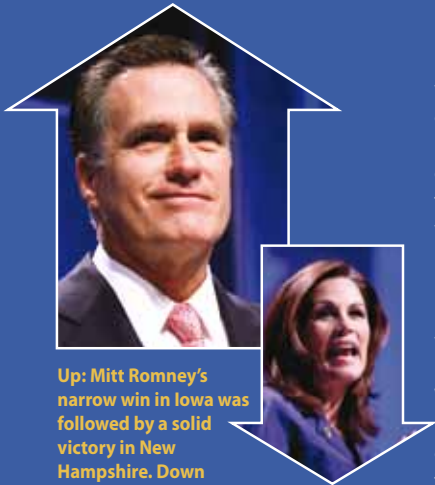




# US ELECTION 2012

## The State of Play

Mitt Romney's time may have come, but will it be enough to land him the Presidency, wonders Sir Robert Worcester



**Up:** Mitt Romney's narrow win in Iowa was followed by a solid victory in New Hampshire. **Down and out:** Michele Bachmann said goodbye in January, unless she can maintain 'Tea Party' presence and ride in as the Vice-Presidential side of the Republican ticket. PHOTOS: GAGE SKIDMORE

When the American election in 2008 hotted up, Hilary Clinton was the front runner until the Iowa caucus, before the black, liberal, intellectual Barack Obama<sup>1</sup> surprised everyone by winning in that midwest farming state. Yet Clinton came back a week later to win in New Hampshire. It's not like that this time. This time it was North Carolina. Everybody, including me, thought that Romney would walk it, and be on his way to the Republican nomination if not to the White House.

Mitt Romney's time had seemingly come, after running for the Presidency for at least 12 years, and more. First he's won in the midwestern state of Iowa, in New England's New Hampshire, but the deep South of South Carolina was his Waterloo. With that

Southern state won, he'd have been well nigh unbeatable.

Still, in my view, the winner of the Republican nomination looks set to be Mitt Romney. The loser at the General Election, Mitt Romney.

One key reason is that in the 'matchup' polls as they call it in the US of A ('trial heats' in Britain), he was in the best position to beat Obama, who was just a point ahead of him, As we say in the punditry business, the Republicans formed a firing squad into a circle and the last week of the primary, it was 'ready, FIRE, aim'.

Herman Cain, Michele Bachmann and now Jon Huntsman and Rick Perry have bit the dust and are out of the race. Huntsman's playing for an important job in the next Administration, whichever it happens to be. Minnesota Congresswoman Michele Bachmann followed Sarah Palin as the Tea Party's great hope but is now back

Iowa Caucus Results (01.04.12) (RCP)			
Candidate	Final Result	RCP	Difference
Romney	24.6	22.8	+1.8
Paul	21.4	21.5	-0.1
Santorum	24.5	16.3	+8.2
Gingrich	13.3	13.7	-0.4
Perry	10.3	11.5	-1.2
Bachmann	5.0	6.8	-1.8
Huntsman	0.6	2.3	-1.7
Others	0.3	5.1	-4.8

New Hampshire Primary Results (01.10.12) (RCP)			
Candidate	Final Result	RCP	Difference
Romney	39.3	37.5	+1.8
Paul	22.9	17.5	+5.4
Santorum	9.4	11.5	-2.1
Gingrich	9.4	10.3	-0.9
Perry	0.7	1	-0.3
Bachmann	0	0	0
Huntsman	16.9	14.5	+2.4
Others	1.4	7.7	-6.3

<sup>1</sup> Worcester, Robert, 'Explaining where, and by whom, a black, liberal, intellectual was elected to be the US President', *Journal of Public Affairs* 9: 143-149 (2009), Wiley.

to obscurity (unless in the curious way American politics works she ends up being Romney's choice to 'balance the ticket' and hopefully deliver the Tea Party vote).

Because the American Constitution doesn't say otherwise, the choice of the Vice President, 'one heartbeat away from the presidency,' is the arbitrary choice of the party's nominee for President. This had a lot of people worried in 2008 when the Republican candidate, Senator John McCain, surprised just about everyone by choosing the then Alaska Governor, Sarah Palin, to be his running mate. The surprise this time could possibly be Bachmann or Cain.

## The Choice v Obama

The political state of the nation is that some 46% of registered voters say they'd vote for Barack Obama to be returned to the White House for a second term, while about 46% say they'd rather have their choice of a Republican candidate and make Obama a one-term president. Their problem is that Republican voters can't necessarily have their 'own' candidate.

When Obama is put head to head against named Republicans, the only ones who stack up are former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, the narrow victor in Iowa and a solid winner in New Hampshire, and Former Speaker Newt Gingrich, the winner in the South Carolina Primary. Neither would walk away with the election in November, but both would put up a good fight. The Republican Right might be holding their noses, but they'd vote for Romney in November, anything to keep Barack Obama from re-election. The moderates would hold their noses but vote for Gingrich for the same reason.

Romney, we thought, won Iowa by just eight votes, but now we know



**Rick Santorum had momentum in Iowa, but fared less well in New Hampshire**

GAGE SKIDMORE

Santorum won by 34 ballots, after certification. By that time he was, we thought, out of the election, and Romney went to New Hampshire the front runner, the best of a bad bunch. Romney has been plagued up to now with the received wisdom that no matter the contest he just couldn't break through his 30% ceiling, nationally or in Iowa or before New Hampshire and South Carolina, in any of the next few early primary states, Florida on the 30th and Arizona and Michigan on the 28th of February. There are also caucus states in February, Maine and Nevada on the 4th and Colorado and Minnesota on the 7th.

Although Gingrich, at 13.3% in Iowa, got just about what final polls suggested (13.7%), Santorum, with just four percent support last October in Iowa, nearly tied Romney on the day. He did brilliantly, increasing his share of the vote by just over what had been thought to have been his share in the late Iowa polls, as the Republican right scrambled for a candidate, any candidate, to keep Romney from securing the nomination. It didn't work in New Hampshire.

This performance in the polls for the one candidate is a remarkable occurrence, suggesting either (or probably both) a huge 'silent majority' (first so-called in the 1964 presidential contest when Senator Barry Goldwater's spinmeisters tried to explain low poll ratings by forecasting that a 'silent majority' was there all along) or that on election day the pollsters would be proved to be massively out of line. They weren't, but I've never seen anything quite like the vast underestimate represented by the difference between Santorum's 16.3% final poll average (the last two had him at 18%) and the 24.5% he actually received from the Republicans and Independents attending the caucuses and voting in them. No question that Santorum certainly had the momentum in the final few days of the Iowa contest. Yet it faded within the week.

Now we know the result in South Carolina where Newt Gingrich astonished us all, overtaking Romney who fell sharply back to 28%, his core support, Romney had a ten point lead less than a week before the election.

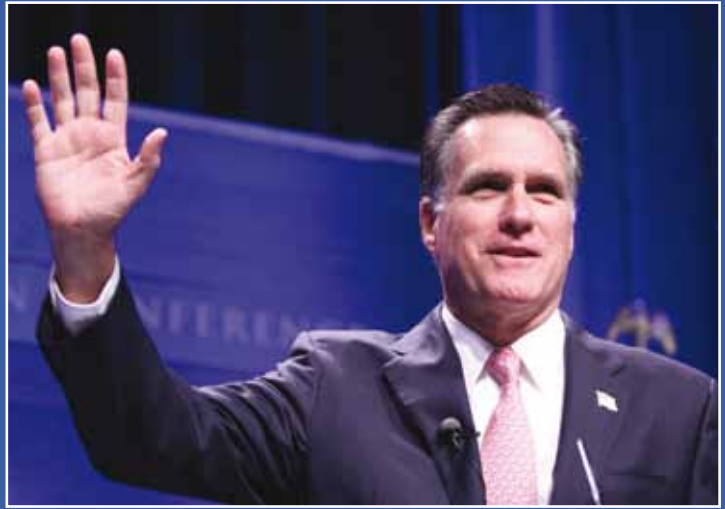
On the day, there was a huge swing

to Gingrich, coming almost entirely from the 'odds and sods'. One factor that has seldom been mentioned is that South Carolina was an 'open' primary, where anyone could vote, not just registered Republicans. It isn't like that in Florida, where only people who are Registered Republicans can vote in the primary. This might indeed have been one of the reasons that Gingrich with all the baggage he carries was the White House's wished-for opponent for the President, and 'yellow-dog Democrats' might just have been tempted to vote in the Republican primary in South Carolina for Newt Gingrich.

Gingrich had a huge lead in Florida during December, low 40s vs. low 30s for Romney, then with the Iowa caucus this reversed, before the surprise Gingrich victory in South Carolina, and has now bounced back, from an 18 point lead for Romney to now an 8 point lead for Gingrich, a 13 point 'swing' in less than a week.

### The Caucus Effect

I suspect the massive overestimate of the other 'odds and sods' who received votes from those attending the caucuses, first in Iowa and then in a slew of states in the West (e.g. Washington,



**Romney: a Mormon, but 'not Christian', according to some evangelical Republicans**

GAGE SKIDMORE

Wyoming, Idaho, Nevada and North Dakota) and a few in other states (e.g. Maine, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado and Minnesota) have been the difference between the wishful thinkers saying they'd vote for 'the nice guy next door' or whomever, and the realisation on the day that to do so would be daft, and they'd go with the flow. The so-called 'Caucus Effect' of your friends and neighbours openly arguing that you should join them in their corner and support their candidate can have a powerful impact. That is why the secret

ballot was instituted. In primary elections ballots are secret and individual conscience allows the individual to vote, in secret, for the candidate of their choice in a democratic election.

One thing that still stands between Romney and the nomination, however, is his religion. The widely respected Pew organisation looked closely at this in November. At the time it received little attention, but now it is worth looking at more closely. At that time, only about half of all registered voters, including six in ten self-acknowledged

Rank				Change last month	Candidate	Position	RCP %			
End Sept	Early Nov	End Nov	Mid Jan				Nov 6	Dec 12	Jan 16	Jan 24
1	2	2	1	+1	Mitt Romney	Former Gov., Michigan	22	21	31	29
9	3	1	2	-1	Newt Gingrich	Former Speaker	12	33	16	24
N/R	8	7	3	+4	Rick Santorum	Senator, Pennsylvania	2	4	14	14
4	5	4	3	-1	Ron Paul	Congressman, Texas	8	10	13	14
2	4	5	5 <sup>2</sup>	=	Rick Perry	Governor, Texas	10	7	6	-

N/R – Not Rated in [www.realclearpolitics.com](http://www.realclearpolitics.com) average of recent polls (11.01.12 - 23.01.12) which included polls from CBS News, Fox, Gallup, CNN/ORC, Pew and Reuters/Ipsos, (further details on their web sites)

<sup>2</sup> Cain, Bachmann and Huntsman have dropped out of the race, as now has Perry

South Carolina Primary Results (01.21.12) (RCP)			
Candidate	Final Result	RCP	Diff.
Romney	27.8	28.5	-0.7
Paul	13	13.8	-0.8
Santorum	17	11.8	+5.2
Gingrich	40.4	33.5	+6.9
Perry	0.4	2.5	-2.1
Others	1.4	9.9	-8.5

evangelical Republicans, know that Romney is a Mormon. Over half of them say that the Mormon religion is not Christian.

Over the years, pollsters have put to the American public the question of voting for a Mormon, and around one American in five has had the view that they would never vote for a Mormon. It stands to reason that many of these voters are more likely than others of different religions to be Republicans. In the American electoral scene, one question not yet explored (so far as my research has uncovered) is the effect that this prejudice against a Mormon president has on turnout. It could be argued that his previous inability to crack the 30% level of support before New Hampshire partly reflects Republicans' reluctance to support him on the basis of his religion.

Romney is out-raising and out-spending his opponents now, and this will continue right up to the Republican convention in August. It may prove to be a good investment in procuring the Republican nomination; it is unlikely in my view to give him the Presidency. ★

*Sir Robert Worcester is the Founder of MORI, Follow him for updates on twitter: @RobertWorcester.*