

The Record

NORTH JERSEY'S TRUSTED SOURCE

November 13, 2012; Circulation: 153,847

Panel at Montclair State University discusses media's impact on presidential race

Unrelenting campaign ads. Endless tweets on candidate gaffs. The 47 percent moment.

Rarely has the media impacted a presidential race more broadly and ferociously than during the one that ended this month, a panel of political journalists and pundits said Monday.

The four guests at Montclair State University sparred over the advantages and headaches of the media's transformation from a fraternity of major news networks dictating what voters should know to an unfiltered barrage of information the public soaks up often without the edit of a single journalist.

"Basically it was a club; it had a stranglehold on political coverage," Jonathan Alter, political columnist at Bloomberg, said of the "legacy" media years ago. "Today the burden is on the voter. If they want to be informed, they'll get informed. No one is being force fed anymore."

To Alter, who has covered presidential campaigns since the 1980s, the most pivotal moment of this year's race was when an unnamed person in Boca Raton, Fla., secretly caught Republican challenger Mitt Romney on video telling a crowd at a fundraiser that 47 percent of the country's population "believe they are victims ..."

Those comments likely solidified many people's impression of Romney as an elitist – and it, and some other mistakes, sunk him so low in the polls, Alter said, that even his winning debate performance couldn't bring him back.

Still, conservative New York Post Editorial Writer Robert George said the biggest media impact was the "pummeling" campaign television advertisements gave the battleground states.

Yet, with all those citizen Twitter feeds, anonymous video uploads and Facebook postings comes a lot of "noise," said Tim O'Brien, Executive Editor of The Huffington Post.

"There is more access (to news) but also a lot of confusion," he said.

The panelists also dissected the influence big party-leaning new channels – like Fox on the right or MSNBC on the left — have on the electorate.

MSU political Professor Brigid Harrison called it "irrelevant."

"It's not what's controlling people's viewpoints," she said.

Monday night's event, which drew roughly 70 attendees, was hosted by the college's School of Communication and Media.

[**View Original Article**](#)