



## **Romney, Paul Battle for Lead in Iowa...Santorum Surges, Perry in Mix, Gingrich Stumbles**

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

**For Immediate Release: Friday, December 30, 2011**

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

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

With just days until the Iowa caucus, Mitt Romney and Ron Paul are in a virtual dead heat. Romney receives the support of 23% to Paul's 21%, well within this NBC News/Marist Poll's margin of error, among likely Republican caucus-goers including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate. Rick Santorum who was in single digits earlier this month has bounced into the pack along with Rick Perry. Newt Gingrich, ahead in NBC News/Marist's early December survey, has seen his support cut by just more than half.

Here is how the contest stands among **likely Republican caucus-goers including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate and the difference from earlier this month:**

- 23% for Mitt Romney (+4)
- 21% for Ron Paul (+2)
- 15% for Rick Santorum (+9)
- 14% for Rick Perry (+4)
- 13% for Newt Gingrich (-15)
- 6% for Michele Bachmann (-1)
- 2% for Jon Huntsman (No change)
- 7% are undecided (-2)

"There has been a lot of movement in the past month," says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. "This is a contest that is very unsettled."

In NBC News/Marist's survey in early December, 28% of likely Republican caucus-goers including leaners supported Gingrich followed by Paul and Romney who each received 19%. Perry garnered 10% of participants' support while 7% favored Bachmann. Santorum received 6%, and 2% were for Huntsman. Nine percent, at the time, were undecided.

Among the larger pool of **potential Republican caucus-goers** including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate, 23% back Romney compared with 20% for Paul. Perry receives the support of 14% as does Gingrich. 12% are behind Santorum while 5% rally for Bachmann and 2% support Huntsman. 10% are undecided.

**Key points:**

- Among likely Republican caucus-goers who are **conservative or very conservative** including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate, 21% are for Romney compared with 18% for Santorum and the same proportion -- 18% -- for Paul.
- Paul -- 28% -- and Romney -- 27% -- vie for the lead among those who are **liberal or moderate**.
- Looking at **Tea Party supporters** overall, Santorum receives 20% compared with 17% for Romney and the same proportion -- 17% -- for Paul. Gingrich garners 16% of these participants. However, among those who are **strong supporters of the Tea Party**, Gingrich and Santorum each receive 22%.
- Among likely Republican caucus-goers who **do not support the Tea Party**, Romney -- 27% -- edges Paul -- 24%.
- Nearly one in four likely Republican caucus-goers who are **Evangelical Christians** - - 24% -- back Santorum. This compares with 21% for Perry.
- Looking at age, 38% of likely Republican caucus-goers **under 30 years old** and 22% of those **30 to 44 years old** back Paul. Among those **45 to 59 years old**, it's Romney with 23% and Santorum and Paul who each receive 19%. Romney -- 29% - - does the best among those who are **60 and older**.

**Majority Firmly Committed to Candidate, but Many Remain Uncertain**

With the clock ticking down to the caucus, only 53% of likely Republican caucus-goers report they strongly support their choice of candidate. 33% say they are somewhat committed to their pick, and 13% think they might vote differently on Tuesday. Only 2% are unsure.

There has been an increase in the proportion of voters who say they will not waver in their support. When NBC News/Marist last reported this question in early December, 40% said they were firmly behind their choice. The same proportion -- 40% -- was somewhat committed to their candidate while 19% said they could change their mind. Only 1%, at that time, was unsure.

**Key points:**

- Nearly six in ten **likely Republican caucus-goers who support Santorum** -- 59% - - are firmly committed to him. This compares with 54% of **Paul's backers**, 52% of

those who rally for **Perry**, and 51% of those who are behind **Romney**. 46% of **Gingrich's** supporters express a similar level of support.

### **Romney, Perry Top List as Second Choice**

When it comes to the second choice of likely Republican caucus-goers who have a candidate preference, 21% pick Romney while Perry is the second selection of 20%. Santorum receives 15% followed by Gingrich with 13%. Bachmann is next with 11% followed closely by Paul with 9%. Huntsman is the second pick of 3%, and 8% are undecided.

#### **Key points:**

- Romney is the second choice of 38% of **Gingrich's backers**, 34% of **Paul's supporters**, and 25% of **those behind Perry**.
- Perry -- 35% -- is the second choice of **those who support Santorum**.
- **Among those who back Romney**, there is little consensus. 20% pick Gingrich as their second choice, 19% select Santorum, and 18% choose Perry.

### **Santorum, Paul Considered to be True Conservatives, but Gingrich Perceived to Be Best Debate Match for Obama**

When it comes to the candidate who is the **true conservative** in the race, 23% of likely Republican caucus-goers believe Santorum deserves that title followed closely by Paul with 21%. 16% say Bachmann is the true conservative while 11% have this view of Perry. Seven percent believe Romney is the real conservative, and 6% say the same about Gingrich. Only 2% categorize Huntsman in this way. Four percent say none of the candidates deserve this title, and 9% are undecided.

However, when it comes to the **best debater against President Barack Obama**, 37% believe Gingrich is the best opponent. Here, Romney follows with 26%. 13% think Paul can best debate the president compared with 7% for Perry. Four percent think Bachmann is the best debate match against the president compared with 3% who have this view of Santorum. Just 1% gives Huntsman top debate honors while 2% believe none of the candidates can adequately take on the president in a debate. Seven percent are undecided.

Which is more important to likely Republican caucus-goers? A majority -- 54% -- want a Republican nominee who is a true conservative while 39% prefer one who can best battle it out with Obama in the debates. Seven percent are unsure.

## **Romney, Santorum Considered Acceptable Candidates...Loss of Confidence in Gingrich**

Half of likely Republican caucus-goers -- 50% -- think Romney is an acceptable candidate for the GOP nomination. 27% share this view but have reservations while 21% say he is an unacceptable choice. Three percent are unsure. In NBC News/Marist's previous survey in Iowa, fewer than half -- 46% -- thought Romney fit the bill.

When looking at Santorum's acceptability, 49% believe he is a good fit for the role while 22% report he will do, but they have some concerns. The same proportion -- 22% -- says Santorum is an unacceptable pick, and 7% are unsure.

When it comes to Perry, there has been a slight increase in the proportion of likely Republican caucus-goers who believe he is an acceptable choice for the nomination. 44% have this view while 29% say the same but with concerns. 24% think Perry is not a good match for the role, and 4% are unsure. Perry was perceived to be an acceptable choice by 38% in NBC News/Marist's previous survey in Iowa.

Likely Republican caucus-goers are more uncertain about Bachmann's acceptability. Here, 37% say Bachmann is a good fit for the nomination while 25% agree but have hesitations. 34%, however, think Bachmann is an unacceptable choice, and 3% are unsure.

Looking at Paul, 35% believe he is a good fit for the role while 21% agree but with reservations. 41% say he is an unacceptable pick, and 3% are unsure. Earlier this month, 38% of likely Republican caucus-goers thought Paul was a good match for the GOP nomination.

Gingrich has slipped from grace in the eyes of likely Republican caucus-goers. 35% think Gingrich is a good fit for the nomination. 28% report he is acceptable for the role, but they have some reservations. 35%, however, say he is an unacceptable choice, and 3% are unsure. Earlier this month, Gingrich was the only candidate in the GOP field perceived by a majority of likely Republican caucus-goers -- 54% -- to be a good fit for the nomination with only 16% describing him as not acceptable.

## Shared Values Tops List of Participants' Priorities

What matters most to likely Republican caucus-goers? Three in ten -- 30% -- want a candidate who shares their values while 28% think electability is the most important factor. 23% prefer a candidate who is closest to them on the issues while 15% want someone with the experience to govern. Four percent are unsure.

There has been a change on this question. In NBC News/Marist's early December survey, more than three in ten likely Republican caucus-goers -- 31% -- wanted a candidate who was closest to them on the issues while 29% desired someone who shared their values. Electability was key for 21% of likely Republican caucus-goers, and 16% preferred a candidate with experience. Two percent, at that time, were unsure.

### Key points:

- Santorum -- 25% -- has surged among those who **want a candidate who shares their values**. Paul receives 21% from this group of participants.
- Romney -- 34% -- has the advantage among those who value **electability** in a candidate. Gingrich trails behind with 18% of these likely Republican caucus-goers followed by Perry with 16%.
- Romney also does well among those who want a candidate who has the **experience to govern**. Here, 29% back Romney compared with 22% for Paul and 19% for Gingrich.
- Among those who prefer a **candidate who is closest to them on the issues**, Paul leads with 34% to 23% for Romney.

### Getting to Know the Candidates

The candidates are making their final pitch to caucus-goers in Iowa. In the last month, 86% of likely Republican caucus-goers report being contacted by at least one of the campaigns.

The proportions of likely Republican caucus-goers who have been contacted by each of the following:

- 72% **Paul** campaign
- 69% **Perry** campaign
- 68% **Romney** campaign
- 68% **Gingrich** campaign
- 62% **Bachmann** campaign
- 44% **Santorum** campaign

### **Most in Iowa Do Not Want Palin or Bush to Run**

Sarah Palin recently said there is still time for a Republican candidate to enter the race for the GOP nomination. Do likely Republican caucus-goers want Palin to jump in? 81% do not while 14% do. Six percent are unsure.

A run by Jeb Bush is only slightly more acceptable. 70% do not want Bush to enter the contest while 17% do. 13% are unsure.

### **Majority Believes Mormons are Christians**

55% of likely Republican caucus-goers in Iowa believe a Mormon is a Christian while 45% think a Mormon is not a Christian, or they are unsure.

Earlier this month, the same proportions shared these views. A majority of likely Republican caucus-goers -- 55% -- reported a Mormon was a Christian while 45% thought the opposite or were unsure.

### **Key points:**

- While Romney -- 30% -- is ahead among those who think a **Mormon is a Christian**, Paul -- 20% -- edges Santorum -- 18% -- and Perry -- 16% -- among those who believe a **Mormon is not a Christian or are unsure**. Gingrich receives 14% of these participants compared with 13% for Romney.

### **Obama's Job Approval Rating at 45%**

Voters divide about President Obama's job approval rating. 45% of registered voters in Iowa approve of the job the president is doing in office while 43% disapprove, and 12% are unsure.

Views of the president's performance in office have flipped. In NBC News/Marist's previous survey in Iowa, 43% approved while 46% disapproved. 12%, at the time, were unsure.