

Letters to the Editor

Obama Story Stirs Reader Rage

Our fall cover story on door dealers and the new health care law (“This Might Hurt a Little”) attracted some email kudos for our fair and unbiased reporting.

Yet, our presidential poll story (“Survey: Dealers Want Obama Out”), sparked some of the harshest email we’ve ever received. We received fewer than 10 emails about it, but they all had similar criticism.

Here’s a sampling of what readers said and our response. To prevent further fanning of the flames, the readers’ full names are not identified. Responses have been edited for spelling, brevity, clarity, and decency.

Rick (a dealer): You’re so stupid to mix politics with business. Do you think every business owner is Republican? Please remove me from your mailing list.

D&AS: All four of our presidential polls indicate that our industry’s dealers tend to be Republican (65% in 2000, 75% in 2004, 75% in 2008, and 82% in 2012). Those are the facts, and we simply reported them.

John (a dealer): Because of your article regarding the president, your magazine is in the garbage. I don’t want to receive it anymore.

Mark (a dealer): Your bold statement on the cover, “Survey: Dealers Want Obama Out” was irresponsible ... especially when you only received opinions from 11 percent of the surveys sent out! If you had added, “based on a survey where only 11% responded,” then it would have been fair.

D&AS: Our poll was a nationwide poll of 1,928 random dealers, of whom 221 (11.4%) replied. This response is a statistically relevant sample with a margin of error of +/- 6%. National polls from Gallup and similar firms are typically based on responses from fewer than 2,000 respondents, which is a much smaller sampling than 11% of the millions of likely voters in the U.S.

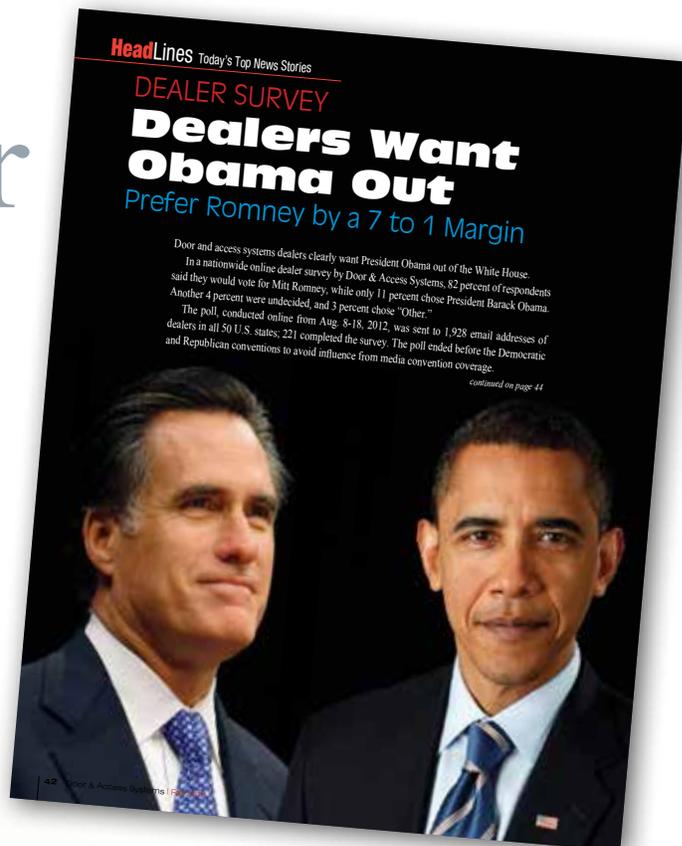
Ron (a dealer): You say your poll ended before the Democratic and Republican conventions “to avoid influence from the convention coverage.” Really? Seriously? After the conventions is when everybody really starts to pay attention.

D&AS: Our publication deadline (Aug. 20) didn’t give us the time to postpone the survey until after the conventions. Yet, in spite of the early date of our poll (Aug. 8–18), 96% of responding dealers already knew their choice for president.

Ron (a dealer): What really offends me are the quotes you published on page 44. The NRA would be proud of you, but I’m sure you know that. If I paid for this rag to be delivered to me, I would be outraged.

D&AS: We felt that those strong comments were a key part of the story. They demonstrated the heated contentiousness of this election.

We published 11 pro-Romney comments and two pro-Obama comments. This 11-to-2 ratio accurately reflected the heavy pro-Romney proportion of comments received.



Ron (a dealer): Your quoting hateful speech from the majority of the minority that responded to your survey does not show dominant attitudes of my fellow garage door people, but only the uninformed hateful ones with which you seem to agree.

D&AS: We published harsh dealer statements that were anti-Romney (e.g., “Romney is f**king insane”) and anti-Obama (e.g., “This president is out to destroy this country”).

You assume that we are pro-Romney. Ironically, in 2008, some assumed that we were pro-Obama. We have no interest in promoting any personal political bias.

Dave (a manufacturer): As I recall, your presidential survey questions were highly problematic. They seemed skewed such that the result of the poll would be highly slanted toward the Republican point of view. Differently worded questions, those with no bias toward one side or the other, would have resulted in a much different outcome.

D&AS: Perhaps you’re thinking of a different survey. Our presidential survey asked these questions:

1. “If the U.S. presidential election were held today, for whom would you vote?” We then listed the candidates in alphabetical order. “Barack Obama” was listed first and “Mitt Romney” second. Respondents could also check “Undecided” or “Other.”
2. “How much influence do the following issues have on your vote?” We then provided an alphabetical list of a dozen topics that are commonly asked in such polls.

We know that the credibility of our surveys depends on credible survey questions and proper procedures.

Dave (a manufacturer): Thank you for your response. Yes, I would absolutely agree that these questions are not slanted or skewed to elicit a desired response. Please accept my deepest apology. ■