



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on May 24, 2012

Voters Protest Obama in Kentucky, Arkansas Primaries

While GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney handily won Tuesday's Kentucky and Arkansas primaries, voters in the two states mounted a heavy revolt against President Obama, as Democratic contenders garnered a sizable block of votes. Moreover, discontent with Obama's first term is so intensive that voters in West Virginia delivered a prison inmate in Texas [over 40 percent](#) of the state's Democratic primary vote.



Forty-two percent of voters in Kentucky checked off "uncommitted" on their ballot, while in Arkansas, a little-known lawyer named John Wolfe garnered 41.6 percent of the primary vote. "Arkansas is a state that is ready-made for a strong protest vote against the president," asserted Jay Barth, a professor at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas. "This primary just gave them another opportunity to vote against the president."

The electoral outcomes in these three states indicate growing dissatisfaction with Obama's performance in the White House, as economic growth remains sluggish and unemployment still hovers above the 8-percent mark.

Voters in Kentucky and Arkansas will inevitably vote Republican in the November election, but the development is likely a chronicle of embarrassment for the President. However, some liberal critics are shrugging off Tuesday's primary results as meaningless, and nothing more than an opportunity for conservative critics to bash the President.

Democratic strategist Ed Kilgore, for example, purported his nonchalance over the story on Washington Monthly's Political Animal blog. "You will forgive me, I hope, for a lack of excitement about the 'story' of the president's weakness in these two states (and in other border states with large fossil-fuel energy industries and relatively few African-Americans), since I've been reading about it since the 2008 primaries," Kilgore [wrote](#).

Eric Colub, [writing](#) for the *Washington Times*, notes the hypocrisy of those media outlets who brand the story as inconsequential, considering that in the past, the mainstream media sensationalized electoral results comprising nearly identical outcomes:

When Pat Buchanan picked up 37 percent of the vote in New Hampshire against President George Herbert Walker Bush, the media declared that a victory for Buchanan. 53 percent for a sitting President is a pyrrhic victory. When it is Obama struggling in his own party, the media tendency is to ignore the story.

Some observers contend that Southern resistance to the President is largely due to race, because many white democrats in the region supposedly refuse to support an African-American presidential candidate. Again, Mr. Colub rejects this notion:

The primaries themselves are less interesting at this point than the excuses offered by those suffering defeats. Supporters of President Obama will dismiss the staggering rejection in the South



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by advocating that Southern Democrats are not real Democrats. Then they wonder why they lose the South. They will blame racism because that is what they do. The real problem is the big-government liberalism. The Democrats abandoned the South long before the South returned the favor.

Disappointment with Obama's policies, particularly his adamant push for environmental regulation — as well as overall discontent with the Democratic Party — is a dynamic factor, [says](#) Chris Cillizza on the *Washington Post* blog. "Overall, showings in Kentucky and Arkansas are certainly an embarrassment for Obama; the question is whether they portend a real enthusiasm problem in the fall," he notes.

Mr. Cillizza suggests that the real question is whether the Kentucky and Arkansas primaries are foreshadowing a devastating loss for Obama in North Carolina, a battleground state that is almost evenly split between Republicans and Democrats — with Obama carrying the state by a mere 0.4 percent in 2008. Consequently, even a modest defection of Democratic voters could prove fatal for the President's contingency for a North Carolina victory.

"For a sitting president to evoke such opposition in his own party tells us something about Obama's problems," [writes](#) the *Washington Post's* Jennifer Rubin. "The reason for this, as you might imagine, is that in burnishing his credentials with the left, Obama has hurt himself in the center, even within the Democratic Party."

Furthermore, Tuesday's results could indicate that the Obama campaign must dedicate more time to courting the white working class. White working-class voters who have been personally affected by the economic downturn are purportedly flocking to the Republican Party, especially those who oppose the President's growingly unpopular healthcare reform law.

"Obama will never carry [the] white working class. But he can't afford to lose it by massive margins, either," [noted](#) University of Virginia political scientist Larry Sabato on his Twitter feed. In that sense, Mr. Sabato averred, Democrats and liberal commentators who view Tuesday night's damning results as meaningless are "whistling past a potential graveyard."

Photo: Democrat Congressional hopeful Gene Jeffress, right, and state Senate candidate Bruce Maloch laugh in downtown Magnolia, Ark., May 19, 2012: AP Images



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