

## Mitt Romney – Five Reasons for a Lack of Enthusiasm

By Jacob Skinner

Is there a lack of enthusiasm for this year's group of GOP candidates? If voter turnout is any indication of enthusiasm then maybe there is. On 5 March 2012, CNN reported that voter turnout in this year's Republican primary is down by nine percent over 2008.<sup>1</sup> Many fault Mitt Romney because his candidacy has failed to coalesce a strong following, and some also blame him for being a bore. Another reason for a lack of enthusiasm is the negative effects of a supposed long primary; although, to counter this claim, it is worth remembering that George H.W. Bush did not drop out of the 1980 primary race against leading candidate Ronald Reagan until May.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the reason for a lack of enthusiasm, this article examines five reasons why voters may feel less than enthused about 2012 GOP front-runner Mitt Romney.

Reason one: Mitt Romney is a Mormon. Mormonism values high moral standards and the virtues of conforming and normative behavior. Mormons abstain from drugs, alcohol, smoking, drinking tea or coffee, and take a conservative approach to sexuality.<sup>3</sup> One is also unlikely to find a faithful Mormon who swears or is comfortable when an off-colour joke is made. The appearance of the stereotypical Mormon mirrors their lifestyle: clean shaven, with perfectly coiffed hair, and conservative dress (especially when they are public figures). Indeed, Mormons are the opposite of the 'bad boy,' and thus, can appear stiff and bland by comparison. This pushes Mormons to be socially insular, limiting social opportunities to interact with non-Mormons, who conclude they are a bit of a bore.

This stereotype may contribute to the second reason: Romney's inability to connect with others. While Mormon traits are desirable, being too 'perfect' can create distance with others. As well, the Mormon focus on family often comes at the expense of developing friendships. One of Romney's partners at Bain Capital said of him: "He didn't go out for a beer, of course, but he also rarely went out with the guys in any social venue. He was all business or all family."<sup>4</sup> Another partner called Romney "the tin man for his inability to bond."<sup>5</sup>

Mitt's wealth is the third problem, leading to claims he lacks the common touch. That he has not known financial adversity makes Romney less relatable to the public. He and his wife, Ann, have made gaffes that emphasized the gap between their lifestyle and that of everyday Americans. In his speech to the Detroit Economic Club prior to the Michigan primary, Romney described the many American-made cars that he owns, including two Cadillacs driven exclusively by his wife.<sup>6</sup> His comment that he "likes to be able to fire people" drew criticism from a sensitive American public who see unemployment as a key

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<sup>1</sup> Libby Lewis, "What Color is the GOP Electoral Mood Ring," *CNN.COM*, 5 March, 2012. Accessed 5 March, 2012. [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com)

<sup>2</sup> Mark O. Hatfield, *Vice Presidents of the United States, 1789-1993* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), 529-538.

<sup>3</sup> Mormons limit sexual activity to marital relationships, and oppose homosexuality.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Kranish and Scott Helman, *The Real Romney* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2012), 158.

<sup>5</sup> Kranish and Helman, 158.

<sup>6</sup> Zach Carter, "Mitt Doubles Down on Cadillac Gaffe," *Huffington Post*, 26 February, 2012. Accessed 7 March, 2012. [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com)

issue.<sup>7</sup> Comments like these make Romney appear out of touch, insensitive, and sometimes boastful of his riches, which can cause resentment and dislike.

A fourth reason is the 'modern' electoral campaign, which is data driven, negative, and subject to the whims of social media and the 24-hour news cycle. Having the incumbent president, Democrats do not have a primary this time around, making the Republican primary appear more divisive and bitter than it really is. This has cooled some voters. Problems have also arisen for Romney as he has tried to control his branding. This attempt at message management sometimes contradicts Romney's past efforts at strategic branding. On *The Daily Show*, Jon Stewart regularly embarrasses the Romney campaign for flip-flopping, airing past footage which makes Romney appear hypocritical and groundless.

The final reason for a lack of enthusiasm is President Barack Obama's likeability. Romney is forced to compare his personality with Obama's, which is typically more charismatic in public. A perfect example of this contrast is the January 2012 Obama-Romney 'sing-off.' At a fundraiser at Harlem's Apollo Theater, President Obama's skilled rendition of Al Green's "Let's Stay Together" garnered the type of wild cheering one might find at a rock concert. In contrast, when Mitt Romney sang "America the Beautiful" at a Florida Seniors Home, he was met with sporadic applause. *The Washington Post's* Jonathan Capehart noted the comparison: "If the November election were a sing-off the Obama's would not have to bother looking for moving boxes."<sup>8</sup>

Lucky for Romney the election is not a singing competition because while the preceding five reasons for a lack of enthusiasm are legitimate, many of these same qualities will endear him to Americans by Election Day. The clean cut image and conservative social behaviour appeals to an older demographic who vote in greater numbers. Romney may not have many friends, but his success as a family man is hard to argue. If success at home came at the expense of close friendships, this is something many Americans can respect. Romney's singing voice may not match Obama's, but his song choice was more patriotic and the venue indicated the audience Romney seeks. In 2008, Obama's patriotism was questioned for failing to wear an American flag lapel pin, fueling rumours regarding his religious affiliation and citizenship.<sup>9</sup> The McCain Campaign also worked to turn Obama's celebrity into a weakness by making him appear aloofly arrogant.<sup>10</sup>

Enthusiasm for Romney will likely increase as Republicans unite behind him in anticipation of the election. Some Americans will vote for President Obama based on his popularity, but those feeling less well off in 2012 may punish him by voting for Romney. Romney may be a bore and his wealth may make him appear out of touch, but his prosperity is the product of business success - something many see as an essential qualification for the presidency. In this case, Mitt Romney may benefit from the perception that he is the better candidate for the job, maybe just not the most likeable.

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew Rosenthal, "Memo to Mitt Romney: We Get it. You're Rich," *The New York Times*, 28 February, 2012. Accessed 7 March, 2012. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Capehart, "Obama wins sing off with Romney," *The Washington Post*, 31 January, 2012. Accessed 5 March, 2012. [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

<sup>9</sup> E. J. Dionne, Jr, "President Obama as an Alien," *The Washington Post*, 22 February, 2012. Accessed 9 March, 2012. [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

<sup>10</sup> Jim Rutenberg, "McCain Tries to Define Obama as Out of Touch," *The New York Times*, 31 July, 2008. Accessed 9 March, 2012. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)