



**NBC News/Marist Poll:
Romney Holds Wide Lead in New Hampshire**

*** Complete Tables for Poll Appended ***

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This NBC News/Marist Poll Reports:

With all eyes on New Hampshire, Mitt Romney outpaces his closest competitor, Ron Paul, by 20 percentage points among likely Republican primary voters including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate. Rick Santorum, whose support was in single digits in NBC News/Marist's early December survey, is now in third place with 13%. But, for Newt Gingrich, there's bad news. Gingrich, who was in second place last month, now sees his support cut to 9%.

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

- 42% for Mitt Romney (+3)
- 22% for Ron Paul (+6)
- 13% for Rick Santorum (+11)
- 9% for Newt Gingrich (-15)
- 9% for Jon Huntsman (no change)
- 1% for Rick Perry (-2)
- 5% are undecided (+1)

"Expectations are sky-high for a big Romney victory," says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. "These numbers are a table setter for this weekend's debates, the last best chance for a major turnaround that would deprive Romney of a decisive win."

When NBC News/Marist last reported this question in early December, 39% of likely Republican primary voters including leaners backed Romney. 24% supported Gingrich while 16% were behind Paul. Nine percent were for Huntsman while Michele Bachmann,

who has since suspended her campaign, received 3%. Three percent also favored Perry, and 2% were for Santorum. Four percent, at that time, were 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 leads with 41%. Paul is a distant second with 22% followed by Santorum with 13%. Nine percent of these voters are behind Huntsman, and the same proportion -- 9% -- rallies for Gingrich. Just one percent is for Perry, and 5% are undecided.

Key points:

- A notable proportion of likely primary voters in New Hampshire will be independents - 38%. Likely Republican primary voters in New Hampshire also include 40% who support the Tea Party, 22% who are Evangelical Christians, and 15% who identify themselves as very conservative. This is in sharp contrast with the Iowa Republican caucus as detailed in the entrance poll of caucus attendees by Edison Research of Somerville, New Jersey. 23% of GOP caucus participants were independents, 64% were Tea Party supporters, 57% of caucus-goers were Evangelical Christians, and 47% said they were very conservative.
- When looking at just **Republicans** who are likely to vote in the GOP primary, Romney is ahead by 28 percentage points. Romney has 46% followed by Paul with 18% and Santorum with 14%. Romney's lead, however, narrows among **independents**. Here, 35% are for Romney while 28% support Paul. Huntsman receives 13% of the independent vote while Santorum takes 12%.
- Among **likely Republican primary voters who support the Tea Party**, the race tightens. 35% back Romney compared with 25% for Paul. 20% of these voters rally for Santorum, and 12% back Gingrich. However, among those who **strongly back the Tea Party**, Romney falls to third place. Santorum leads with 31% of this voting group. Paul garners 26% while Romney has the backing of 22%. The difference in New Hampshire is this group makes up only 12% of likely Republican primary voters compared with 34% of Iowa caucus-goers.
- Romney has plurality support among **likely Republican primary voters who identify as liberal or moderate** -- 46% -- and among those who describe themselves as **conservative** -- 41%. He is neck and neck with Santorum, 30% to 27%, among those who say they are **very conservative**. Paul receives 22% among these voters.
- Looking at age, Romney leads among those 30 and older. 43% of **likely Republican primary voters 30 to 44** years of age, 40% of those **45 to 59** years old, and 44% of those 60 and older support Romney. However, Paul has the edge among those younger than 30. Here, 47% back Paul compared with 40% for Romney.
- 31% of **Evangelical Christians** are behind Romney while 30% are for Santorum.

Six in Ten Strongly Support Choice of Candidate

60% of likely Republican primary voters say they strongly support their choice of candidate while 29% report they are somewhat committed to their pick. 11% think they might change their mind before Tuesday, and only 1% is unsure.

There has been an increase in the proportion of voters who are firmly committed to their choice of candidate. In NBC News/Marist's early December survey, only about half of likely Republican primary voters -- 49% -- said they would not waver in their support. 31% reported they were somewhat behind their pick while 18% believed they might vote differently. Only 2%, at that time, were unsure.

Key points:

- About two-thirds of **likely Republican primary voters who back Paul** -- 67% -- say they strongly support their candidate while 60% of **Romney's supporters** are firmly committed to him. This compares with nearly six in ten -- 57% -- of **Gingrich's backers**. The same proportion -- 57% -- of **Huntsman's backers** and a majority of **Santorum's supporters** -- 52% -- say the same.

Little Consensus about Second Choice...Gingrich, Paul Least Liked

When it comes to their second choice, 19% of likely Republican primary voters select Romney, 18% choose Santorum followed by 16% for Gingrich. Huntsman is the second pick of 13% compared with 11% for Paul. Perry is the second best candidate for 6%, and 16% are undecided.

Which candidate is the least liked? More than one in four likely Republican primary voters -- 27% -- say they like Gingrich least. 23% have a similar view of Paul, and 17% say the same about Perry. 13% of voters believe Romney is the least desirable candidate followed by 7% who have a similar opinion of Huntsman. Six percent have this attitude toward Santorum, and 6% are undecided.

60% View Romney as Acceptable Candidate...Gingrich's Acceptability Plummet

Six in ten likely Republican primary voters in New Hampshire -- 60% -- think Romney is an acceptable candidate for the GOP nomination. 23% agree but have reservations while only 16% don't think he is a good fit for the role. Just 1% is unsure. In NBC News/Marist's previous survey, 63% said Romney was an acceptable choice as the Republican nominee.

Looking at Santorum, 42% say he is an acceptable choice for the top of the GOP ticket while 30% find him to be acceptable but have concerns. However, one in four -- 25% -- thinks Santorum is an unacceptable pick, and 3% are unsure.

While 35% believe Paul is a good fit for the Republican nomination, and 21% think he fits the bill but with reservations, there has been an increase in the proportion of voters who believe Paul is an unacceptable candidate for the top of the ticket. 43% currently have this view, and 1% is unsure. In early December, 38% said Paul was an acceptable choice for the GOP nomination while 31% reported he was an unacceptable selection.

31% think Huntsman is an acceptable choice for the Republican nomination. 30% agree but with reservations, and 33% report he is an unacceptable candidate. Six percent are unsure.

Fewer likely Republican voters perceive Gingrich to be a proper fit for the top of the ticket. Only 29% think he is an acceptable choice. 27% approve of him as the candidate but have concerns, and 44% think Gingrich is an unacceptable candidate for the role. Less than one percent is unsure. In December, a majority -- 54% -- reported Gingrich to be an acceptable candidate. At that time, only 19% thought Gingrich was an unacceptable candidate for the nomination.

Looking at Perry's acceptability, just 17% say he is an appropriate choice. 26% report he is acceptable but with reservations while a majority -- 54% -- believes he is not a good fit. Three percent are unsure. In NBC News/Marist's previous survey, 24% thought Perry to be a good choice for the nomination.

Issues, Electability Top List of Most Important Candidate Qualities

Three in ten likely Republican primary voters in New Hampshire -- 30% -- are looking for a candidate who is closest to them on the issues while 29% want someone who can defeat President Barack Obama in the general election. However, 19% think someone who has the experience to govern is the most important quality to consider when selecting a candidate. The same proportion -- 19% -- wants a candidate who shares their values. Two percent are unsure.

In NBC News/Marist's early December survey, 30% wanted a candidate who was close to them on the issues while 23% preferred a candidate who shared their values. The same proportion -- 23% -- thought a candidate who could defeat the president was the key while 22% said experience was the most important quality for a candidate to possess. Two percent were unsure.

Key points:

- Among likely Republican primary voters who **want a candidate who is closest to them on the issues**, 36% are for Paul compared with 32% for Romney.
- Romney -- 59% -- does best among likely Republican primary voters who cite **electability** as the most important factor when choosing a candidate. Santorum receives 13% of these voters to 12% for Gingrich.

- Romney -- 46% -- also has an advantage among those who want a candidate who has the **experience to govern**. 19% of these voters support Paul, 12% back Huntsman, and 11% are behind Gingrich.
- Among those who prefer a **candidate who shares their values**, 28% are for Romney while the same proportion -- 28% -- backs Santorum. Paul follows closely behind with 25%.

Paul, Santorum True Conservatives...Romney Best Match against Obama

Which is more important to likely Republican primary voters in New Hampshire? 61% say their priority is a candidate who has the best chance to win the White House while 33% want a candidate who is a true conservative. Only 6% are unsure.

Romney is the candidate who 65% of likely Republican primary voters think has the best chance to beat Obama come November. With the exception of Paul who receives 10%, the rest of the GOP field is in single digits.

Nearly three in ten likely Republican primary voters in New Hampshire -- 28% -- believe Paul is the true conservative in the race while 26% have this view of Santorum. 12% think Romney is the real conservative while the same proportion -- 12% -- has this opinion about Gingrich. Only 5% describe Huntsman in this manner while the same proportion -- 5% -- believes Perry deserves this title. Three percent say none of the candidates are true conservatives, and 7% are undecided.

Romney Best Understands Voters' Problems...Will Improve Washington for the Better

30% of likely Republican primary voters in New Hampshire think Romney is the candidate who best understands the problems of people like themselves while 25% say Paul best identifies with voters' concerns. 15% report Santorum has a grasp of these problems while 10% think Huntsman deserves this description. Seven percent believe Gingrich best understands the concerns of voters while 1% has the same view of Perry. Six percent think none of the candidates comprehend the problems people face, and 6% are undecided.

Romney is also perceived by 35% of likely Republican primary voters to be the candidate who will improve Washington for the better while 24% think Paul is the best candidate for this job. 12% believe Santorum will have a positive impact on Washington while 10% say the same about Gingrich. Huntsman receives 8% to just 1% for Perry. Five percent say none of the candidates will change Washington for the better, and 5% are undecided.

Influencing Factors: Debates Impact Voters' Decisions

What additional factors matter to likely Republican primary voters in deciding their vote?

- 75% of likely Republican primary voters in New Hampshire say **the debates** at least somewhat helped them decide which candidate to support.
- More than one-third -- 35% -- think **seeing the candidate in person** helped them in making their decision.
- 30% of likely Republican primary voters report **campaign ads** have influenced their candidate selection.
- John McCain recently endorsed Mitt Romney, what impact did **McCain's endorsement** have on voters? 28% report his endorsement, at least somewhat, informed their decision.
- 27% of likely Republican primary voters say the **results of the Iowa caucus** have helped decide their vote, including 51% of Santorum voters.
- Only 19% of voters say **contact with a candidate's campaign** has helped them choose a candidate.
- When it comes to the **Manchester Union Leader's endorsement of Newt Gingrich**, just 12% say such an act helped them, at least somewhat, decide their vote.

More than Six in Ten Think Mormons are Christians

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

Key points:

- Nearly half of likely voters **who believe a Mormon is a Christian** -- 48% -- support Romney. However, among those who think a Mormon is not a Christian or are unsure, he leads 32% to 26% for Paul. Santorum has 17%.

49% Disapprove of President Obama's Job Performance

40% of registered voters in New Hampshire approve of the job President Obama is doing in office while almost half -- 49% -- disapproves, and 10% are unsure.

Little has changed on this question since last month. 40%, at that time, approved of the president's job performance while 52% disapproved. Eight percent, then, were unsure.