



**NBC News/Marist Poll:
Gingrich Soars in Florida**

*** Complete Tables for Poll Appended ***

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This NBC News/Marist Poll Reports:

Newt Gingrich, who once received single-digit support in Florida, has climbed to the top of the Republican field. Gingrich now leads Mitt Romney by 15 percentage points statewide. Romney, who was in a tight battle with former candidate Herman Cain for the number one position in October, has been dramatically outpaced.

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

- 44% for Newt Gingrich
- 29% for Mitt Romney
- 8% for Ron Paul
- 4% for Rick Perry
- 3% for Michele Bachmann
- 3% for Jon Huntsman
- 2% for Rick Santorum
- 8% are undecided

“Not only does Gingrich have a double-digit lead, but no one else other than Romney has more than single digits,” says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. “The important question is who will still be an active candidate by the Florida primary at the end of January.”

The Republican contest looked much different in October. In that NBC News/Marist Poll, 33% of likely Republican primary voters in Florida including those who were undecided yet leaning toward a candidate backed Romney. A similar proportion -- 32% -- rallied for Herman Cain who has since suspended his campaign. Nine percent supported Perry. Paul and Gingrich each received 6%. Two percent, at that time, threw their support behind

Bachmann while the same proportion -- 2% -- favored Huntsman. One percent backed Santorum, and 8%, in October, were undecided.

When looking at the current **Florida potential Republican electorate including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate**, 41% of these voters back Gingrich while 28% support Romney. Paul receives the support of 9% while 4% are for Perry, and 4% are for Bachmann. Huntsman garners 3%, and Santorum is preferred by 1%. 10% are undecided.

Key points:

- Gingrich receives the backing of 57% of likely Republican primary voters who are **Tea Party supporters** compared with 22% for Romney.
- Among those who are **very conservative**, Gingrich leads Romney, 64% to 17%.
- Gingrich also outpaces Romney among likely Republican primary voters who are **Evangelical Christians**. Here, Gingrich receives the support of nearly half -- 49% - - compared with 26% for Romney.
- There are also **gender** and age **differences**. Among **men**, Gingrich -- 48% -- leads Romney -- 23% -- by 25 percentage points. Paul receives 12%. **Women** divide. 38% of women are for Gingrich compared with 35% for Romney. Gingrich does better among likely Republican primary voters who are older. Nearly half of those **45 or older** -- 47% -- favor Gingrich while 29% are behind Romney. Among those who are **younger than 45**, 34% support Gingrich while 26% rally for Romney. Paul receives 19% of this age group.

Plurality Strongly Supports Choice of Candidate

47% of likely Republican primary voters in Florida are strongly committed to their choice of candidate. 31% somewhat support their pick, and 20% might vote differently. Two percent are unsure.

Little has changed on this question since NBC News/Marist's October survey. At that time, 44% were firmly committed to their choice of candidate. More than one in four -- 27% -- were somewhat committed to their pick while the same proportion -- 27% -- thought they might vote differently come primary day. Only 2%, then, were unsure.

Key points:

- **Gingrich's backers** -- 60% -- are more firmly behind their candidate compared with **Romney's supporters** -- 38%.
- A majority -- 55% -- of **likely Republican primary voters who support the Tea Party** are firmly committed to their choice of candidate.

Second Best: More than Three in Ten Choose Romney

31% of likely Republican primary voters who have a candidate preference say Romney is their second choice. Nearly one in four -- 24% -- pick Gingrich while 10% select Bachmann. Perry is the second choice of 9% while 7% believe Paul is the next best choice. Santorum receives 6% while 4% think Huntsman is the second best option. Nine percent are undecided.

Key points:

- 55% of **Romney's backers** select Gingrich as their second choice while 51% of **Gingrich's backers** pick Romney.

Gingrich Bests Romney and Paul in Three-Way Matchup, Leads Romney Head-to-Head

If the Republican contest comes down to Gingrich, Romney, and Paul, 51% of likely Republican primary voters in Florida rally for Gingrich, 31% are behind Romney, and 10% support Paul. Nine percent are undecided.

If Paul is not in the final field, 54% of likely Republican primary voters in Florida back Gingrich while 36% are for Romney, and 10% are undecided.

Could Cain Endorsement Have Impact in Florida?

Since Herman Cain dropped out of the Republican contest, talk has turned toward which candidate, if any, he will endorse. But, will his endorsement matter? While 32% of likely Republican primary voters in Florida say a Cain endorsement makes no difference to their vote, 33% say it makes them more likely to cast their ballot for such a candidate while 29% report it will make them less likely to support a candidate with Cain's backing. Six percent are unsure.

Gingrich and Romney Deemed Acceptable as GOP Nominee

Almost two-thirds of likely Republican primary voters in Florida -- 65% -- think Gingrich is an acceptable candidate for the GOP nomination. 20% believe he is a good fit, but they have reservations, and 11% report he is unacceptable for the role. Four percent are unsure.

Looking at Romney, nearly six in ten -- 58% -- perceive him to be an acceptable choice for the top of the GOP ticket while 28% think he is suitable, but they have some concerns. 10%, however, believe Romney is an unacceptable option, and 4% are unsure.

However, the narrative changes for Paul and Perry. 37% of likely Republican primary voters say Paul is an *unacceptable* pick for the Republican nomination while 27% think he is acceptable. 30% report Paul is satisfactory, but they have reservations, and 6% are unsure.

When it comes to Perry, 35% believe he is *not* a good fit for the top of the GOP ticket while 27% find him to be acceptable. 31% think Perry, overall, is acceptable, but they have concerns, and 7% are unsure.

Talking Controversy: Which Issues are Acceptable?

When it comes to positions on controversial issues, what are likely Republican primary voters in Florida willing to accept in a nominee?

Most -- 92% -- believe it is *not* acceptable for the Republican candidate **to tolerate Iran building a nuclear weapon** while only 5% think it is acceptable. Three percent are unsure.

Eight in ten likely Republican primary voters -- 80% -- say it is problematic if the nominee supports **allowing illegal immigrants to obtain in-state tuition**. 14% do not find this stance to be objectionable, and 6% are unsure.

When it comes to a candidate who **supports an individual mandate for health care insurance**, 64% say it is not a desirable position while 25% find it acceptable, and 10% are unsure.

However, a majority of likely Republican primary voters in Florida -- 53% -- thinks it is *acceptable* for a candidate **to support limited amnesty for some illegal immigrants**. 41% believe it is unacceptable, and 7% are unsure.

Candidate Qualities That Matter

Nearly three in ten likely Republican primary voters in Florida -- 28% -- believe it is most important that the Republican nominee have the ability to defeat President Barack Obama in the general election. 26% rate shared values as their top priority while 23% want someone who is closest to them on the issues. 20% believe a candidate with the experience to govern is the most important quality in a candidate, and 4% are unsure.

When NBC News/Marist last reported this question in October, 28% of likely Republican primary voters thought a candidate who was closest to them on the issues was the most important factor in a candidate. More than one in four -- 26% -- cited shared values as their priority, 23% said electability was their priority while experience topped the check list for 21%. Three percent, at that time, were unsure.

Key points:

- Gingrich fares best among likely Republican primary voters who value **experience**. Here, he leads with a majority -- 52% -- to 29% for Romney. Romney has lost ground among this group. In October, a plurality of likely Republican primary voters in Florida who wanted a candidate with experience -- 46% -- supported Romney.
- Nearly half of those who rate **electability** as the most important candidate quality -- 47% -- favor Gingrich compared with 34% for Romney.
- Gingrich -- 42% -- also has the advantage over Romney -- 22% -- among those who want a candidate who **shares their positions on the issues**.
- Although Gingrich retains a lead, the contest tightens among likely Republican primary voters who want a **candidate who shares their values**. 38% favor Gingrich while 28% are behind Romney.

Romney Ideology Mismatch for Florida Likely Voters

Looking at the perception of Romney's ideology, a majority of likely Republican primary voters in Florida -- 56% -- describes Romney as a moderate, and 10% say he is a liberal. Only 23% think he is a conservative. 10% are unsure.

Romney's ideology is not compatible with that of the likely Republican electorate in Florida. Only 26% of these voters describe themselves as moderate and 4% view themselves as liberal. 70% identify as conservative.

Majority Says a Mormon is a Christian

57% of likely Republican primary voters in Florida think a Mormon is a Christian while 43% say a Mormon is not a Christian or are unsure.

There has been little change on this question since October. At that time, almost six in ten likely Republican primary voters -- 58% -- reported they believed a Mormon is a Christian while 42% said a Mormon is not a Christian or were unsure.

Key points:

- Gingrich -- 45% -- is ahead of Romney -- 20% -- among likely Republican primary voters who report a **Mormon is not a Christian or are unsure**. Among those who say a **Mormon is a Christian**, the race tightens. 42% back Gingrich compared with 35% who support Romney.

Obama Ahead of GOP Challengers...Lead Grows against Romney

Looking at hypothetical matchups for the general election, Romney remains President Obama's closest competitor. However, the president has widened his lead over his potential Republican challenger.

Among registered voters in Florida, 48% back the president while 41% support **Romney**, and 11% are undecided.

In October, voters divided. 45% were for Obama while 43% were behind Romney, and 12% were undecided.

Against **Gingrich**, the president leads with a majority -- 51% -- to 39% for Gingrich. 10% are undecided.

President Obama has a 13 percentage point lead against **Paul**. In this hypothetical contest, 49% favor the president while 36% rally for Paul. 14% are undecided.

In 2008, President Obama narrowly won Florida with 51% to 48% for John McCain.

Voters Divide about Obama's Job Performance

46% of registered voters in Florida approve of the job President Obama is doing in office while 45% disapprove, and 9% are unsure.

The perception of the president's job performance has improved in Florida. In NBC News/Marist's October survey, nearly half -- 49% -- *disapproved* of the president's job performance while 41% approved, and 10% were unsure.