



**NBC News/Marist Poll:
Romney with Wide Lead over Paul in Virginia**

*** Complete Tables for Poll Appended ***

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This NBC News/Marist Poll Reports:

In Virginia, Mitt Romney outdistances his only ballot opponent, Ron Paul, by 43 percentage points among likely Republican primary voters including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate and those who voted absentee in the state.

Here is how the contest stands:

- 69% for Mitt Romney
- 26% for Ron Paul
- 6% are undecided

“Although Romney is expected to win Virginia and win it big, voters remain lukewarm to him,” says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. “If all four GOP candidates were on the Virginia ballot, it would be a different political landscape.”

Key points:

- Just 42% are firmly behind their pick while 40% are somewhat committed to him. 17% might change their mind, and 2% are unsure.
- 43% of **Romney’s supporters** strongly support him compared with 37% of **Paul’s backers** who say the same about him.
- Romney leads Paul among all key voting groups.

The Big “If,” Four-Way Contest More Competitive

If Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich were on the ballot in Virginia, Romney would have the support of 36% of likely Republican primary voters compared with 28% for Santorum. Gingrich would garner 15%, and Paul would receive 13%. Eight percent are undecided.

Key points:

- 60% of likely Republican primary voters in Virginia think it's **more important to have a nominee who can defeat Obama** in the general election while 34% say a candidate who is a true conservative is the most important.
- Romney is the candidate perceived by 65% of likely Republican primary voters in Virginia to have **the best electoral** chances against President Obama.
- 36% think Santorum is the **true conservative in the race**.
- 78% of likely Republican primary voters in Virginia believe Romney will be the **inevitable nominee**.
- 26% believe Santorum is the candidate who **best understands voters' problems**. Romney receives 25% compared with 20% for Paul, and 15% for Gingrich.
- **Romney** is the candidate who is viewed as the most **acceptable** nominee. 58% of likely Republican primary voters in Virginia have this opinion. An additional 29% agree but with reservations. 11% say he is an unacceptable pick.
- Looking at **Santorum's acceptability**, 49% think he is a good fit for the role while 27% say he is acceptable, but they have hesitations. 20% believe he is not a good choice.
- **Gingrich** is less **acceptable**. 35% report Gingrich is acceptable as the top of the GOP ticket while 31% say the same but with reservations. 32% think he is an unacceptable candidate for the nomination.
- **Paul** is viewed as the least **acceptable**. Just 29% say he is a satisfactory choice for the Republican nomination while 29% think he will do, but they have concerns. Four in ten -- 40% -- report Paul is not a proper fit for the role.

Electability Key Candidate Quality

33% of likely Republican primary voters in Virginia want a candidate who can defeat President Barack Obama in the fall. 26% say someone who is close to them on the issues tops their list of candidate qualities while 21% say shared values is the key. 18% favor a candidate with experience, and 2% are unsure.

Half *Not Satisfied* with GOP Field

Just 47% of likely Republican primary voters in Virginia are satisfied with the four GOP candidates seeking the presidency. 50% would like to see someone else run, and 3% are unsure.

Majority Thinks Mormons are Christians

56% of likely Republican primary voters in Virginia say a Mormon is a Christian. However, 44% believe a Mormon is not a Christian or are unsure.

Obama Leads GOP Field by Wide Margins...Independents Desert GOP

How does the field of Republican candidates fare against President Obama in the general election?

Among Virginia's registered voters:

- Obama receives 52% to 35% for **Romney**. 12% are undecided.
- 53% favor Obama compared with 32% for **Paul**. 15% are undecided.
- Obama has a 22 percentage point lead against **Santorum**. Here, Obama garners 54% to 32% for Santorum. 15% are undecided.
- Obama -- 57% -- leads **Gingrich** -- 31%. 13% are undecided.

In each of these hypothetical contests, Obama leads his potential GOP challengers among independents by double digits.

"President Obama is getting now what he got in Virginia four years ago," says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. "The Republican primary battle is clearly taking its toll on the GOP candidates. They are losing the fight for independent voters."

There has been a shift in party identification from a similar poll conducted in October 2008. At that time, 34% of registered voters considered themselves to be Democrats, 28% identified as Republicans, and 38% called themselves independents. Now, those proportions are 36% Democrat, 24% Republican, and 39% independent.

When considering the race among those who said they voted in 2008, there is little change in the contest between Obama and his GOP contenders. When looking at participation in 2010, the matchups narrow slightly.

McDonnell Little Help as VP Pick... Popular as Governor

What if Romney were to receive the nomination and bring Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell on as his running mate? Obama and Vice President Joe Biden outpace Romney and McDonnell, 51% to 36% with 13% undecided.

If Santorum were to team up with McDonnell, Obama and Biden are still ahead, 51% to 34%, with 14% undecided.

However, Governor McDonnell is viewed positively by a majority of registered voters in Virginia. 51% approve of his job performance while 30% disapprove. 19% are unsure.

Obama Job Approval Rating at 51%

When it comes to President Obama's job approval rating in Virginia, 51% of registered voters in the state give the president high marks while 39% disapprove of his performance. 10% are unsure.

Virginia Voters Optimistic about the Future of the U.S. Economy

When thinking about the future of the U.S. economy, a majority of registered voters in Virginia -- 53% -- think the worst is over while 39% say the worst is still ahead. Eight percent are unsure.

How do Virginia voters think the U.S. economy will fare in the coming year? 38% believe it will get better while 19% say it will get worse. 40% report it will remain about the same, and 3% are unsure.

Nearly Half Believe the Nation Moving in the Wrong Direction

When it comes to the nation's trajectory, 49% of registered voters in Virginia say things are off on the wrong track while 44% believe the country is moving in the right direction. Seven percent are unsure.

Kaine Leads Allen in Senate Contest

In the race for U.S. Senate in Virginia, Democrat Tim Kaine leads Republican George Allen. In this hypothetical race, 48% back Kaine compared with 39% for Allen. 14% are undecided.

Looking at voters who say they participated in the 2008 election, Kaine receives 48% to Allen's 40%. But, if turnout resembles 2010, Kaine garners 49% to Allen's 43%.