrat-safe states (contd.)

- **Functions of rhetorical questions**

  - **Persuasive RQs:**
    - served to synchronize speaker and addressee beliefs
    - e.g. "Wouldn't it be great if we could look back on the last four years with confidence that the crisis had been confronted and we'd turned the corner toward a brighter future?" (implicit persuasion)

  - **Doubt-inducing RQs:**
    - a more indirect strategy than persuasion RQs, often using impersonalization and passivization strategies
    - e.g. "It is often asked why is this recovery the slowest on record?"

# **Democrat-safe states** (contd.)

(**Example 3**: Romney's speech made in Iowa on October 23, 2012)

RQ11.    "He promised to cut the deficit in half, but he doubled it. And his budget? It failed to win a single vote, Republican or Democrat, in either the House or the Senate. He said he would reform Medicare and Social Security and save them from pending insolvency, but he shrunk from proposing any solution at all."

RQ12.    "And then, **where** are the jobs?"

RQ13.    "Where are the 9 million more jobs that President Obama promised his stimulus would have created by now? They are in China, Mexico, and Canada and in countries that have made themselves more attractive for entrepreneurs and business and investment, even as President Obama's policies have made it less attractive for them here."

> And **what about** his budget?

> Note that politicians often follow up their RQs with *pre-determined elaborate answers.*

# Democrat-safe states (contd.)

(**Example 3**: Romney's speech made in Iowa on October 23, 2012)

- The cascade of RQs produced a powerful verbal punch against President Obama:
  - After asking RQ11 "And [what about] his [Obama's] budget?", Romney immediately provided his answer "It failed to win a single vote…"
  - He kept on his attack by asking "And then, where are the jobs?" (RQ12), and followed up with yet another rhetorical question "Where are the 9 million jobs that President Obama promised …?" (RQ13).

- At the end of his 1st and 3rd rhetorical question, Romney chose to answer his own questions and eliminate the potential risks:
  - It may be risky for speakers to leave "the unspoken answer" to the addressee after asking a rhetorical question, therefore speakers often do not pause long before jumping in again "to interject their own answer" (Ephratt, 2007: 1922-3).

# Democrat-safe states (contd.)

(**Example 4**: Romney's speech made in Washington on April 4, 2012)

RQ14.     "**What** exactly does President Obama intend to do differently once he is no longer accountable to the voters?"

RQ15.     "**Why** does "flexibility" with foreign leaders require less accountability to the American people?"

RQ16.     "And, **on what other issues** will he state his true position only after the election is over? But instead of answering those vital questions, President Obama came here yesterday and railed against arguments no one is making – and criticized policies no one is proposing. It's one of his favorite strategies – setting up straw men to distract from his record."

# **Democrat-safe states** (contd.)

(**Example 4**: Romney's speech made in Washington on April 4, 2012)

- The 3 open-ended *wh-*questions made Romney appear more objective.

  - Audiences were in principle free to arrive at their own conclusions.

- However, Romney immediately eliminated the opportunity for his audience to think of any possible answer beneficial to Obama. This he accomplished by:

  - again using the cascading *wh*-question technique;

  - immediately interjecting the brief post-RQ pause with his own answer and interpretation: "But instead of answering those vital questions, President Obama came here yesterday and …"

# Republican-safe states

- **Rhetorical questions in different topics**

| RQs / Issues | Total | Yes-No | *Wh-* | Alternative | Declarative |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Economic | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Political | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Social | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total no. of RQs** | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** | **0** |

- In Missouri, South Carolina, and Texas, Romney asked only 3 RQs to **political** issues (including 2 **yes/no** questions and 1 **wh-**question).

- The low usage of RQs to Republican-dominant audiences is remarkable but not surprising (he has little need to persuade audiences that are already inclined to support his presidential bid in the first place).

# Conclusion

- Romney tended to ask more RQs against president Obama in **the swing states and the Democrat-safe states** than in his Republican-safe states.

- Characteristics identified in Romney's use of RQs:

  (1) In the swing states, most of Romney's RQs were *yes/no* questions (more direct and forceful in generating audience involvement).

  (2) In the Democrat-safe states, Romney used both *yes/no* and *wh-*questions (to induce doubt in the rival candidate in a more subtle and indirect manner).

  (3) In both the Democrat-safe states and the swing states,
      - the more forceful *yes/no* rhetorical questions focused more on **economic** issues;
      - the more indirect *wh-*rhetorical questions focused more on **political** issues

      These moves constitute a safe and effective strategy for Romney to highlight his skill as a **financial whiz** while downplaying his lack of experience in **national politics** and **foreign relations**.

# **Conclusion** (contd.)

- Functions of Romney's RQs

    - Romney used **persuasion** and **doubt-inducing** RQs when addressing Republican-dominant audiences.
        - Even so, Romney rarely used RQs when addressing a friendly and supportive audience, compared to 'fence-sitting' (or rather, 'independent-minded') audiences—only 3 RQs for this target audience

    - In the Democrat-safe states, Romney asked more RQs to **persuade** and **induce doubt**, with a fair number of his RQs used as **challenges** as well.

    - In the swing states, Romney also used a fair number of **persuasion** and **doubt-inducing** RQs.
    - However, almost half of his RQs in the swing states were of a **challenging** nature.
    - Romney also engaged in more **self-promotion** in the swing states (11%) compared to the Democrat-safe states (1%).

# **Conclusion** (contd.)

- In this study we have seen how a skillful politician such as Mitt Romney effectively deploys rhetorical questions (RQs) to achieve his political goals.

- Different types of RQs were used with different frequency depending on the <span style="color:red">type of audience</span>.

- The type and frequency of RQs used were also influenced by the <span style="color:red">topics discussed</span>.

- RQs were used to enhance Romney's image as a strong challenger and viable candidate for the US presidency.

- His skillful use of RQs contributed to his impressive performance during the 2012 US presidential election. Although he did not win, his rhetorical skills provide us with a valuable opportunity to examine how politicians can effectively establish, negotiate and maintain common ground with the general public.

# Acknowledgement

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