

US POLL
brief

Obama has early voter lead
AP, WASHINGTON

President Barack Obama is heading toward Election Day with an apparent lead over Republican Mitt Romney among early voters in key states that could decide the election. But Obama's advantage isn't as big as the one he had over John McCain four years ago. About 25 million people already have voted in 34 States and the District of Columbia. No votes will be counted until Election Day. So far, Democratic voters outnumber Republicans in Florida, Iowa, Nevada, North Carolina and Ohio. Republicans have the edge in Colorado.

Sandy brings military in polls
AFP, New York

Army trucks will serve as polling stations in Tuesday's US presidential election as authorities in states stricken by superstorm Sandy race against time to get voting ready. Amid predictions that election tallies could be delayed because of the devastation, authorities in New York and New Jersey are still unsure how many polling stations will be ready in time. Department of Defense trucks are set to be used in New Jersey. About 3,000 of the sites hosting presidential, congressional and local elections have no electricity.

Campaign coverage 'negative'
AFP, Washington

The US media coverage of the 2012 presidential campaign has been more negative than positive, with the harshest comments coming in social media, a study said yesterday. The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism found that coverage of President Barack Obama was not as negative as that of Republican Mitt Romney, but that the tables were turned after the first presidential debate.

Blacks should vote Romney: Ad
THE DAILY BEAST ONLINE

A super PAC ad running Ohio hopes it can woo African American voters with a new ad suggesting their loyalty to the Democratic Party is misguided, and that they should vote Republican because Abraham Lincoln was a Republican, too. "It is a big lie that Democrats are for black Americans, and Republicans are against black Americans. Abraham Lincoln, who freed the slaves, was a Republican.... Republicans passed the Civil Rights Act, while Democrats opposed it," said the ad. According to survey polls, 89 percent black Americans are supporting Democrats this

US PRESIDENTIAL POLL 2012

DEMOCRAT: **47.4%**

REPUBLICAN: **47.3%**

3 MORE DAYS TO GO

Voting machines remain a worry

AFP, Washington

Few want to even think about it, but the 2012 US election result could be clouded by problems with voting machines... again. Twelve years after the Florida punch card debacle in which thousands of votes went uncounted in the crucial state, some experts cite similar concerns about voting technology. "I'm not sure we've made forward progress since 2000," said Douglas Jones, a University of Iowa computer scientist and co-author of a book published this year, "Broken Ballots." Jones said technology used on some vote machines is now close to a decade old and should be updated. And some systems have security flaws or may not allow for recounts or audits, he noted. "Whenever an election is close all of the weaknesses become apparent," he said. "I expect there will be some states where the margin is so close that people will raise questions about irregularities." A frequent target for critics is the use of touchscreen voting machines, which lack a paper backup. Around 25 percent of Americans are expected to use paperless electronic voting, according to the Verified Voting Foundation. A report earlier this year by two activist groups and the Rutgers University School of Law said systems used in 20 states were either "inadequate" or needed improvement. That includes 16 states which use paperless machines in some or all jurisdictions. Six states were ranked "good" and 24 "generally good." Hurricane Sandy's destruction has added another element of uncertainty, says Thad Hall, a University of Utah political scientist and researcher for the Voting Technology Project.



Hillary would win against Romney: Poll
GUARDIAN ONLINE

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would be on course for a landslide victory over Mitt Romney, with a lead five points larger than Barack Obama's, if she was on the ballot paper instead of the president in Tuesday's US election, according to a poll. The survey by YouGov (pdf), shown exclusively to the Guardian, has the secretary of state beating Romney by 51% to 45% among likely voters. Obama leads Romney by 48% to 47%.

YouGov estimates that Hillary's lead would translate into a massive victory in the electoral college, by 347 to 191 votes. The poll shows Hillary performing more strongly than Obama among almost every group: men and women, Republicans and independents, those earning less than \$40,000 a year and those earning more. Among white voters the president trails Romney by 21 points; Hillary would cut that advantage to 14 points. The findings are likely to add to the clamour for Hillary to seek the presidency in 2016, when she would be the frontrunner for her party's nomination.

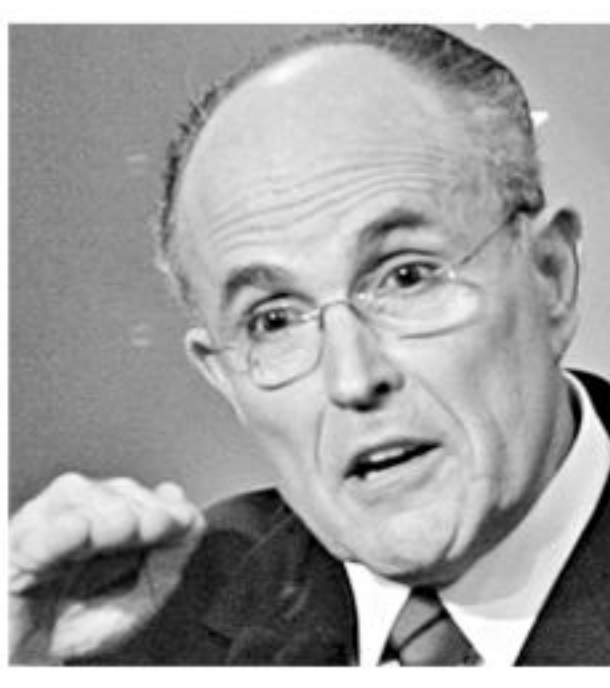
Dirty tricks sully US polls
AFP, Chicago

Scare-mongering ads, voter registration forms dumped in the trash and misleading statements on the stump: the list of dirty tricks sully the US presidential election is seemingly endless. With the high-stakes race culminating with voting Tuesday, experts warn that the unfortunately typical attempts to keep a rival's supporters from the polls or sway voters with flat out lies could end up deciding the outcome. "If an election is close those kinds of things can matter," said Kathleen Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. "We've had the chastening experience of 2000. And 2004 was close as well."

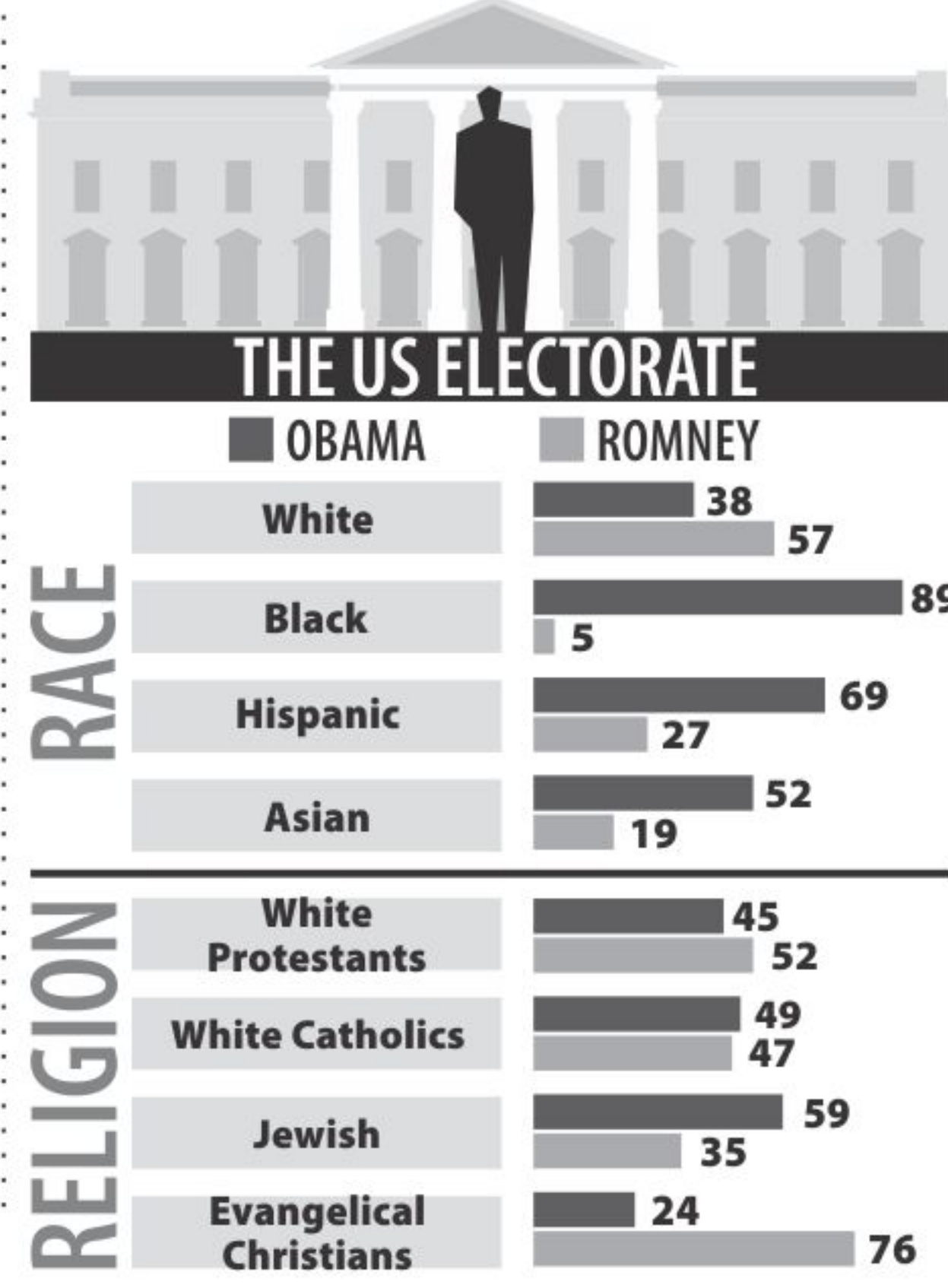
Some of the uglier tactics could end up backfiring, Jamieson said, citing a DVD sent to voters in swing states claiming to have uncovered nude photos of President Barack Obama's mother in a bondage magazine. False and misleading statements on the stump and in advertisements run the risk of alienating voters by undermining a candidate's trustworthiness. But given the "abysmal" level of political knowledge among most voters, the payoff often outweighs the risk, said FactCheck.org editor Brooks Jackson. Republican White House hopeful Mitt Romney recently came under fire from both Democrats and the heads of General Motors and Chrysler for ads that falsely implied an automaker rescued by Obama is now shipping American jobs to China. The Obama campaign has also told its share of whoppers, including claiming that Romney plans to outlaw all abortions when he has clearly stated his support for exceptions in the case of rape, incest and a threat to the life of the mother. Meanwhile, a conservative group called True the Vote has sparked fears of voter intimidation with its vow to train thousands of volunteers to challenge any "suspicious" people at the polls as they seek to ferret out voter fraud. While tossing out voter registration forms is a serious problem, many dirty tricks don't have much of an impact on the outcome, according to elections expert Rick Hasen of the University of California, Irvine. "What is likely to have a larger impact is changes in laws, especially laws passed by Republican legislatures, which have the potential to moderately suppress Democratic turnout such as cutting back on early voting, making registration more difficult and voter ID laws," said Hasen.

Giuliani calls on Obama to resign
CNN ONLINE

Not long after taking a few seconds of silence for those affected by Superstorm Sandy, Rudy Giuliani began ripping into President Barack Obama on Friday while speaking at major campaign event for Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan in Ohio. The former New York City mayor delivered a series of blistering zingers against the president, rallying the massive crowd with line after line of reasons why Obama should "resign" and faulting him for "in-

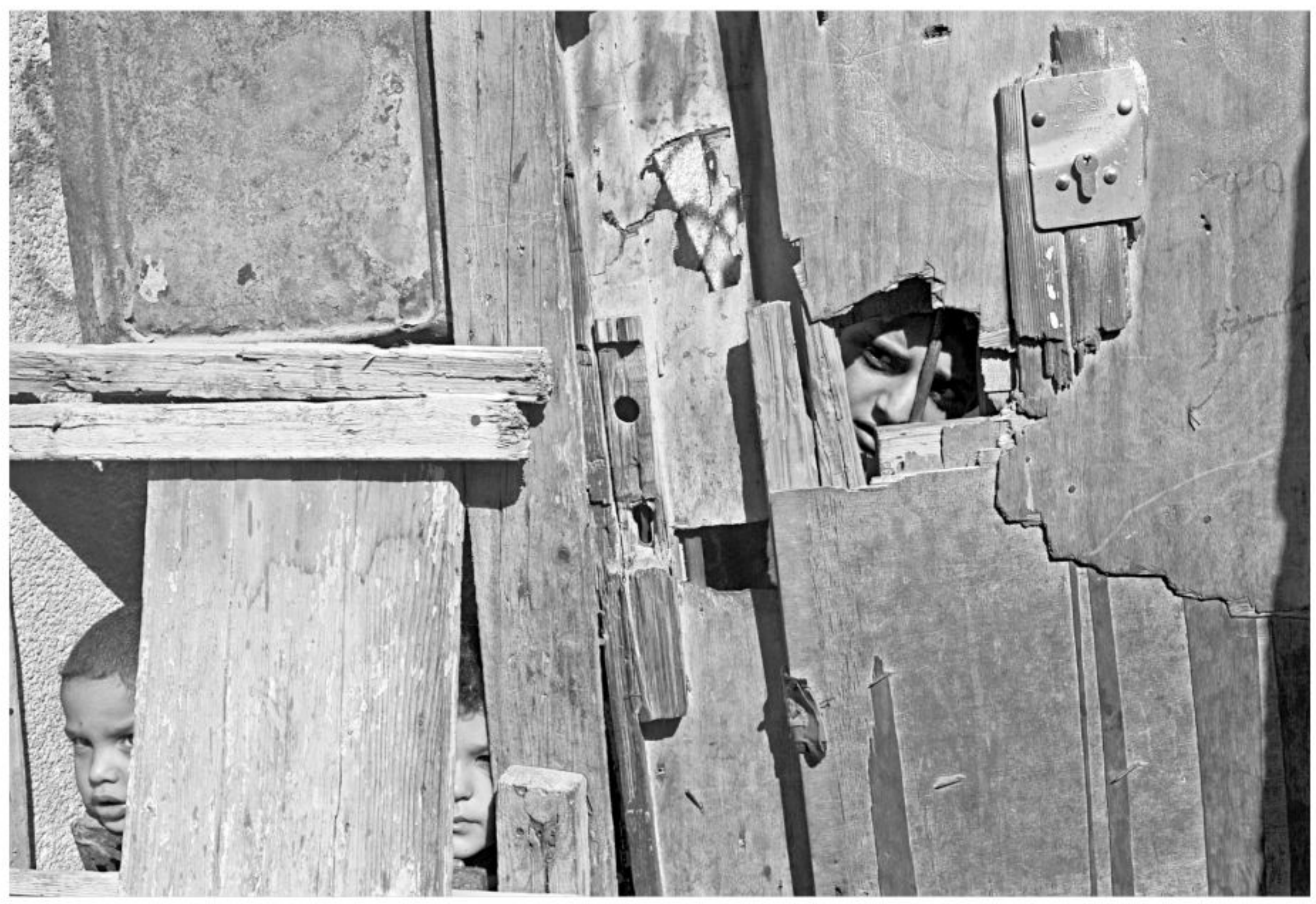


competence" over the Libya consulate attacks. "He should resign! He told us he would resign if he did this poorly," Giuliani said, referring to a 2009 interview in which Obama vowed to turn the economy around in three years, otherwise there would be a "one-term proposition." The former mayor, who also ran for president in 2008, pivoted to Romney's business experience, saying it should be considered a strength and blasted Democrats for making it a target on the campaign trail.



BENGAZI ATTACK
CIA's response under scrutiny
AFP, Washington

Nearly two months after a deadly attack on a US consulate in Libya, a bitter row is still raging over who is to blame for the security breakdown, with the spotlight now shifting to the CIA's role. President Barack Obama, the State Department and the Pentagon have come under fire since the September 11 assault in Benghazi that killed US ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans. Republican supporters of Obama's rival Mitt Romney pounced on the issue in a hard-fought presidential campaign, keeping it in the spotlight. John McCain and other Republican senators called for Senate Armed Forces Committee hearings to address whether there was sufficient military personnel in place in Benghazi at the time of the attack. Due to the clandestine nature of its work, the Central Intelligence Agency was initially spared from scrutiny, but now the spy service and its director are on the defensive. The Wall Street Journal suggested Friday that the CIA's fixation with secrecy may have led to confusion over security at the compound and crossed signals with the State Department. According to the report, the US Benghazi mission was essentially a CIA operation instead of a diplomatic post



Palestinian children peer through a wooden door at the Shati Palestinian refugee camp in Gaza City yesterday. The issue of refugees is one of the thorniest elements of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, with the Palestinians demanding that Israel recognise the "right of return" of refugees. Israel denies their claim. PHOTO: AFP

Syria rebels target key airbase
AFP, Damascus

Syrian rebels yesterday said they had launched a major assault on a northern airbase used to deploy regime air power, on the eve of a crucial meeting to decide the future of the opposition. The attack on the Taftanaz base, from where helicopter gunships raid opposition positions and rebel-held areas, comes after regime forces this week launched an unprecedented wave of air strikes in a bid to reverse rebel gains. A video posted on the Internet said eight battalions were taking part in the attack, including the radical Islamist Al-Nusra Front, and showed a missile launcher mounted on the back of a pick-up truck firing on regime positions.

The Syrian Revolution General Commission, a network of activists on the ground, said an operation had begun "to liberate the Taftanaz airbase." The rebels earlier attacked and briefly held an air defence position at Duwila in Idlib, in fighting that killed an army officer and wounded eight rebels, the Observatory said. The fresh clashes came as Syria's political opposition prepared for key talks starting today in Qatar, where the US is expected to push for a new umbrella organisation to unite the country's fractured regime opponents. Reports have emerged that Washington will press for an overhaul of the opposition and its main representative body, the Syrian National Council (SNC), with long-

Limited power returns to lower Manhattan
New York axes marathon amid growing anger

AGENCIES

The lower Manhattan skyline lit up early yesterday morning for the first time since superstorm Sandy slammed into the US Northeast while thousands of storm victims in New Jersey and elsewhere remained in the dark and awaiting disaster relief. The power restoration came as gasoline supplies headed to coastal zones devastated by the record storm surge and to motorists whose patience has been tested by gasoline rationing during the painstaking effort to rebuild. With the US presidential election just three days away, about 3 million homes and business remained without power in a region choked with storm debris and long gas lines reminiscent of the 1970s-era US fuel shortage. Angry storm victims wondered when their lives would return to normal. The US death toll hit 102 on Friday, after Sandy killed 69 people as a hurricane in the Caribbean. Power utility Consolidated Edison, battling what it called the worst natural disaster in the company's 180-year history, restored electricity to neighbourhoods such as Wall Street, Chinatown and Greenwich Village in the pre-dawn hours, leaving 11,000 customers in Manhattan without service. In New Jersey, the utility PSE&G said 612,000 customers were still without lights after power to 1 million had been restored. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg also moved to tamp down rising anger in the most populous US city by dropping plans to hold the city's annual marathon. The city had been expecting more than 40,000 runners in Sunday's event. Disaster modelling company Eqecat estimated Sandy caused up to \$20 billion in insured losses and \$50 billion in economic losses.

Men are happiest at 37
PRI, London

Men reach the peak of happiness at age 37 when they have climbed the career ladder and started a family, according to a new study. Thirty-seven is the age by which most men are settled in a happy relationship and have formed a close circle of friends with which to socialise, according to a study by a UK menswear brand. The dreaded 'mid-life crisis' is still a decade away and their troubled angst-ridden teens are a fading memory, the Daily Mail reported. Becoming a father is particularly rewarding with a beaming 43% of men saying that becoming a parent was one of the happiest days of their life, the study found.

It was followed by getting married, with 35% rating it as one of their top three happiest moments in life, and seeing their favourite football team win the league (18%). Other memorable happy moments include buying a house (17%) or car (7%), proposing to a partner (13%), and graduating from university (9%). Experts say these are all milestones men are likely to have passed by the age of 37 and could explain why it is the 'age of happiness'. Phillip Hodson, fellow of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, said men of 37 typically benefit from health and life experience. Lucy Dobson, from Jacamo, said: "It's great to see that becoming a father and getting married is the key to men's lasting happiness."