



## BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

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Contact: Ashley Clark  
(202) 637-1456  
[aclark@bipartisanpolicy.org](mailto:aclark@bipartisanpolicy.org)

Curtis Gans  
(540) 822-5292  
[curtis.gans@gmail.com](mailto:curtis.gans@gmail.com)

### **2012 GOP Primary Turnout Lower Than 2008, 2000**

#### **Higher in Some States with Open or Semi-Open Primaries**

*Washington, D.C.* - Average Republican turnout in the presidential primaries through this week's Super Tuesday contests has been smaller than the average turnout in the primaries in the same states in both 2008 and 2000, the previous two years of competitive GOP contests.

Based on final and official results from the six states whose primaries preceded Super Tuesday and near final and unofficial results from the seven Super Tuesday primaries, 7,846,172 voted out of 68,125,000 eligible citizens or 11.5 percent. Turnout in 2008 was 13.2 percent of eligibles and it was 12.2 in 2000.

Of the thirteen states with presidential primaries which have voted so far, eight had lower turnout than 2008, five had higher – all states that allowed independents or both independents and Democrats to vote in the GOP primaries in a year when there was no Democratic presidential contest.

These were some of the highlights of a joint preliminary report on GOP primary turnout released by the Bipartisan Policy Center and the Center for the Study of the American Electorate on Thursday.

The state with the highest turnout was New Hampshire where 24.5 percent of eligibles voted, higher than the 24.2 percent that voted in 2008, but lower than the 26.41 which voted in 2000. In South Carolina 17.3 percent of eligibles voted higher than the 13.5 percent that voted in 2008, but lower than the 19.5 percent that voted in 2000. Ohio's 2012 turnout was 13.9 percent, higher than the 12.8 who voted in 2008, but lower than the 16.8 who voted in 2000. Michigan had a higher turnout in 2012 (13.6 percent of eligibles) than the 12.0 percent that voted in 2008, but lower than the 19.6 percent who voted in 2000. The other state with higher 2012 turnout as compared to 2008 was Vermont where 11.8 percent of eligibles voted as compared to only 8.3 percent in 2008. But the 2012 turnout was substantially lower than the 18.0 percent who turned out in 2000.

The two states with the lowest turnouts and the largest decreases since 2008 were Virginia whose turnout was 4.6 percent of eligibles and substantially lower than the 8.8 percent who voted in 2008; and Missouri where 5.6 percent of eligibles cast their ballots, lower than the 13.5 percent who voted in 2008. But they had an excuse for their delinquency. Missouri's primary came highly advertised as a "beauty contest" which would have no bearing on delegate allocation and only two candidates, Mitt Romney and Ron Paul, were on the Virginia ballot.

Other states with lower turnout included Massachusetts where 7.8 percent of eligibles voted compared to 10.9 in 2008 and 11.1 in 2000; Tennessee where 11.5 percent of eligibles voted as compared to 12.1 in 2008; Georgia with a 2012 turnout of 13.2 percent compared to 15.0 percent in 2008; Oklahoma with a turnout of 10.5 as compared to 12.6 in 2008; Florida whose 2012 turnout of 12.4 percent of eligibles was substantially lower than the 15.4 percent who voted in 2008; and Arizona where 10.4 percent of eligibles voted in 2012 compared to the 13.3 percent who voted in 2000.

While the turnout trends in primaries does not have a history of correlation with general election turnout and the Republican Party is likely to be united against President Obama, both the divisions within the party, the lack of enthusiasm with the primary candidates by a large elements of the party and the comparatively low turnout may signal a turnout decline in this year's general election.

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**About the Bipartisan Policy Center:**

Founded in 2007 by former Senate Majority Leaders Howard Baker, Tom Daschle, Bob Dole and George Mitchell, the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) is a non-profit organization that drives principled solutions through rigorous analysis, reasoned negotiation, and respectful dialogue. With projects in multiple issue areas, BPC combines politically-balanced policymaking with strong, proactive advocacy and outreach. For more information, please visit our website: [www.bipartisanpolicy.org](http://www.bipartisanpolicy.org).

Republican Turnout as a Percentage of VAP - Burnham 2012 vs 2008 - 1992  
 President - Primary Races

ST	2012 VAP	2012		2008		2004		2000		1996		1992	
		2012 VAP	% VAP Turnout	% VAP Voted	+/-12-08 Points	% VAP Voted	+/-12-04 Points	% VAP Voted	+/-12-00 Points	% VAP Voted	+/-12-96 Points	% VAP Voted	+/-12-92 Points
AZ	4,422,000	458,631	10.37	13.27	-2.90	—	—	9.53	0.84	11.54	-1.17	—	—
FL	13,427,000	1,659,292	12.36	15.42	-3.06	—	—	6.32	6.04	8.65	3.71	9.26	3.10
GA	6,810,000	876,760	12.87	14.98	-2.11	2.67	10.20	11.34	1.53	10.58	2.29	9.31	3.58
MA	4,689,000	361,381	7.71	10.88	-3.17	1.53	6.18	11.09	-3.38	6.41	1.30	6.11	1.60
MI	7,307,000	996,126	13.63	12.01	1.62	—	—	19.60	-5.97	7.54	6.09	6.62	7.01
MO	4,505,000	252,185	5.60	13.47	-7.87	2.91	2.69	11.61	-8.01	—	—	—	—
NH	1,017,000	248,741	24.46	24.20	0.26	6.74	17.72	26.41	-1.95	23.69	0.77	20.91	3.55
OH	8,643,000	1,194,873	13.82	12.84	0.98	9.23	4.59	16.80	-2.98	11.73	2.09	10.71	3.11
OK	2,736,000	286,298	10.46	12.63	-2.17	2.58	7.88	5.02	5.44	10.99	-0.53	9.38	1.08
SC	3,487,000	603,856	17.32	13.48	3.84	—	—	19.51	-2.19	9.93	7.39	5.66	11.68
TN	4,781,000	550,169	11.51	12.10	-0.59	2.26	9.25	5.97	5.54	7.26	4.25	6.54	4.97
VT	494,000	56,614	11.46	8.30	3.16	5.94	5.52	18.00	-6.54	13.30	-1.84	—	—
VA	5,807,000	265,520	4.57	8.81	-4.24	—	—	13.20	-8.63	—	—	—	—
Overall:	68,125,000	7,810,446	11.46	13.15	-1.69	4.39	7.07	12.24	-0.77	9.58	1.88	8.58	2.89

## Additional Charts to Follow the Commentary

### COMMENTARY:

**(This commentary represents only the views of Curtis Gans, Director of the Center for the Study of the American Electorate.)**

### Why the 2012 Nominating Process is Working As It Should.

Republican governors are worried, it is reported, that the likely long, drawn-out nominating process will weaken their chances for victory in November. Their worries are misdirected.

A process of similar length in 2008 heightened the national interest in the Democratic Party's two candidates, created largely favorable feelings for both and, probably, made the party's road to victory smoother. The problem for the GOP lies not with the process but rather with their candidates.

With one exception -- the selfish and self-defeating action of the Florida Republican Party in defying the GOP rules by moving its primary into January and forcing voting in Iowa's caucuses to be held in the first week in January rather than the first week in February -- the 2012 nominating system has worked as planned. It winnowed the field of the unprepared and unqualified. It allowed candidates without substantial funds (read Santorum) to compete on the basis of equality with candidates who had enormous financial backing (read Romney). It provided time and space for candidates to build support and raise money based on their early successes and to pick and choose their targets of opportunity. Coupled with the salutary effects of the large number of debates, the process has been elongated enough to eliminate any rush to judgment and has made possible a thorough scrutiny of the candidates' character, judgment, advocacy and response to challenge. And the system, in ensuring that no candidate could win sufficient delegates for nomination before April, has given the party leadership time to decide whether any of the current and flawed crop of candidates will provide adequate competition in November or whether remedial measures need to be taken.

The 2012 presidential nominating process is a minor miracle, in many ways: It was the product of cooperation between the major parties and was ratified and installed by both. It ended, one hopes, 40 years of quadrennial changes and is likely to prove durable. It constructively addresses all the important aspects of creating a method by which each major party chooses the person who may become the president of the most powerful nation in the world and provides for both continuity and orderly change. This new system will not be without post-election challenge, which is why a vigorous defense of its essence and its complexity is needed.

Most other advanced democracies operate under a parliamentary system in which the legislative and executive branches of government are fused, parties tend to reflect class and/or ideological differences and leadership is chosen by a caucus of each party's elected legislators (the leader of the majority party or coalition becoming, in the process, prime minister).

In the United States, the president is the symbolic and, at least since 1912, the de facto leader of the nation. The choice of the major party nominees is a choice, not simply of the leadership of each party but also the direction of each party, and for the general election winner,

the nation. Since the 1820s, the ultimate power to choose those nominees has been vested in the delegates to the quadrennial conventions of each party. The difference between then and now is how those delegates are selected.

From the 1820s through 1968 and with one significant 1912 amendment, the delegates were chosen by the party organizations in each state. Those organizations most often featured top-down control by state party leaders and, in some cases, city and state unelected bosses. The conventions tended to make their selections by horse trading among regions, factions and interests. Only rarely, as in 1860, was a major ideological issue at the heart of decision-making. Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Dwight Eisenhower (all major and positive figures) were selected under this system. But for those longing for the “good old days” of smoke-filled rooms and back room deals, it should be noted that this system also produced Millard Fillmore, Ulysses S. Grant, Rutherford Hayes, Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge who, for whatever virtues they might have had, were not of the ability and stature commensurate with national leadership. This system also produced a convention in 1860 that took more than 50 ballots to nominate Stephen Douglas and one in 1924 that took 103 ballots to nominate John Davis, both losers in the general election and was at the root of the Democratic donnybrook convention of 1968.

Thanks to the Progressive movement and their depiction of the parties as being under corrupt oligarchical control, this system was modified in 1912 to include party primaries. But these primaries, limited to about a dozen each election year and electing only a fraction of the delegates needed to nominate, were primarily advisory (testing the electability of potential candidates) ruling some out, like Robert Taft and Hubert Humphrey, and enhancing the chances of others, like John F. Kennedy and Barry Goldwater. But the convention was still controlled by unelected party leadership delegates, as Estes Kefauver who won several primaries in 1952, learned.

This system died in the aftermath of the 1968 Democratic convention. At the time of that convention, both the party and the nation had turned against the war in Vietnam, the issue that had divided the party in the primaries. With one exception, the anti-war candidates, either Sen.

Eugene McCarthy or Sen. Robert Kennedy, had won every primary and every accessible party caucus. Yet, the convention was controlled by President Johnson and delegations selected, largely, before the 1968 contests and delegates who were not bound by the results of the contests in their states. The convention nominated his chosen nominee, Vice-President Hubert Humphrey and overwhelmingly defeated a resolution aimed at placing a peace plank in the party's platform. The divisions within the party that existed prior to the convention were exacerbated by the convention, probably cost the Democrats the presidency in the general election and mandated greater internal democracy in the selection of nominees. The road to a sensible more democratic process would turn out to be pitted by potholes.

A commission to effect those changes was created which, in turn, produced a series of reforms, including mandating that all delegates would be selected by processes started in the election year; that all delegates would be bound to the winner of the primary or caucus within their state; that filing deadlines would be established close to each state's contests in order to ensure easy access for candidates; and that there would be quotas in each state's delegation for women, minorities and the young proportional to their proportion in the population. This led to the 1972 Democratic convention where Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and the Illinois delegation were kicked out of the convention for violating the rules, the attorney general of New York addressed the convention and a national prime-time television audience as "Fellow lettuce boycotters," and the presidential candidate gave his acceptance speech at 2 a.m.

Over the next 12 years, the excesses of total democracy were tempered: by mandating that 25 percent of convention delegates would be party leaders who were not required to support the winner of their state's primaries or caucuses, by establishing proportional allocation of delegates based on percentage of votes won, and by softening the initially rigid quota system for various groups. The number of primaries increased from 12 in 1968 to 22 in 1972 to 37 in 1976. The Republican Party, in the main, followed the Democratic contest schedule while allocating delegates in a different manner. Tempered democracy, with only a few squawks about "unrepresentative" Iowa and New Hampshire holding their contests first, worked. Greater harmony reigned, qualified candidates were nominated in both parties - a peace that lasted until 1988.

In 1984, the Democratic candidate, former Vice-President Walter Mondale lost by a landslide. Southern Democratic party leaders believed Mondale lost because he was too liberal for the country and very much too liberal for their more conservative region. They decided to have a greater voice in the choice of nominee by moving most of their region's primaries up to shortly after Iowa and New Hampshire, creating the first multi-contest Super Tuesday. What they failed to realize was that while their region as a whole was more conservative than the rest of the nation, the Southern Democratic Party was not, in part due to the influx of recently enfranchised African-Americans, thanks to the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The results of the 15-contest first Super Tuesday were instructive. The Rev. Jesse Jackson won five contests. The "northern" candidate, Michael Dukakis won five contests. And the "Southern" candidate, Al Gore, won the remaining five. Instead of saying, "Wow, that was a dumb idea," most of the Southern states continued to group themselves early in the process and many states from other regions also started to move their contests forward into another cluster. The result was that two-thirds of the delegates were chosen within a month of the Iowa caucuses.

The resulting system was deeply and dangerously flawed. Because two-thirds of the states were grouped within three weeks of the Iowa caucuses, candidates needed to raise huge sums of money in advance in order to compete in the clustered primaries. Given this need and campaign finance regulations that limited individual contributions to \$1,000 and political action committee contributions to \$5,000, candidates were forced to announce their candidacies more than a year before the first vote was cast. The clustering of states also meant that candidacy was limited to the rich, the famous or those with wide access to potential funders. Because there was a year between announcement and actual votes, it empowered the press to become arbiter of candidate strength and elevated ersatz events such as straw polls and funding levels to exaggerated importance. The lack of time between the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary and the clustered contests (one called Super Tuesday, the other Mega-Tuesday) unduly enhanced the importance of the results in the two early states. The grouping of so many states together in the super and mega Tuesdays and the need to reach all of them within two weeks made the only cost-beneficial mode of campaigning the worst of American politics: tit for tat attack advertising. The compressed schedule effectively served to rush judgment before candidates - for the highest office of the land -

had been subject to sufficient scrutiny, and in two years, 1988 and 2004, led to Democratic nominations for individuals who were insufficiently vetted.

In 1999 leaders of the Rules Committees of both major parties began a joint effort to reverse some of the changes that had occurred since 1988 and create a nominating process that met the high calling of nominating an American president. To eliminate the need to enter a year in advance of the vote, raise huge initial sums of money and hand the media power to shape the race and render early judgment on the candidates, the new rules would mandate four early contests in states of modest populations to be held in February. While the framers of the new rules chose not to challenge (and likely need to litigate) Iowa's first in the nation caucuses and New Hampshire's first in the nation primary, they chose to add contests in Nevada and South Carolina to test the candidates' mettle in varied demographic environments. They mandated a four week pause between the four early contests and the ensuing ones to permit those who had made a positive showing to raise the necessary capital and create the necessary organization to continue to compete. They provided incentives for states to move their contests later in the process and by virtue of that reducing the frontloading and grouping of primaries and enhancing grassroots activities beyond the first two contests, by allowing only those contests which occurred after the end of March to award their delegates on a winner-take-all basis. This, in turn, made it impossible for any individual candidate to amass a sufficient number of delegates for nomination before April and ensured that candidates would get tested and evaluated against different political challenges and demographics. The elongated campaign also made possible, should party leadership deem it necessary or an individual see opportunity, late entrants to the competition. The new system retained one facet from the old: that each convention would have a percentage of non-elected leadership delegates should the need arise for convention decision.

(There was an additional side benefit to the new rules. By providing incentives for states to move their contests later in the calendar, it also permitted them schedule primaries and caucuses for state and other federal offices on the same day as the presidential primary and thus save money.)

Thanks to the GOP leadership in Florida and the ten states that decided to move their primaries to a single early date and create another Super Tuesday this year, the implementation of the new rules has been imperfect. On the other hand, Florida was penalized, losing half their convention votes and may be further penalized by having their winner-take-all rules disallowed. And the states that moved their contests up may realize, as did some who did so in 2008, that they didn't determine the eventual winner and that the power to do so rests and rested with states whose primaries and caucuses occur later in the year.

What has been created and is in place is a system that is worthy of choosing a potential American president, provides for both continuity and the potential for orderly change; doesn't unduly advantage the monied; emphasizes citizen involvement; winnows the field through early small state exposure; allows for flexibility; provides a sufficiently long track for thorough evaluation; precludes a rush to judgment; reduces, through exposure in real electoral contests over time, the power of both free and paid media; makes possible both late entering candidates and leadership and/or convention decision-making and should produce qualified and tested candidate

It is a system worthy of support and preservation.

### Accompanying Charts:

Ranked Order - 2012  
Republican President - Primary Turnout as a Percentage of VAP - Burnham

	2012 VAP	2012 Turnout	2012 % VAP Voted
1) NH	1,017,000	248,741	24.46%
2) SC	3,487,000	603,856	17.32%
3) OH	8,643,000	1,199,802	13.88%
4) MI	7,307,000	996,126	13.63%
5) GA	6,810,000	900,345	13.22%
6) FL	13,427,000	1,659,292	12.36%
7) VT	494,000	58,162	11.77%
8) TN	4,781,000	550,169	11.51%
9) OK	2,736,000	286,298	10.46%
10) AZ	4,422,000	458,631	10.37%
11) MA	4,689,000	367,044	7.83%
12) MO	4,505,000	252,185	5.60%
13) VA	5,807,000	265,521	4.57%

Republican Turnout as a Percentage of VAP - Burnham 2012 vs 2008  
 Ranked By Percent Point Difference  
 President - Primary Races

ST	2012 VAP	2012 Turnout	2012	2008	— -2012 - 2008 —	
			% VAP Voted	% VAP Voted	Point Diff /	% Diff
SC	3,487,000	603,856	17.32	13.48	3.84 /	28.49
VT	494,000	58,162	11.77	8.30	3.47 /	41.81
MI	7,307,000	996,126	13.63	12.01	1.62 /	13.49
OH	8,643,000	1,199,802	13.88	12.84	1.04 /	8.10
NH	1,017,000	248,741	24.46	24.20	0.26 /	1.07
TN	4,781,000	550,169	11.51	12.10	-0.59 /	-4.88
GA	6,810,000	900,345	13.22	14.98	-1.76 /	-11.75
OK	2,736,000	286,298	10.46	12.63	-2.17 /	-17.18
AZ	4,422,000	458,631	10.37	13.27	-2.90 /	-21.85
MA	4,689,000	367,044	7.83	10.88	-3.05 /	-28.03
FL	13,427,000	1,659,292	12.36	15.42	-3.06 /	-19.84
VA	5,807,000	265,521	4.57	8.81	-4.24 /	-48.13
MO	4,505,000	252,185	5.60	13.47	-7.87 /	-58.43

Republican Turnout as a Percentage of VAP - Burnham 2012 vs 2000  
 Ranked By Percent Point Difference  
 President - Primary Races

ST	2012 VAP	2012 Turnout	2012	2000	— -2012 - 2000 —	
			% VAP Voted	% VAP Voted	Point Diff /	% Diff
FL	13,427,000	1,659,292	12.36	6.32	6.04 /	95.57
TN	4,781,000	550,169	11.51	5.97	5.54 /	92.80
OK	2,736,000	286,298	10.46	5.02	5.44 /	108.37
GA	6,810,000	900,345	13.22	11.34	1.88 /	16.58
AZ	4,422,000	458,631	10.37	9.53	0.84 /	8.81
NH	1,017,000	248,741	24.46	26.41	-1.95 /	-7.38
SC	3,487,000	603,856	17.32	19.51	-2.19 /	-11.23
OH	8,643,000	1,199,802	13.88	16.80	-2.92 /	-17.38
MA	4,689,000	367,044	7.83	11.09	-3.26 /	-29.40
MI	7,307,000	996,126	13.63	19.60	-5.97 /	-30.46
MO	4,505,000	252,185	5.60	11.61	-6.01 /	-51.77
VT	494,000	58,162	11.77	18.00	-6.23 /	-34.61
VA	5,807,000	265,521	4.57	13.20	-8.63 /	-65.38

**NOTES**

1. Turnout is the percentage of eligible citizens who vote. It is not the percentage of those registered who vote. Eligible citizens is a stable and continuing denominator, changing only by virtue of population increase. Registration levels can change with changes in law and administration, the timing and effectiveness of list maintenance and cleaning, and the accuracy of the registration lists.
2. The eligible citizens denominator in this report is based on the biennial Census enumeration of those age-eligible minus the non-citizen population estimates contained in the Census' American Community Survey and interpolated backward for previous years and forward on the basis of rate of change in the previous decade. For spring primaries, the interpolated denominator used is between April and April.

3. This report does not contain any data on caucuses - because accurate turnout numbers are not easily attainable and because the places holding caucuses tend to change each election year.
4. There will be a report on turnout after the presidential primaries have been completed, but the comparisons between this year and previous ones will be less useful, since in each recent previous year one candidate was able to claim victory well before the primary season ended.