

The Washington Post

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Your 2012
Credit Score?**

Excellent 750 - 840

Good 660 - 749

Fair 620 - 659

Poor 310 - 619

I Don't Know ????

FIND OUT INSTANTLY!

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The advertisement is a vertical banner with a green background. It features a title in white text, followed by five colored buttons representing credit score ranges: blue for 'Excellent', red for 'Good', purple for 'Fair', pink for 'Poor', and orange for 'I Don't Know'. Below these is a white button with black text that says 'FIND OUT INSTANTLY!'. At the bottom is the 'FreeScore.com.' logo in black text.

Can Romney the turnaround artist do it again?

By [George F. Will](#),

An Illinois lawyer who had a way with words once characterized a particular argument as weaker than soup made from the shadow of a pigeon that died of starvation. The argument for Mitt Romney benefiting from [South Carolina's voting](#) is almost as weak as Lincoln's soup, but here it is:

In the physics of politics, actions generate reactions. Granted, Newt Gingrich carried [43 of the state's 46 counties](#), and at least [six of the seven congressional districts](#), now leads in delegates, and his colorful personal life did not prevent him from decisively beating Romney among the women of a culturally conservative state. But Sunday morning, from coast to coast, Republican candidates for Congress, governorships and other offices awakened to a sobering thought: They could be running next autumn with Gingrich — whose current approval rating nationally in a Jan. 12-14 Fox News and Opinion Dynamics [poll](#) was 27 percent favorable, 56 percent unfavorable — atop the ticket. They have nothing to fear so much as an absence of fear about this. With Gingrich defining the GOP brand, the Republicans' dream — unified government: a trifecta of holding the House, winning the Senate and the White House — might become three strikes and they are out.

Just 11 days after finishing fourth in New Hampshire, Gingrich's pugnacity in two debates enraptured South Carolinians, especially when [he waxed indignant](#) about the supposition that the risk-taking in his personal life — e.g., having an affair during an indignation festival against Bill Clinton — is pertinent to his fitness for the presidency. Gingrich encourages Republican voters to believe he should be nominated because he would do best in the (at most) three debates with Barack Obama. So, because Gingrich might sparkle during $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours of debates, he should be given four years of control of nuclear weapons? Odd.

When the Republican nomination contest commenced, two assumptions were that Romney's strength would be his private-sector resume, and that his principal problems would be his religion and his authorship of Massachusetts' health care mandate. The mandate, however, has receded as an issue since Romney noted that Gingrich was for a mandate before he was against it. And many "values voters" who consider Mormonism somehow suspect seem to regard it as not very important, no more important than Gingrich's serial monogamy, and less important than Romney's largest problem, which is, remarkably, his resume.

The first presidential candidate from the economy's now deeply unpopular financial sector, Romney is suffering because this sector's arcane practices and instruments seem to many people, as indecipherable things often do, sinister. [His tax returns](#) perhaps testify to no more than sophisticated exploitation of the baroque tax code's opportunities for — even encouragement of — tactics to minimize liabilities. This, however, may exacerbate the impression many Republicans seem to have of his slipperiness. And this attribute is related to the suspicion that there is something synthetic about him. This may be unfair, but so is life.

Life has been good to Romney, who now must quickly [demonstrate authenticity](#), even if he needs to synthesize it. Actually, he does not need to. He speaks well, which is to say with infectious passion, about the dangers of the other party's dependency agenda and the entitlement mentality it cultivates. But if Romney says even one more time "I believe in America" — a bromide worthy of Tom ("Your future is still ahead of you") Dewey — voters may decide he is a human Oakland, that (as Gertrude Stein said of the city) there is no there there.

Some Romney aides have complacently expected enthusiasm for him to be a consequence rather than a cause of his victories. But there is too much space between his victories: The last ones before New Hampshire this month were 47 months ago, in some Feb. 5, 2008, [primaries and caucuses](#).

Actually, losing in South Carolina could be a partial blessing if it banishes from his campaign and from Republican voters' minds the dispiriting, eat-your-spinach idea that electability is the best reason for nominating him.

Gingrich thinks South Carolina has catapulted him toward irresistible victory. There remain, however, 53 more delegate-selection processes — in 47 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and some possessions. Busy as an intellectual beaver having big ideas by the bushel, Gingrich has neglected some mundane matters, such as getting on the Virginia and Missouri ballots.

Should Prometheus have to sweat such tiresome details? Yes, because the nominating process in this complex continental nation usefully foreshadows the challenges of governing such a nation.

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