



sticking its military or diplomatic nose into the affairs of other nations, scrap most government social assistance programs, leave responsibility for those programs to individual choice, and allow people to do whatever they choose as long as it's legal and not harmful to others.

After an astonishing 20 candidates' debates, voters have yet to decide which personality they prefer.

Romney, Gingrich and Santorum have all won primaries or party caucuses and have traded frontrunner status since January. Paul hasn't won any contests but is still standing, and his fervent band of followers remains a force.

The fluid nature of the contest has undercut Romney's claims of inevitability and electability. His campaign is considerably better funded and far better organized than the others and, under normal circumstances, his nomination would be assured by now.

His opponents are someone who, six years ago, lost a re-election bid for U.S. Senate by 18 points (Santorum); someone who was chased out of the U.S. Congress in an ethics scandal 13 years ago (Gingrich); and a rather obscure Texas congressman whose ideas have been charitably described as quirky and not so charitably characterized as goofy (Paul).

Romney, though, has been unable to close the deal, lodged persistently in the mid to high 30 percent range in voter preference.

While his gaffes haven't inflicted mortal damage, it is the perception that he lacks core convictions that has become the greatest obstacle to his drawing support away from the others and building such a commanding lead that his opponents will recognize the futility of continuing.

Santorum, Gingrich and Paul have vowed to take their campaigns to the national convention in Tampa in August, because they see no valid reason not to. Despite his overwhelming superiority in money and organization, Romney hasn't scared them out or blown them out.

The proportional allocation of delegates, rather than a winner-take-all primary system in some states, has worked in their favor as well, allowing them to continue to lose and accumulate delegates while denying them to Romney.

