



Mercyhurst Center
for Applied Politics

*Pennsylvania Republican
Presidential Primary Election*

*A Survey of 425 Registered
Republicans in Pennsylvania*

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Summary

A Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics poll of 425 registered Republicans in Pennsylvania (+/- 4.75% margin of error) indicates that, with less than one month until the state's primary election, Rick Santorum (37%) is leading Mitt Romney (31%) in the Keystone state. Santorum's once substantial lead over Mitt Romney in the state has diminished to approximately 6%, and this lead is within the poll's margin of error. Santorum's advantage exists in spite of the fact that a majority of Republicans polled say that Mitt Romney stands the best chance of beating Barack Obama in November (50%) and nearly the same number (49%) say the long nomination process is weakening their party's ability to challenge Barack Obama. A majority (55%) of Republicans also say that the tone of the primary competition has been somewhat or much more negative than previous primary competitions.

In spite of recent signs of economic recovery, Pennsylvania Republicans identify economic issues as being of primary importance for them in the April election. Health care and a collection of other issues also appear to be shaping Pennsylvania Republicans' choice of candidates in the primary election.

In terms of their perception of the candidates, Pennsylvania Republicans choose a variety of words to describe each would-be President. Mitt Romney is most frequently described as "businessman" or "moderate," Rick Santorum as "conservative" or "honest," Newt Gingrich as "intelligent," and Ron Paul as "old." Interestingly, very few Republicans chose the word "Mormon" to describe Mitt Romney, suggesting that, perhaps, the issue of religion is not as problematic for him as once supposed. Also noteworthy is that more than 10% of Republicans chose the word "conservative" as the one word they would use to describe Rick Santorum, compared to .7% who chose the word to describe Romney.

The Pennsylvania Republican Primary Contest

If the Pennsylvania Republican Primary Election were held today, 37% of Pennsylvania's registered Republicans say they would vote for Rick Santorum, 31% for Mitt Romney, 9% for Newt Gingrich, and 10% for Ron Paul. The 6-point lead suggests a tightening race with a month to go before the Pennsylvania primary, and the difference between the two candidates is within the margin of error for the poll. Santorum's advantage over Romney exists in spite of the fact that roughly a majority of registered Republicans say that Mitt Romney (50%) has the best chance of beating Barack Obama in the November election, and only a quarter (24%) say the same of Santorum.

The survey contains an indicator for whether supporters of either candidate will coalesce behind the party's candidate in the fall if their preferred candidate loses. In a general election contest between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama, 74% of Pennsylvania Republicans say they would vote for Mitt Romney, while 17% say that they would vote for Barack Obama (10%) or choose not to vote (7%). Similarly, 76% say that they would vote for Rick Santorum in November if he is the party's nominee, and roughly 18% say that they would not.

Although Rick Santorum and Mitt Romney are clearly the key candidates vying for the lead in Pennsylvania, a plurality (35%) of Republicans says that Newt Gingrich is best able to address challenges in the area of foreign policy.

Interestingly, in a polarized electorate Pennsylvania Republicans seem to favor bipartisanship over ideological rigidity, if a Republican candidate is elected next fall. A strong majority (83%) of Pennsylvania's registered Republicans say that if their party's candidate wins the November election, it is either very (54%) or somewhat (29%) important for him to be willing to compromise with Democrats on key issues facing the country. Likewise, roughly a majority (53%) say that if a Republican wins the November election, it is more important for him to "compromise with the other party if it is necessary to get things done," than to "stick to his principles, no matter what" (41%).

The Republican Nomination Process

Registered Republicans are interested in the primary, though a plurality sees the long process as a weakening the Republican chances in the fall. A solid majority of Pennsylvania Republicans say that they are very interested (51%) or somewhat interested (35%) in the Pennsylvania primary election, but a plurality (49%) says the lengthy primary competition has weakened their party's ability to challenge Barack Obama in the November election. A plurality (46%) of Pennsylvania Republicans also believes that there have been too many debates between their party's candidates and, out of the twenty televised debates, Republicans have watched an average of only 3.7. A solid majority (55%) of Pennsylvania Republicans also says that the tone of the primary competition has been somewhat (37%) or much more (18%) negative than previous primary competitions, and a plurality (47%) says that the media is most responsible for setting the tone of the campaign.

One-Word Descriptions of the Republican Candidates

When asked to choose one word to describe Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, Rick Santorum, and Mitt Romney, a plurality of Pennsylvanian Republicans chose

“intelligent” (22) for Newt Gingrich, “old” (18) for Ron Paul, “businessman” (12) for Romney, and “conservative” (45) for Rick Santorum (see Table 1). The words most frequently chosen to describe Mitt Romney also included “moderate,” (10) “rich” (9) and “Arrogant” (9). For Santorum, the words most frequently chosen were largely positive with “honest,” (24) “moral” (11) and “good” (9) mentioned after his conservative ideology. Interestingly, only 4 respondents (<1%) chose the word “Mormon” to describe Mitt Romney.

Table 1: Top One-Word Descriptions of the Republican Candidates*

(Q18 – Q21. If you had to choose one word to describe [Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, Rick Santorum, Mitt Romney], what word would that be? I can only record one word.)

Gingrich (n=344)		Paul (n=308)		Romney (n=362)		Santorum (n=365)	
	n		n		n		n
Intelligent	22	Old	18	Businessman	12	Conservative	45
Old	14	Unknown	15	Moderate	10	Honest	24
Smart	11	Interesting	12	Rich	9	Moral	11
Politician	11	Honest	10	Arrogant	9	Good	9
Brilliant	8	Intelligent	9	Business	7	Religious	8
Knowledgeable	7	Libertarian	7	Untrustworthy	6	Ultraconservative	5
Experienced	7	Irrelevant	7	Changeable	6	Inexperienced	5
Aggressive	6	Eccentric	6	Boring	5	Values	5
Sleazy	6	Too-Old	5	Business	5	Extreme	5
Untrustworthy	6	Consistent	5	Capable	5	Sincere	5
Loser	6			Experienced	5		
Unlikeable	5			Good/Great	5		
Dislike	5			Honest	5		
				Intelligent	5		
				Positive	5		
				Flip-flopper	5		
				Fake	5		
				Politician	5		
				Positive	5		

**Top one-word descriptions of the Republican candidates include only words that were used by a minimum of 5 respondents. Results are based on un-weighted data.*

Most Important Issues in the Pennsylvania Primary

As one might expect, a plurality of Pennsylvanian Republicans who were polled identified the economy as first (151) or second (53) most important issue in the primary election. When combined with “jobs” (24/18) and unemployment (6/2), a majority (63%) of those polled say that some facet of their economic life is of primary or secondary importance in the primary election. Besides the economy, health care is of primary (39) or secondary (70) importance to a sizable number of individuals who were polled.

Table 2: Most Important Issues in the Pennsylvania Republican Primary*
(Q16 and Q17. Using only one word, what is the most important issue for you in the primary election? Besides the issue just mentioned, what is the most important issue for you in the primary election?)

Most Important Issue (n=400)		Second Most Important Issue (n=357)	
	n		n
Economy	151	Healthcare	70
Health care	39	Economy	53
Jobs	24	Jobs	18
Beating-Obama	13	Gas	18
Abortion	9	Foreign-Policy	14
Taxes	8	Taxes	13
Honesty	8	Defense	11
Winning	8	War	10
Medicare	7	Security	8
Freedom	7	Religion	8
Debt	7	Abortion	7
Unemployment	6	Social Security	6
Education	6	Morality	6
Budget	6	Freedom	6
Gas-Prices	5	Education	6
Deficit	5	Budget	6
		Beating-Obama	5

**Most Important issues in the Pennsylvania Republican Primary include only words that were used by a minimum of 5 respondents. Results are based on unweighted data.*

Frequency Report

Interviews were completed with 425 registered Republicans in Pennsylvania. For a sample size of 425, there is a 95 percent probability that our survey results are within plus or minus 4.8 percentage points (the margin of error) of the actual population distribution for any given question. For subsamples the margin of error is larger (depending on the size of the subsample). The data were weighted on age and gender to correct for discrepancies between sample and population. Due to rounding, column totals may not equal 100 percent. Bracketed text was intended for the use of the programmer, while bolded, italicized or parenthetical text was intended as instruction for the interviewer.

1. To begin, I would like to know about where you get your news about politics. About how many days a week do you read a local newspaper to get news about politics?

Days	
0	38%
1	6%
2	7%
3	5%
4	2%
5	7%
6	4%
7	32%
DK	-
RF	-

2. About how many days a week do you watch cable news channels like CNN, FOX NEWS, MSNBC to get news about politics?

Days	
0	27%
1	10%
2	8%
3	7%
4	2%
5	8%
6	2%
7	36%
DK	1%
RF	-

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1 OR 9-10, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 4]

3. Which one do you watch most often? (Subsample, N=327)

Fox News	59%
CNN	22%
MSNBC	8%
Other	10%
DK	2%
RF	-

4. How about watch a local news program to get news about politics? (How many days a week do you...)

Days	
0	29%
1	8%
2	4%
3	7%
4	5%
5	6%
6	3%
7	38%
DK	0%
RF	-

5. How about listen to talk radio programs to get news about politics? (How many days a week do you...)

Days	
0	59%
1	6%
2	5%
3	5%
4	4%
5	9%
6	1%
7	11%
DK	0%
RF	-

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1 OR 9-10, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 7]

6. How about listen to news radio programs to get news about politics? (How many days a week do you...)

Days	
0	66%
1	6%
2	5%
3	4%
4	2%
5	7%
6	1%
7	10%
DK	1%
RF	-

7. How about discuss current political news with friends, family or coworkers?
(How many days a week do you...)

Days	
0	17%
1	17%
2	16%
3	14%
4	9%
5	7%
6	2%
7	16%
DK	2%
RF	-

8. How about use the internet to get news about politics? (How many days a week do you...)

Days	
0	45%
1	7%
2	6%
3	6%
4	7%
5	5%
6	2%
7	22%
DK	2%
RF	-

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1 OR 9-10, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 11]

9. Now I'd like to ask you some questions about the Republican candidates for president of the United States. Which Republican candidate has the best chance to defeat Barack Obama in the fall? Would you say it is Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, Mitt Romney, or Rick Santorum?

Newt Gingrich	5%
Ron Paul	3%
Mitt Romney	50%
Rick Santorum	24%
All of them	1%
None of them	10%
Other	-
DK	7%
RF	0%

10. Would you say you are very interested, somewhat interested, somewhat uninterested, or not at all interested in the Republican primary election?

Very interested	51%
Somewhat interested	35%
Somewhat uninterested	5%
Not at all interested	8%
DK	1%
RF	-

11. Do you feel there have been too many, not enough, or the right amount of televised Republican debates?

Too many	46%
Not enough	7%
Right amount	33%
DK	13%
RF	-

12. About how many did you watch? Mean=3.7

13. In your opinion, has the tone of this Republican primary competition been much more positive, somewhat more positive, somewhat more negative, or much more negative than previous presidential primaries?

Much more positive	4%
Somewhat more positive	22%
Somewhat more negative	37%
Much more negative	18%
Same (volunteered)	10%
DK	8%
RF	0%

14. Who is most responsible for setting the tone of the Republican primary campaign? Are the candidates, the media, the political parties, or outside groups most responsible for setting the tone of the campaign?

Candidates	28%
Media	47%
Political Parties	6%
Outside Groups	10%
Other	4%
DK	5%
RF	0%

15. In your opinion, has the long primary competition between the Republican candidates strengthened, weakened, or had no effect on their ability to challenge Barack Obama in the fall?

Strengthened	26%
Weakened	49%
No effect	17%
Other	0%
DK	8%
RF	-

16. Using only one word, what is the most important issue for you in the primary election? I can only record one word.

17. Besides the issue you just mentioned, what is the second most important issue for you in the primary election? I can only record one word.

[ASK QUESTIONS 18 – 21 IN RANDOM ORDER]

18. If you had to choose one word to describe Newt Gingrich, what word would that be? I can only record one word.

19. If you had to choose one word to describe Ron Paul, what word would that be? I can only record one word.

20. If you had to choose one word to describe Mitt Romney, what word would that be? I can only record one word.

21. If you had to choose one word to describe Rick Santorum, what word would that be? I can only record one word.

22. There are many foreign policy challenges facing the United States, including the continuing war in Afghanistan, the issues facing Iran, and the international image of the United States. Who do you think is best prepared to address foreign policy challenges? Would you say it is Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, Mitt Romney, or Rick Santorum?

Newt Gingrich	35%
Ron Paul	7%
Mitt Romney	23%
Rick Santorum	19%
Other	1%
None of them	5%
All of them	0%
DK	9%
RF	-

23. If the Pennsylvania primary election was held today, which Republican candidate would you vote for? Would you vote for Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, Mitt Romney, or Rick Santorum?

Newt Gingrich	9%
Ron Paul	10%
Mitt Romney	31%
Rick Santorum	37%
Other	4%
DK	6%
RF	2%

24. If Mitt Romney wins the nomination, would you vote for Mitt Romney, Barack Obama or choose not to vote in the November election?

Mitt Romney	74%
Barack Obama	10%
Choose not to vote	7%
Other	1%
DK	6%
RF	1%

25. If Rick Santorum wins the nomination, would you vote for Rick Santorum, Barack Obama or choose not to vote in the November election?

Rick Santorum	76%
Barack Obama	12%
Choose not to vote	6%
Other	1%
DK	4%
RF	0%

26. If the Republican candidate beats Barack Obama in the November election and becomes president, how important will it be for him to compromise with Democrats to make progress on key issues facing the country? Is it very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, or not at all important that the Republican Party nominee is able to compromise with the other party?

Very important	54%
Somewhat important	29%
Somewhat unimportant	6%
Not important at all	7%
DK	3%
RF	-

27. Which is more important to you, that your party nominate a candidate for president that will remain true to his principles, no matter what; or a candidate that would compromise with the other party if it is necessary to get things done?

Remain true to principles	39%
Compromise	53%
Depends	4%
DK	3%
RF	0%

28. Finally, I have a few questions that we'll be using for statistical purposes. Generally speaking, would you consider yourself to be a liberal, a conservative, a moderate, or have you not thought much about this?

Liberal	2%
Conservative	56%
Moderate	16%
Not thought much about it	24%
DK	1%
RF	-

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1 OR 3-4 OR 8-9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 32]

29. Would you consider yourself to be a strong conservative or not very strong conservative? (Subsample, N=254)

Strong conservative	69%
Not very strong conservative	26%
Other	4%
DK	1%
RF	-

30. In what year were you born?

18 – 34 years	20%
35 – 64 years	57%
65 years or older	24%

31. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than high school	2%
High school	22%
Some college/associates/technical	26%
College	31%
Graduate degree	14%
DK	-
RF	-

32. What is your religious affiliation?

33. What is your marital status?

Married	71%
Single	15%
Divorced	5%
Widowed	7%
Partnership	1%
Other	-
DK	-
RF	0%

34. If you add together the yearly incomes, before taxes, of all the members of your household for the past year, what would the total be?

Less than \$30,000	10%
\$30,000-\$60,000	23%
\$60,000-\$100,000	24%
\$100,000-\$150,000	10%
Greater than \$150,000	12%
DK	
RF	20%

35. What is your race?

White	97%
Non-White	2%
DK	-
RF	1%

36. Sex

Male	50%
Female	50%

37. In which county do you live?

Allegheny County	8%
Philadelphia County	8%
North Eastern Counties	10%
North Western Counties	8%
South Eastern Counties	17%
South Western Counties	13%
Central PA Counties	36%

Detailed Methodology

This report summarizes the results of a survey of registered Republican voters in Pennsylvania which was conducted between Monday, March 19 and Friday, March 30, 2012. During the 11 day field period interviewers called weekday evenings between the hours of 6:00 and 9:00 PM and between 11:00 AM and 3:00 PM on selected weekdays. For each working phone number, interviewers made no fewer than eight attempts to contact individuals selected to participate in the study. Calls were generated by CATI software or manually dialed and relied on a list of randomly selected registered Pennsylvania Republicans obtained from Marketing Systems Group (<http://www.m-s-g.com/home.aspx>).

A total of 425 subjects were interviewed. For a sample size of 425, there is a 95 percent probability that the results are within plus or minus 4.75 percentage points (the margin of error) of the actual population distribution for any given question. For subsamples, the margin of error is higher (depending on the size of the subsample). Aside from sampling error, there are several factors that prevent the results obtained through a probability sample from being a perfect representation of the results that would be obtained if the entire population was interviewed. This non-sampling error may be caused by a variety of factors including, but not limited to, response rate and question order. In this survey, a variety of techniques were employed to reduce common sources of non-sampling error.

Response Rate

Calculating a response rate for a particular study involves considering a number of variables (see http://www.aapor.org/Response_Rates_An_Overview.htm); but, simply stated, it refers to the percentage of individuals in a sample that, when contacted, elect to participate in a study by responding an interviewer's questions. In recent years, researchers have documented a sharp decline in response rates. Today, a typical study that relies on telephone interviews can expect a response rate of between 20 and 30%. Although it is unclear if, or to what extent, response rate is a source of non-sampling error, most polls strive to maximize response rate by making multiple attempts to contact individuals and taking steps to secure their cooperation once they have been reached. In this way, our study of registered female voters in Pennsylvania is no different than most polls: No fewer than eight attempts were made to contact hard-to-reach individuals. These attempts occurred during weekday evenings, mornings and on Saturday afternoons. To ensure a high rate of cooperation, interviewers received training on conversion techniques that are consistent with research ethics as identified by the Mercyhurst University

Institutional Review Board. As a result of these efforts, our study obtained a response rate of 23%.

Questions

This report contains the questions as worded on the questionnaire and in the order in which they were asked. Some of the questions include bracketed information, which is, in every case, an instruction to the programmer or interviewer.

Whenever possible, question order was randomized to ensure that respondents did not receive a set order of response options, which allowed response set bias to be minimized. For structured (close-ended) questions, interviewers were trained to probe for clarity when respondents' answers were not identical to the predefined response options. For unstructured (open-ended) questions, interviewers were trained to record verbatim responses whenever possible. In cases where verbatim responses were impossible to capture due to their length or complexity, interviewers sought to clarify responses by using standard, question-specific probes. In cases where a respondent asked that a question or response option be repeated, interviewers were careful to re-read the entire question or all response options.

Data

Data collected during this study was prepared for analysis by director and associate director of Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics. Data preparation included, but was not limited to, removing partial interviews (respondent-terminated interviews) from the dataset. To maximize the accuracy of our results and correct for discrepancies between our sample and the population, the data were weighted on gender and age. Simply stated, weighting is when data collected from survey respondents are adjusted to represent the population from which the sample was drawn.

Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics

The Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics (MCAP) began operations in July 2010. Inspired by the mission of Mercyhurst University and guided by the university's core values, the center promotes reasoned discourse about problems facing communities, states and nations. It accomplishes this objective by providing elected officials, government agencies, news organizations, and nonprofits with accurate and unbiased assessments of public opinion; and offering a nonpartisan forum for public debates and roundtable discussions that address pressing public problems.

The centerpiece of MCAP is the state of the art computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) facility. The facility, which is located in the Hammermill Library, is comprised of sixteen interviewer stations and staffed by well-trained research associates. The specialized computer software used to conduct telephone interviews generates random telephone numbers in a predefined geographic area or dials from a list, and allows research associates to accurately complete even the most complex interviews.

The center also has the ability to design and administer online surveys. This method of interviewing is ideal for organizations that have relatively up-to-date email addresses for their members. The software used by MCAP allows a researcher to administer a survey - whether short and simple or long and complex – to an unlimited number of email addresses. In addition, a researcher has the ability to monitor response rates and send out reminders, thereby ensuring that the study produces high quality results.

As the Northwestern Pennsylvania's only CATI facility whose primary purpose is to regularly and accurately gauge public opinion, the MCAP is an invaluable resource for community leaders. Each year the center conducts polls on issues of local, state and national interest. The results of these studies are made available to the public via the university's webpage (polisci.mercyhurst.edu/mcap). In addition to its annual polls, the center offers its services to private parties, nonprofits, news organizations, and government agencies for minimal cost.

Please direct questions about the center to Dr. Joseph M. Morris, Director, Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics, Mercyhurst University, 501 E. 38th Street, Erie, PA, 16546, (814) 824-2154, jmorris@mercyhurst.edu.