



**NBC News/Marist Poll:
Romney Lead Narrows in New Hampshire Primary**

*** Complete Tables for Poll Appended ***

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This NBC News/Marist Poll Reports:

Although Mitt Romney outpaces his closest competitor in New Hampshire's Republican Presidential Primary by 16 percentage points, his lead has been cut in half since a similar poll conducted in October.

Here is how the contest stands **among likely Republican primary voters including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate** in New Hampshire:

- 39% for Mitt Romney
- 23% for Newt Gingrich
- 16% for Ron Paul
- 9% for Jon Huntsman
- 3% for Michele Bachmann
- 3% for Rick Perry
- 2% for Herman Cain
- 1% for Rick Santorum
- 4% are undecided

"Romney is down, Cain has collapsed, and the undecided have dropped since October," says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. "In the meantime, Gingrich has emerged as a serious threat to Romney's must-win, first-in-the-nation primary."

When NBC News/Marist last reported this question, 45% of likely Republican primary voters including leaners supported Romney while Cain and Paul each received 13% of the vote. Seven percent, at the time, were behind Perry while 5% rallied for Huntsman. Gingrich placed sixth in October with 4% while 3% favored Bachmann. One percent supported Santorum. Eight percent, at that time, were undecided.

Little changes if Cain drops out of the race given he currently receives support from only 2% of New Hampshire voters likely to vote in the Republican primary. Based upon the second choice of his supporters, the contest among likely Republican primary voters including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate is now 39% for Romney, 24% for Gingrich, and 16% for Paul. Nine percent back Huntsman while Bachmann and Perry each receive 3%. Two percent support Santorum, and 4% remain undecided.

Among **the potential Republican electorate in New Hampshire**, that is, all Republicans and those independents who plan to vote in the primary, **including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate**, Romney has a 19 percentage point lead. 40% back Romney while Gingrich takes the second spot with 21% followed by Paul with 16% and Huntsman with 10%. Three percent favor Bachmann, and the same proportion -- 3% -- rallies for Perry. Two percent back Cain, and 1% supports Santorum. Four percent are undecided.

Key points:

- When looking at likely primary voters including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate, Romney leads Gingrich by 12 percentage points among **Republicans** and by 21 percentage points among **independents**.
- Romney and Gingrich vie for the top spot among **likely Republican primary voters who support the Tea Party**. Each receives the support of 33%. However, among those who **strongly back the Tea Party**, 41% are for Gingrich compared with 19% for Romney.
- Gingrich -- 36% -- has the advantage over Romney -- 29% -- among **likely Republican primary voters who are very conservative**.

More Voters Firmly Committed to Candidate

Nearly half of likely Republican primary voters -- 49% -- say they strongly support their choice of candidate while 31% report they are somewhat committed to their pick. 18% might vote differently, and 2% are unsure.

There has been an increase in the proportion of voters who say they stand firm behind their choice of candidate. In NBC News/Marist's October survey, 38% of likely Republican primary voters were strongly committed to their choice of candidate, 35% were somewhat behind their pick, and 26% said they might cast their ballot differently. Only 1%, at the time, was unsure.

Key points:

- More than six in ten **likely Republican primary voters who back Paul** -- 62% -- are firmly committed to him compared with 48% of **Romney's backers** and 48% of **Gingrich's supporters** who say the same about their pick.

Gingrich, Romney Top List for Second Best

Who do likely Republican primary voters in New Hampshire say is their second choice for the nomination? Nearly one in four -- 24% -- select Gingrich while the same proportion -- 24% -- picks Romney. 11% say Paul is second best while 8% favor Huntsman. Cain and Perry follow closely behind with 7% each. Five percent choose Bachmann as their second choice while 4% think Santorum rates as the second best option. Nine percent are undecided.

Romney Viewed as Acceptable Nominee by More than Six in Ten

63% of likely Republican primary voters in New Hampshire believe Mitt Romney is a good fit for the GOP nomination. An additional 23% think he is acceptable, but have reservations. 12% say he is not an acceptable candidate. Only 1% is unsure.

Gingrich is perceived by a majority of likely Republican primary voters -- 54% -- to be an acceptable choice while 25% agree but with reservations. Nearly one in five -- 19% -- say he is not a good fit for the top of the ticket, and 3% are unsure.

When it comes to Paul's acceptability, likely voters fracture. 38% say he would be an acceptable fit, 29% believe he would be suitable but have concerns, and 31% report he would be an unacceptable nominee. Two percent are unsure.

Controversial Issues: Candidate Who Supports Limited Amnesty Acceptable, Says Majority

54% of likely Republican primary voters in New Hampshire find it acceptable if the Republican nominee **supports limited amnesty for some illegal immigrants**. 41%, though, believe it is unacceptable, and 5% are unsure.

However, most -- 84% -- think it is unacceptable if the nominee **tolerates Iran building nuclear weapons**. 12% believe it is acceptable, and 4% are unsure.

83% of likely Republican primary voters also say it is unacceptable if the GOP nominee **favors allowing illegal immigrants to obtain in-state tuition**. 14% report it is acceptable, and 3% are unsure.

When it comes to a candidate who **has been accused of sexual harassment**, more than six in ten likely Republican primary voters -- 63% -- are not comfortable with a nominee who

has faced such allegations while 32% don't believe this to be problematic. Five percent are unsure.

Six in ten -- 60% -- don't think it is acceptable for the Republican nominee **to support an individual mandate for health care insurance** while 32% believe such a position on the issue is fine. Seven percent are unsure.

If the Republican nominee **has earned millions of dollars advising Freddie Mac**, nearly six in ten likely voters -- 59% -- find this to be unacceptable. 34%, however, do not object to having such a nominee top the ticket, and 7% are unsure.

Issues Key Candidate Quality

What matters most to likely Republican primary voters in choosing a nominee? Three in ten -- 30% -- believe a candidate who is close to their positions on the issues is the priority. Nearly one in four -- 23% -- thinks someone who shares their values is most important while the same proportion -- 23% -- says a candidate who can defeat President Barack Obama in the general election is paramount. 22% report experience matters most, and 2% are unsure.

In October, the same proportion of likely Republican primary voters -- 30% -- thought shared positions on the issues was the leading factor when choosing a candidate while 28% believed someone who had similar values was the most important. 22% put experience at the top of their list while 19% thought electability was key. Two percent, at the time, were unsure.

Key points:

- Romney does well among likely Republican primary voters who want a **candidate who can defeat President Obama** -- 46% -- compared with 35% for Gingrich.
- Romney has an edge among those who favor **experience** in a candidate -- 40%. Gingrich receives 28% of this group. Romney's biggest drop since October is among these voters. Romney garnered 64% support from voters focused on experience in the earlier poll.
- Among those who **want a candidate with similar values**, Romney leads with 35% to 20% for Gingrich and 19% for Paul.
- Looking at those **who think someone who is closest to them on the issues** is the priority, Romney -- 35% -- is followed by Paul with 25%, Gingrich with 14%, and Huntsman with the same proportion -- 14%.

More Than Six in Ten Call Romney a Moderate

61% of likely Republican primary voters believe Romney is a moderate while 24% think he is a conservative, and 10% say he is a liberal. Five percent are unsure. However, just 35% of

likely Republican primary voters describe themselves as moderate compared with 58% who identify as conservative or very conservative.

Many Say Mormons are Christians

62% of likely Republican primary voters believe that a Mormon is a Christian. 38%, however, think they are not or are unsure.

Key points:

- Romney leads **among those who believe a Mormon is a Christian** -- 44%. He is also ahead among those who think a Mormon is not a Christian or are unsure but by a narrower margin.

Trump Backing Provides Little Benefit

Most Republicans who are likely to vote in the New Hampshire primary would not be more likely to vote for a candidate who receives the endorsement of Donald Trump. A plurality -- 42% -- reports such an endorsement would make no difference to their vote while 37% say it would make them less likely to vote for such a candidate. Only 19% think a Trump endorsement would make them more likely to cast their ballot for a candidate, and 2% are unsure.

Romney, Paul Run Competitively Against Obama, but Romney Loses Some Ground

In hypothetical contests against potential Republican challengers, both Romney and Paul are neck and neck with President Barack Obama in New Hampshire.

46% of registered voters in New Hampshire support **Romney** while 43% back Obama. 11% are undecided.

In NBC News/Marist's October survey, Romney had a nine percentage point lead over the president. At that time, Romney received the backing of 49% compared with 40% for Obama. 11%, at that time, were undecided.

When pitted against **Paul**, 44% of registered voters favor Obama while 42% are behind Paul. 14% are undecided. Here, independents divide. 45% back Obama while 40% rally for Paul. There is also a gender gap. A majority of women -- 53% -- favor Obama while nearly half of men -- 49% -- are behind Paul. Paul has the edge among registered voters younger than 45 -- 45% -- compared with 39% for Obama.

The president has a 10 percentage point lead against **Gingrich**. Almost half of voters -- 49% -- support the president while 39% rally for Gingrich. 12% are undecided.

Against **Perry**, the president leads 51% to 36%. 13% are undecided. President Obama has widened the gap against Perry. In October, 46% of registered voters backed the president while 40% said they would cast their ballot for Perry. 14%, then, were undecided.

Against **Bachmann**, Obama has a 20 percentage point advantage. Here, he outpaces Bachmann, 53% to 33%. 14% are undecided.

President Obama fares best against **Cain**. In this hypothetical contest, a majority of registered voters -- 53% -- back the president while Cain garners 30%, a 23 percentage point lead for the president. 17% are undecided.

Low Marks Continue for Obama

Just four in ten registered voters in New Hampshire -- 40% -- approve of the job President Obama is doing in office. A majority -- 52% -- disapproves, and 8% are unsure.

Little has changed on this question since October. At that time, 38% gave the president a thumbs-up while a majority -- 53% -- gave him a thumbs-down. Nine percent, at the time, were unsure.