



**NBC News/Marist Poll:  
Romney Leads Gingrich by 10 Points in South Carolina;  
5 Points Post-Debate**

\*\*\* Complete Tables for Poll Appended \*\*\*

**For Immediate Release: Thursday, January 19, 2012**

Contact: Lee M. Miringoff  
Barbara L. Carvalho  
Mary E. Azzoli  
Marist College  
845.575.5050

**This NBC News/Marist Poll Reports:**

As the Republican presidential candidates crisscross the Palmetto State in the days leading up to Saturday's South Carolina primary, Mitt Romney leads Newt Gingrich, 34% to 24%, among likely Republican primary voters including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate based on interviews conducted on Monday and Tuesday.

Debates matter. Romney's Monday lead of 15 percentage points over his closest competitor, Newt Gingrich, narrowed to 5 percentage points on Tuesday following Monday night's debate.

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

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Pre-debate</b>	<b>Post-debate</b>
Mitt Romney	34%	37%	31%
Newt Gingrich	24%	22%	26%
Ron Paul	16%	15%	17%
Rick Santorum	14%	15%	13%
Rick Perry	4%	3%	5%
Other	1%	<1%	1%
Undecided	8%	8%	7%

"Romney has not closed the deal in South Carolina," says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. "Monday night's debate has changed the political landscape, and it's now a much more competitive contest."

## Key points:

- Overall, Romney -- 36% -- leads Gingrich -- 28% -- among likely primary voters who are **Republicans**. Romney's advantage over Gingrich of 13 percentage points, 39% to 26%, on Monday disappears on Tuesday when Romney has 31% to 30% for Gingrich among this group of voters.
- Among **independents**, Romney has 30% to 28% for Paul, and 17% for Gingrich. On Monday, 31% of independents supported Romney followed by 24% for Paul and 14% for Gingrich. On Tuesday, Paul received 31% to 29% for Romney and 20% for Gingrich.
- Looking at those who are **very conservative**, Gingrich is favored by 33% compared with 23% for Romney and 22% for Santorum. On Monday alone, Gingrich received the support of 32% followed by 27% for Romney and 24% for Santorum. On Tuesday, Gingrich is backed by 35% compared with Santorum at 20% and Romney at 19%.
- Both Romney and Gingrich receive 31% of **Tea Party support** over the two night survey. But, on Monday, Romney garnered 35% to 27% for Gingrich. On Tuesday, Gingrich is backed by 34% to 27% for Romney.
- Similarly, among likely Republican primary voters who are **Evangelical Christians**, when the two nights are combined Romney has the support of 29% to 25% for Gingrich, and 18% for Santorum. On Monday, Romney led with 36% to 22% for Gingrich and 18% for Santorum. On Tuesday, Gingrich receives 27% followed by 22% for Romney and 19% for Santorum.

## Bain Pain for Romney?

Romney has taken heat for his past involvement with the private equity and investment firm, Bain Capital, but 48% of likely Republican primary voters think the criticism is unfair including 70% of Romney's supporters. 22%, however, believe it is fair while 20% have not heard anything about Romney's role at Bain Capital. 11% are unsure. There is little difference between Monday and Tuesday nights.

More than six in ten likely Republican primary voters in South Carolina -- 61% -- believe investment firms like Bain Capital help the U.S. economy through free market practices while 24% think these firms hurt the economy by profiting at the expense of jobs and workers' wages. 15% are unsure.

31% of registered voters in South Carolina say the criticism of Romney's experience with Bain Capital is unfair, 25% believe it is fair, and 34% have not heard anything about it. 11% are unsure. Not surprisingly, almost three in ten Democrats -- 29% -- view the criticism as well-founded while a plurality of Republicans -- 45% -- call it unfair. Among independent voters, 31% think the criticism is unfair while 26% say it is not.

When it comes to the impact on the economy, 42% of registered voters in the state believe these types of investment firms have a positive influence while 33% think they are harmful. One in four -- 25% -- is unsure.

### **Electability Tops List of Key Candidate Qualities**

Nearly four in ten likely Republican primary voters in South Carolina -- 39% -- prefer a candidate who can defeat President Barack Obama in the general election. A candidate who is closest to them on the issues comes in a distant second with 21% followed closely by a preference for a candidate who shares their values with 20% and someone with the experience to govern with 18%. Three percent are unsure.

There has been a shift on this question. In NBC News/Marist's December survey, 28% of likely Republican primary voters thought a candidate who shared their values was the most important quality for a candidate to possess. 26% wanted a candidate who had the same positions on the issues while 23% believed experience was key. Only about one in five -- 21% -- reported their priority was a candidate who could defeat President Barack Obama in the general election, and 3%, at the time, were unsure.

### **Key points:**

- Among those who favor **electability**, Romney leads. He has 43% to 29% for Gingrich. Gingrich has made inroads among likely Republican primary voters whose priority is electability. On Monday alone, Romney -- 46% -- outpaced Gingrich with 25%. On Tuesday, Romney received the support of 40% to 32% for Gingrich.
- Romney -- 41% -- also leads Gingrich -- 26% -- among those who want a candidate who has the **experience to govern**.
- Paul and Romney each receive 24% among likely Republican primary voters who want someone who **shares their positions on the issues**. They are followed by Gingrich with 20% and Santorum with 17%.
- Santorum edges his competitors among voters who want someone who shares their **values**. He is backed by 25% compared with 20% each for Romney and Paul. Gingrich receives 18%.

### **Majority Strongly Supports Choice of Candidate in South Carolina**

55% of likely Republican primary voters in South Carolina say they are strongly committed to their choice of candidate. 29% somewhat support their pick while 15% might vote differently on Saturday. One percent is unsure.

There has been an increase in the proportion of likely Republican primary voters who are firmly committed to their choice of candidate. When NBC News/Marist last reported this question in December, 43% said they strongly supported their pick while 31% reported they

were somewhat behind their candidate. 23%, at the time, thought they might change their minds, and 3% were unsure.

### **Key points:**

- 61% of **likely Republican primary voters who back Romney** and 58% of those who are **Gingrich supporters** are firmly entrenched in their candidate's camp. This compares with 50% of **likely Republican primary voters who support Paul** and 44% of **those who are for Santorum**.

### **Gingrich, Romney Top List as Second Choice...Paul Liked Least**

Which candidate is voters' second choice? 22% select Gingrich while a similar proportion -- 21% -- picks Romney. Santorum is the second choice of 19% compared with 15% who say Perry is their fallback candidate. Paul is the reserve candidate for 12%, and 11% are undecided.

Which candidate is the least liked? 36% mention Paul while 21% have a negative feeling toward Gingrich. 13% have a less than stellar impression of Romney while Perry and Santorum are least liked by 12% and 11%, respectively. Seven percent are undecided.

### **Field of Republican Candidates On Par, Say 48% of Voters**

Nearly half of likely Republican primary voters in South Carolina -- 48% -- think this year's field of candidates is average. 21% report it is above average, and 8% go a step farther and say it is one of the best groups of GOP candidates. Only 13% believe the roster is below average, and 8% think it is one of the worst fields of candidates. Two percent are unsure.

### **Majority Views Romney as Acceptable Candidate...Gingrich Less Acceptable**

A majority of likely Republican primary voters in South Carolina -- 56% -- say Romney is an acceptable GOP nominee. 26% agree but have reservations, and 17% report he is an unacceptable choice. Two percent are unsure. In NBC News/Marist's December survey of South Carolina, 53% thought Romney was a good fit for the nomination.

Likely Republican primary voters have a less favorable view of Gingrich. Currently, 47% believe Gingrich is an acceptable choice to top the GOP ticket while 23% find him to be acceptable but with hesitation. 28% don't think Gingrich is an acceptable choice for the nomination, and 2% are unsure. In December, 63% thought Gingrich was a good fit for the GOP nomination.

When it comes to Santorum's acceptability, a plurality of likely Republican primary voters -- 44% -- thinks Santorum fits the bill while 29% agree but with concerns. 23%, however, say Santorum is not a good fit for the nomination, and 4% are unsure.

37% believe Perry is a good pick for the nomination while 28% report he will do, but they have reservations. 31% think Perry is an unacceptable candidate, and 4% are unsure. In December's NBC News/Marist survey, 31% said Perry was a satisfactory choice for the nomination.

Paul is the least acceptable candidate. Only 30% of likely Republican primary voters in the Palmetto State perceive Paul to be an acceptable candidate for the nomination. 26% say he is a good fit, but they have reservations while 42% believe he is an unacceptable pick. Two percent are unsure. 29% of likely Republican primary voters in South Carolina believed Paul to be a good choice for the nomination in NBC News/Marist's previous survey.

### **Perceptions of the Candidates and the Campaign**

Which groups and interests do the candidates represent? What is the overall tone of the campaign? Likely Republican primary voters in South Carolina weigh in.

- Romney is perceived by 23% of likely Republican primary voters to be the candidate who best understands voters' problems. Gingrich follows closely behind with 22%.
- Three in ten likely Republican primary voters -- 30% -- think Romney is the candidate who is spending the most time talking about the issues. Gingrich receives 21%.
- A plurality -- 41% -- thinks Gingrich is the candidate who is spending the most time attacking his opponents. 19% perceive Romney to be the candidate who is slinging the most mud.
- Overall, many likely Republican primary voters in South Carolina think the campaign has been negative. 64% believe the candidates are spending more time attacking each other while 26% say they are talking about the issues.
- Santorum -- 22% -- Gingrich -- 21% -- and Paul -- 20% -- vie for the title of true conservative. Romney is thought to be the real conservative in the contest by 13% compared with Perry at 9%.
- A majority of likely Republican primary voters -- 56% -- say Romney is the candidate with the best chance of defeating President Barack Obama in the general election.
- 58% believe it is more important that the GOP nominee be able to beat Obama while 36% want a candidate who is a true conservative.

### **Debates Key in Shaping Vote...Ads, Not So Much**

Seven in ten likely Republican primary voters -- 70% -- say the debates have at least somewhat helped them decide their vote. However, only 28% consider campaign ads to have influenced their vote to at least some extent.

## **The Great Ecumenical Divide**

A majority of likely Republican primary voters in South Carolina -- 53% -- believe a Mormon is a Christian while 47% think a Mormon is not a Christian or are unsure.

In December, voters divided. 50% of likely Republican primary voters in the state believed a Mormon is a Christian while 50% thought a Mormon is not a Christian or were unsure.

### **Key points:**

- Romney -- 42% -- leads with plurality support among those who believe a **Mormon is a Christian**. However, Romney -- 25% -- and Gingrich -- 25% -- are neck and neck among those who say a **Mormon is not a Christian or are unsure**. Santorum and Paul follow with 18% each.

## **49% Disapprove of Obama's Job Performance**

While 44% of registered voters in South Carolina approve of the job President Barack Obama is doing in office, nearly half -- 49% -- disapprove, and 7% are unsure.

This is little changed from when NBC News/Marist last reported this question in December. At that time, nearly half of registered voters in South Carolina -- 48% -- disapproved of the job President Obama was doing in office. 44% gave the president good grades, and 8% were unsure.