



**NBC News/Marist Poll:
Gingrich Races to Head of the Pack in Iowa**

*** Complete Tables for Poll Appended ***

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This NBC News/Marist Poll Reports:

With less than one month to go until the Iowa caucus, Newt Gingrich has surged to the top of the leaderboard in the state. Gingrich outdistances his closest rivals, Mitt Romney and Ron Paul, by 8 and 9 percentage points, respectively.

Here is how the contest stands among **likely Republican caucus-goers including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate:**

- 26% for Newt Gingrich
- 18% for Mitt Romney
- 17% for Ron Paul
- 9% for Herman Cain
- 9% for Rick Perry
- 5% for Michele Bachmann
- 5% for Rick Santorum
- 2% for Jon Huntsman
- 9% are undecided

“As the roller coaster picks up speed in the month leading up to the Iowa caucus, Newt Gingrich has moved into the lead car,” says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. “Hold on tight for any further twists and turns.”

The Republican field has changed in Iowa. In October, 26% of likely Republican caucus-goers including leaners supported Romney. One in five -- 20% -- favored Cain, and 12% backed Paul. Bachmann and Perry each received 11%, 5% were behind Gingrich while Santorum garnered 3%. One percent was for Huntsman. At that time, one in ten -- 10% -- was undecided.

If Cain drops out of the race, based upon the second choice of his supporters, the contest among likely Republican caucus-goers including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate is now Gingrich at 28% followed by Paul and Romney with 19%. 10% favor Perry, 7% support Bachmann, 6% back Santorum, and 2% are for Huntsman. Nine percent remain undecided.

Among the larger pool of **potential Republican caucus-goers** including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate, Gingrich has a 7 percentage point lead over Romney. 25% favor Gingrich, 18% are for Romney, and 16% back Paul. Perry and Cain each receive the support of 9% of these potential participants. Five percent rally for Bachmann while Santorum has the backing of 4%. Two percent are for Huntsman, and 11% are undecided.

Key points:

- Gingrich leads Romney, 34% to 20%, among likely Republican caucus-goers who are just **conservative** including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate. Among those who are **very conservative**, it's Gingrich 29% to 10% for Romney. Looking at those who **support the Tea Party**, 32% support Gingrich, 11% support Romney, and 16% support Paul.
- Among caucus-goers who are **Tea Party supporters, conservative, and Evangelical Christians**, Gingrich receives 35% compared with 11% for Romney. Cain receives 14%, Paul garners 12%, and Santorum takes 10% among these voters.

Four in Ten Strongly Support Choice of Candidate

40% of likely Republican caucus-goers say they strongly support their choice of candidate while the same proportion -- 40% -- somewhat support their pick. However, nearly one in five -- 19% -- might change their mind, and 1% is unsure.

When NBC News/Marist last reported this question in October, 41% reported they strongly supported their choice of candidate, 36% were somewhat committed to their pick, and 20% said they might cast their ballot for someone else. Three percent, at the time, were unsure.

Key points:

- A majority of **likely Republican caucus-goers who back Paul** -- 53% -- are strongly committed to their candidate. 43% of those who favor **Gingrich** and 38% who are behind **Romney** express the same level of support for their pick.

Gingrich, Romney Top List as Second Best

Nearly one in five likely Republican caucus-goers -- 19% -- report Gingrich is their second choice for the nomination while 17% select Romney. Bachmann garners 12% while Cain

and Perry each receive 11%. Paul is perceived to be the next best choice by 10% while 8% have the same perception about Santorum. Three percent say Jon Huntsman is their second choice for the Republican presidential nomination, and 9% are undecided.

Key points:

- Nearly three in ten **likely Republican caucus-goers who support Gingrich** -- 29% -- say Romney is their second choice for the nomination while 43% of **Romney's backers** report Gingrich places second in their minds.

Gingrich Viewed as Acceptable Candidate by Majority, Romney Falls Short

Gingrich is the only candidate in the GOP field who is considered by a majority of likely Republican caucus-goers to be a good fit for the Republican nomination. 54% of likely Republican caucus-goers think Gingrich is an acceptable candidate. An additional 27% say he is acceptable but with reservations, and 16% believe he is an unacceptable choice. Four percent are unsure.

Romney, however, faces a challenge among likely Republican caucus-goers. Fewer than half -- 46% -- think Romney fits the bill while 28% say he will do, but they have reservations about him. Almost one in four -- 24% -- believes he is not an acceptable choice for the top of the GOP ticket, and 3% are unsure.

When it comes to Paul, 38% report he would be a good fit, and 34% agree but with some concerns. 26% say he is an unacceptable nominee, and 3% are unsure.

Controversial Campaign Issues

When it comes to positions on key issues, just what are caucus-goers willing to accept in a candidate? 87% of likely Republican caucus-goers believe it is unacceptable for a nominee **to tolerate Iran building a nuclear weapon**. Eight percent say it is acceptable, and 5% are unsure.

More than eight in ten likely Republican caucus-goers -- 81% -- think it is not acceptable **to allow illegal immigrants to obtain in-state tuition**. 14% believe it is, and 6% are unsure.

Many likely Republican caucus-goers -- 63% -- find it unacceptable for a GOP nominee **to support an individual mandate for health care insurance** while more than one in four -- 28% -- do not take issue with that stance. Nine percent are unsure.

A majority of likely Republican caucus-goers -- 56% -- report it is unacceptable for a nominee **to have earned millions of dollars advising Freddie Mac**. About one-third -- 33% -- find it to be acceptable in a nominee, and 10% are unsure.

A majority of likely Republican caucus-goers -- 54% -- also find it problematic for a nominee to have been **accused of sexual harassment**. Nearly four in ten -- 38% -- do not think this is problematic, and 8% are unsure.

Likely caucus-goers divide about whether or not it is acceptable for a candidate **to support limited amnesty for some illegal immigrants**. 47% say it is unacceptable while 46% believe it is acceptable. Seven percent are unsure.

Issues and Values Top List of Participants' Priorities

More than three in ten likely Republican caucus-goers -- 31% -- want a candidate who is closest to them on the issues while 29% say a candidate who shares their values is key. Electability is the most important factor for 21% of likely Republican caucus-goers while 16% would like a candidate who has the experience to govern. Two percent are unsure.

In NBC News/Marist's October survey, 30% said a candidate who shares their values was most important. A similar proportion -- 29% -- reported someone who had the same positions on the issues was their priority while one in five -- 20% -- wanted a candidate who could defeat President Obama in the general election. Experience, at that time, was the key factor for 17%, and 4% were unsure.

Key points:

- Gingrich leads among likely Republican caucus-goers including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate who believe **experience** is the most important quality in a candidate. 36% of these caucus-goers support Gingrich compared with 26% who back Romney.
- Gingrich -- 38% -- also has the advantage among likely Republican caucus-goers who think **electability** is the key while Romney receives the support of 25% of these participants.
- Among those who think **shared values** is the priority, there is little consensus. 17% throw their support behind Paul, and the same proportion -- 17% -- support Gingrich. Romney and Cain each garner 12%.
- Paul -- 25% -- and Gingrich -- 22% -- vie for the lead among those who think a **candidate's position on the issues** is most important. This compares with Romney who receives 14%.

Romney Out of Step with Iowa GOP Ideology

Romney does not match up well ideologically with Iowa's likely Republican caucus-goers. A majority of likely caucus participants -- 53% -- perceive Romney to be a moderate while nearly one in five -- 18% -- thinks he is a liberal. Just 19% report he is a conservative, and 10% are unsure. However, 68% of likely Republican caucus-goers describe themselves as either conservative or very conservative.

Mormons are Christians, Says Majority

A majority of likely Republican caucus-goers -- 55% -- say a Mormon is a Christian while 45% report a Mormon is not, or they are unsure about it.

Key points:

- While **Romney receives the support of 23% of likely caucus-goers** who say a Mormon is a Christian, he garners just 12% among likely caucus participants who do not share this view about his faith or are unsure.

“The Donald” Has Little Pull among Likely Republican Iowa Caucus-Goers

A plurality of likely Republican caucus-goers -- 44% -- says a Trump endorsement would not affect their vote while 32% say such a backing would make them less likely to vote for a candidate. About one in five -- 21% -- report it would make them more likely to vote for that candidate, and 3% are unsure.

Politics or Pigskin?

But, does it all matter? The BCS Allstate Sugar Bowl will be held on the night of the Iowa caucus. So, how many likely Republican caucus-goers could be glued to their televisions rather than attending the caucus? Just less than half of likely Republican caucus-goers -- 48% -- say they watch either a great deal or a good amount of college football while a majority -- 52% -- reports they are not avid fans.

Key points:

- **Gingrich’s supporters** are more likely to be college football fans than those who **back Romney or Paul**. Gingrich receives the support of 30% of avid college football fans who are likely to attend the GOP caucus compared with 19% for Romney and 16% for Paul.
- **Among likely Republican caucus-goers who are not avid college football fans**, the race tightens. Gingrich receives 23% of the vote to 18% for Paul and 16% for Romney.

Obama Ties Paul...Leads Rest of GOP Field, But Only Has Majority against Bachmann

In hypothetical contests with potential Republican challengers, President Barack Obama bests his competition with one exception.

Against **Paul**, 42% of registered voters in Iowa support Obama while the same proportion -- 42% -- backs Paul. A notable 16% are undecided. Paul attracts 15% of Iowa’s Democrats and leads President Obama 42% to 35% among independent voters. Paul also has a 14

percentage point advantage over Obama among voters under 45 years of age. There is a gender gap. Paul outpaces the president among men by 11 percentage points, and President Obama outdistances Paul among women by 10 percentage points.

In a matchup against **Romney**, the president has a seven percentage point lead. 46% of registered voters support Mr. Obama while 39% favor Romney. 15% are undecided.

Against **Gingrich**, the president garners 47% to 37% for Gingrich, a 10 percentage point lead. 16% are undecided.

The president has an 11 percentage point advantage against **Perry**. Here, 48% back Obama while 37% are for Perry, and 15% are undecided.

When paired against **Cain**, half of Iowa's electorate -- 50% -- supports President Obama compared with 32% for Cain, giving Mr. Obama an 18 percentage point lead. 18% are undecided.

The president receives majority support against **Bachmann**. In this hypothetical contest, Obama receives 54% to Bachmann's 31%, an advantage of 23 percentage points. 15% are undecided.

Iowa Voters Divide about Obama's Job Approval Rating

43% of registered voters in the state approve of the job President Barack Obama is doing in office while 46% disapprove. 12% are unsure.

In NBC News/Marist's previous survey in Iowa, 42% of registered voters in Iowa gave the president high marks while 47% gave his job performance a thumbs-down. 11%, at the time, were unsure.