



Political Insiders Poll



Who would be the **Republicans' strongest presidential nominee** in 2012?

Democrats (111 votes)

Rank	Candidate	Percentage
1.	Mitt Romney	29 percent
2.	John Thune	15 percent
3.	Tim Pawlenty	13 percent
4.	Mitch Daniels	11 percent
5.	Newt Gingrich	6 percent
6.	Haley Barbour	5 percent
6.	Jeb Bush	5 percent
8.	Mike Huckabee	3 percent
8.	Bobby Jindal	3 percent
8.	Sarah Palin	3 percent

Also receiving votes: Dick Cheney, 2 percent; Michael Bloomberg, Eric Cantor, Jon Huntsman, Rick Perry, Colin Powell, Marco Rubio, Rick Santorum, no one, 1 percent each.

Romney

"He can raise money, has something of a national base, has been around the presidential block, can talk about the economy, looks good on TV, and handles himself well."

"The challenge for Romney will be to find his own voice rather than adopting the rhetoric of the fringe elements of his party."

"Romney can present a moderate look with economic credentials and a 'fix-it' attitude."

"He can run as an outsider, which will likely be compelling in 2012."

"A little early, but it needs to be a Mitt Romney type—non-D.C. [candidate] who lets Obama be the issue. At this point, the public is going to vote against Obama as they voted against Bush."

"The 2012 elections are likely to be about leadership, competence, and the economy. And Romney, at this moment, is the strongest candidate."

Thune

"Sen. Thune will be a fresh and good-looking face on the national GOP stage in 2012."

"Don't think he'll be the nominee, but he is by far the scariest Republican of all: smart, hard-right but smooth edges, movie-star looks, great on TV. Yikes!"

"Telegenic, smart, pragmatic, and already a giant killer, [having defeated then-Senate Democratic Leader Tom] Daschle."

Pawlenty

"Executive experience, Midwest swing state, minimal psycho factor."

"He is conservative and looks and sounds reasonable enough not to scare off the moderates. I know that Thune is the flavor of the month, but do people really think a former lobbyist can win the presidency?"

"Democrats would have a tough time against a moderate, non-D.C. politician, governor from Minnesota throughout the Upper Midwest, Rust Belt, and probably the Northwest."

Daniels

"Budget-cutting technocrat governors may be in vogue. And he hails from an Obama state."

"A huge success story to tell."

"While being a bit charismatically challenged, his record of fiscal responsibility (turning a deficit into a surplus), bipartisanship, pragmatism would be the best counter to President Obama."

Gingrich

"He has new and creative ideas, even if they are also scary and misguided."

Barbour

"Is the smartest politician in the potential field. Haley is not a matinee idol, but he is thinner than [William Howard] Taft and better looking than John Quincy Adams."

"He is wicked smart and has a solid record of achievement as governor."

Bush

"In a couple years, there will be fonder memories of GWB among nonideological voters."

Huckabee

"He is likable, which is an important quality for any candidate, but especially important for the Republican presidential candidate."

Palin

"No one will be as good at appealing to the populist anger as Sarah."

—JAMES A. BARNES AND PETER BELL

NationalJournal.com

See whom prominent political bloggers picked as the 2012 Republican nominee by visiting the Insiders Poll online.

Democratic Political Insiders Jill Alper, Brad Bannon, Dave Beattie, Andy Bechhoefer, Cornell Belcher, Matt Bennett, Mitchell W. Berger, Mike Berman, Stephanie Bosh, Paul Brathwaite, Donna Brazile, Mark Brewer, Ed Bruley, George Bruno, Deb Callahan, Bonnie Campbell, Bill Carrick, Guy Cecil, Martin J. Chavez, Tony Coelho, Jerry Crawford, Stephanie Cutter, Jeff Danielson, Peter Daou, Howard Dean, Jim Demers, Tad Devine, David Di Martino, Debbie Dingell, Monica Dixon, Patrick Dorton, Anita Dunn, Jeff Eller, Steve Elmendorf, Carter Eskew, Eric Eve, Vic Fazio, Peter Fenn, Scott Ferson, Jim Fleischmann, Tina Flournoy, Don Foley, Don Fowler, Vincent Frillici, Gina Glantz, Niles Godes, John Michael Gonzalez, Joe Grandmaison, Anna Greenberg, Stan Greenberg, Pat Griffin, Larry Grisolan, Michael Gronstal, Lisa Grove, Marcia Hale, Jill Hanauer, Dick Harpootian, Paul Harstad, Laura Hartigan, Mike Henry, Karen Hicks, Leo Hindery Jr., Harold Ickes, Marcus Jadotte, John Jameson, Steve Jarding, Jonathon Jones, Jim Jordan, Gale Kaufman, Lisa Kountoupes, Kam Kuwata, Celinda Lake, David Lang, Penny Lee, Chris Lehane, Jeff Link, Bill Lynch, Bob Maloney, Steve Marchand, Jim Margolis, Paul Maslin, Keith Mason, Terry McAuliffe, Susan McCue, Gerald McEntee, Tom McMahon, Phil McNamara, David Medina, Mark Mellman, John Merrigan, Steve Murphy, Janet Napolitano, David Nassar, Marcia Nichols, John Norris, Tom Ochs, Tom O'Donnell, Scott Parven, Jeffrey Peck, Debora Pignatelli, Tony Podesta, Jack Quinn, Larry Rasky, Bruce Reed, Mame Reiley, Steve Ricchetti, Will Robinson, Steve Rosenthal, David Rudd, John Ryan, Wendy Sherman, Terry Shumaker, Sean Sinclair, Phil Singer, Erik Smith, Doug Sosnik, Dary Sragow, Ken Strasmas, Katrina Swett, Sarah Swisher, Jeffrey Trammell, Ed Turlington, Mike Veon, Rick Wiener, Bridgette Williams, James Williams, JoDee Winterhof, Brian Wolff, and Jim Zogby.



Political Insiders Poll



Please rank the top five candidates, 1 through 5, in terms of who you think is most likely to capture the 2012 Republican presidential nomination.

■ Republicans

(109 votes)

RANK	CANDIDATE	INSIDERS INDEX*
1.	Mitt Romney	81
2.	Tim Pawlenty	46
3.	John Thune	38
4.	Haley Barbour	28
5.	Mitch Daniels	25
5.	Sarah Palin	25
7.	Newt Gingrich	14
7.	Mike Huckabee	14
9.	Jeb Bush	6
10.	Bobby Jindal	5

Also receiving an index rating: Jim DeMint, Bob McDonnell, Mike Pence, Rick Perry, 2 each; Richard Burr, Eric Cantor, Dick Cheney, Tom Coburn, David Petraeus, Rob Portman, Paul Ryan, no one, 1 each.

■ Romney

"In a downturn, trading a community organizer for a businessman may seem like a no-brainer."

"Actively making the rounds raising money for others and about to launch a new book, but can he energize a Republican base that was slow to warm to him the last time out?"

"Issues are lining up for him—economy, health care."

"Starting the race with the name ID he earned in 2008 will be the difference in 2012."

"Romney has primogeniture, very important to Republican primary voters."

"His business background, savvy campaigning, strong organization, and fundraising will all be huge assets. He needs to be comfortable with who he is. Is he the former governor of Massachusetts or the national candidate in 2008?"

"Lessons learned and a previously built operation will give Romney a huge advantage."

"Needs to decide who is he. But if he can do so successfully, can run and win."

"Will have another \$100 million, but probably does not improve his outcome."

"Romney continues to have numerous problems that haven't gone away, not the least of which is the similarity between Massachusetts health care and the [national] economy."

"Mitt will run a near-perfect race. He will learn from his mistakes and hire the best vision possible."

■ Pawlenty

"A fresh face and a solid conservative record. Best of a weak field. Fewest negatives."

"Proven competent governor, conservative from a moderate state, bland may be what people are looking for by 2012."

"A blue-collar guy from a blue state, and a personable, nonthreatening conservative to boot."

"Solid and will be a lot of folks' No. 2, but the excitement meter really doesn't tick too much."

"Smart, likable guy who has started to assemble a good team. Might just not be his time."

"Plausible but ultimately doesn't cut it. Is moving right so fast it's making Romney's head spin."

■ Thune

"We're done with 60-year-old-plus candidates for a while. We need somebody who can compete with Obama intellectually and visually."

"The fresh face. Solid political credentials with base that still remembers win over [then-Senate Democratic Leader Tom] Daschle. Continues to build on his policy bona fides."

■ **GOP Political Insiders** Dan Allen, Stan Anderson, Gary Andres, Saulius (Saul) Anuzis, Rich Ashooh, Whit Ayres, Brett Bader, Mitch Bainwol, Gary Bauer, David Beckwith, Clark Benson, Wayne Berman, Brian Bieron, Charlie Black, Kirk Blalock, Carmine Boal, Jeff Boeyink, Ron Bonjean, Jeff Buley, Luke Byars, Nick Calio, Danny Carroll, Ron Christie, Jim Cicconi, Cesar Conda, Jake Corman, Scott Cottingham, Charlie Crist, Greg Crist, Diane Crookham-Johnson, Fergus Cullen, Tom Davis, Mike Dennehy, Ken Duberstein, Steve Duprey, Debi Durham, Frank Fahrenkopf, John Feehery, Don Fierce, Mindy Finn, Mindy Fletcher, Carl Forti, Alex Gage, Sam Geduldig, Adam Geller, Benjamin Ginsberg, David Girard-djCarlo, Bill Greener, Jonathan Grella, Lanny Griffith, Janet Mullins Grissom, Doug Gross, Todd Harris, Steve Hart, Christopher Healy, Ralph Hellmann, Chris Henick, Terry Holt, David Iannelli, Barry Jackson, Clark Judge, David Keating, David Kensinger, Bruce Keough, Bob Kjellander, Ed Kutler, Chris Lacivita, Jim Lake, Steve Lombardo, Kevin Madden, Joel Maiola, Gary Maloney, David Marin, Mary Matalin, Dan Mattoon, Brian McCormack, Mark McKinnon, Kyle McSlarrow, Ken Mehlman, Jim Merrill, Tim Morrison, Mike Murphy, Phil Musser, Ron Nehring, Terry Nelson, Neil Newhouse, David Norcross, Ziad Ojaki, Jack Oliver, Todd Olsen, Connie Partoyan, Dana Perino, Van B. Poole, Tom Rath, Scott Reed, David Rehr, Steve Roberts, Jason Roe, David Roederer, Dan Schnur, Russ Schriefer, Rich Schwarm, Brent Seaborn, Rick Shelby, Andrew Shore, Kevin Shuvalov, Don Sipple, Fred Steeper, Bob Stevenson, Eric Tanenblatt, Sara Taylor, Richard Temple, Heath Thompson, Jay Timmons, Warren Tompkins, Ted Van Der Meid, Dirk van Dongen, Jan van Lohuizen, Stewart Verdery, Dick Wadhams, John Weaver, Lezlee Westine, Tom Wilson, Dave Winston, Ginny Wolfe, and Fred Wszolek.

"We may need our own fresh face, one who can appeal to independents and who doesn't have a lot of scary votes on social issues in his background."

"Unlikely he wants to run, but a smart party would figure out he is their best shot at actually winning."

"Has the right temperament, but is he driven enough?"

"Thune is about to become the flavor of the month, and we'll see how he holds up. Like Barbour, he's a former lobbyist."

"If the top tier flames out early, this is where people will head."

■ Barbour

"Shrewdest, toughest, wittiest, most competent GOP leader: If he wants it, he knows how to get it."

"Is the best natural politician in the party, and has a large and loyal following of local party leaders."

"The pick of Republican political professionals, but fear of nominating another white Southern governor works against him."

"Great record as governor, and a savvy strategist."

"The best pol of the group. Not sure that he'll run or that he can win, but, oh, what a campaign that would be!"

■ Daniels

"Great record as governor in difficult economic circumstances."

"The plus: proven champ at cutting fiscal deficits. The minus: hasn't axed his personality deficit."

"The anti-Obama: kind of dull, not afraid to make tough decisions, fiscally responsible."

"The smartest kid in the class with more national experience than Jindal."

"Daniels is the strong-record candidate but lacks any ideological edge."

"If he actually begins to show interest, great potential."

■ Palin

"She's made a series of smart political moves the last few months, after a series of colossally dumb ones the six months prior. Book tour has been a huge plus, so the question is: Which Palin will emerge?"

"Iconic, but missteps are inevitable."

"Party's most exciting candidate, but can she draw anyone who isn't already sold?"

"Now being rehabilitated and increasingly attractive, but Republicans will want someone who can win."

"If she can convert her star power into a solid candidacy and good organization, she has a chance."

"An insurgency could lift her to the nomination—and certain defeat in the general."

"Is the 15 minutes over yet? Still hard to see how she gets past 20 percent in the primary and 30 percent in the general."

■ Gingrich

"If he decides to run—and that is a big 'if'—Newt will run the most policy-oriented effort in recent memory, but will fall short."

"He might outthink his way to a path toward victory."

"Not without baggage, but is the most articulate defender of GOP vision."

■ Huckabee

"He has a 'happy warrior' quality and an appealingly quirky personality."

"Charismatic, hard right, and fits the social conservative story line."

"Another well-liked Republican who cannot win a general election."

■ Bush

"Bush would be the best candidate, except for his last name."

■ Jindal

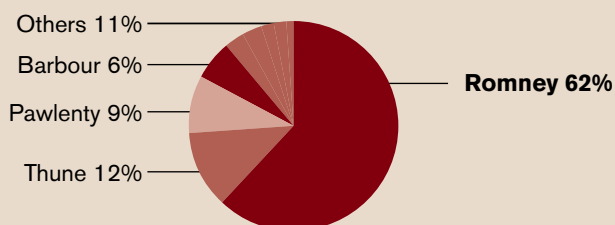
"Successful governor, solid conservative with a smile, and our best face for 21st-century America right now."

—JAMES A. BARNES AND PETER BELL

**METHODOLOGY: All 127 Republicans among National Journal's Political Insiders were asked to name and rank the top five contenders for their party's 2012 presidential nomination; 109 participated. In tallying the rankings, a first-place vote was worth 5 points, a second-place vote 4 points, and so on. The Insiders Index reflects the percentage of points that each contender received out of the maximum possible. For example, Mitt Romney scored an Index rating of 81, meaning he received 81 percent of the possible 545 points, the number he would have had if all 109 participants had ranked him first.*

Behind the Rankings

Percent of first-place votes



Percent of second-place votes

