

Franklin Pierce College / WBZ-TV Poll



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Republican Presidential Primary

RINDGE, NH - Although early in the contest, the historic 2008 New Hampshire Republican Primary is already highly competitive, with clear front-runners well established in the race. Currently, John McCain and Rudolph Giuliani are the early front-runners among likely Republican Primary voters, with Mitt Romney in a competitive third place. Apart from Newt Gingrich - who has not stated his intention to run for the Republican nomination - each of the other candidates currently attracts little support.

Overview

The findings outlined in this report are based on the latest Franklin Pierce College / WBZ-TV Poll, conducted by RKM Research and Communications in collaboration with faculty and staff at Franklin Pierce College. Students from the Fitzwater Center for Communication at Franklin Pierce College will also be involved in subsequent polls. The Franklin Pierce College / WBZ-TV Poll is sponsored by Franklin Pierce College and WBZ-TV. The project represents a collaboration that provides Franklin Pierce College students unique learning opportunities to participate in the polling process and gain real-world experience working with an independent marketing research firm.

The poll is based on interviews with 400 likely Republican Presidential Primary voters. All respondents interviewed in this study were part of a fully representative sample. The survey was administered by telephone March 7-12, 2007. The survey of 400 respondents has a maximum margin of sampling error of $\pm 4.9\%$.

Candidate Favorability Ratings

Former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani (79%) and Arizona Senator John McCain (78%) both have high favorable ratings. Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney (68%) also has a high favorable rating.

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Heard of, but no opinion	Never heard of candidate
McCain	78%	15%	7%	0%
Giuliani	79%	13%	7%	1%
Romney	68%	17%	13%	2%
Gingrich	44%	39%	15%	2%
Huckabee	15%	9%	29%	47%
Brownback	13%	9%	25%	53%
Hagel	11%	16%	26%	47%
Hunter	7%	5%	19%	69%
Paul	5%	3%	14%	78%
Tancredo	7%	7%	16%	70%
Gilmore	4%	2%	16%	78%
Pataki	30%	23%	31%	16%
Thompson	16%	14%	23%	47%

There is a large discrepancy in recognition between the four top candidates (McCain, Giuliani, Romney and Gingrich) and nearly all of the other Republican candidates. In fact, over one-half of respondents said that they have never heard of five of the Republican candidates under consideration: Jim Gilmore (78%); Ron Paul (78%); Tom Tancredo (70%); Duncan Hunter (69%); and Sam Brownback (53%). In addition, candidates with low name recognition include Tommy Thompson, Chuck Hagel and Mike Huckabee, all of whom are not recognized by 47 percent of Republican Primary Voters.

Net Favorability Ratings

In addition to overall favorability ratings, it is useful to consider each candidate's net favorability, which represents the difference between each candidate's favorable rating and unfavorable rating.

The Republican Presidential Primary hopeful with the highest overall favorability is Giuliani, with a favorable rating of 79 percent. Giuliani also has the lowest unfavorable rating of just 13 percent, leaving him with a net favorability rating of 66 percent. John McCain is a close second, with a favorable rating of 78 percent and an unfavorable rating of 15 percent, leaving him with a net favorability rating of 63 percent. Mitt Romney has a favorable rating of 68 percent and an unfavorable rating of 17 percent, leaving him with a net favorability rating of 51 percent.

Although the results are similar for Giuliani and McCain, the data indicate that Giuliani may have stronger overall favorability. Forty percent of respondents feel very favorable toward Giuliani, compared to 32 percent who feel very favorable toward McCain, and 27 percent who feel very favorable toward Romney.

Newt Gingrich is a polarizing potential candidate among Republican voters, with a favorable rating of 44 percent and an unfavorable rating of 39 percent, leaving him with a net favorability rating of just five percent, much lower than Giuliani, McCain and Romney.

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Net Favorability
McCain	78%	15%	63%
Giuliani	79%	13%	66%
Romney	68%	17%	51%
Gingrich	44%	39%	5%
Huckabee	15%	9%	6%
Brownback	13%	9%	4%
Hagel	11%	16%	-5%
Hunter	7%	5%	2%
Paul	5%	3%	2%
Tancredo	7%	7%	0%
Gilmore	4%	2%	2%
Pataki	30%	23%	7%
Thompson	16%	14%	2%

According to R. Kelly Myers, Senior Fellow, Fitzwater Center for Communication at Franklin Pierce College, "the three top-tier candidates in the Republican Presidential Primary each have very strong approval ratings, and relatively low negatives, leaving each of them in a strong position. The net favorability ratings for all of the other Republican Presidential hopefuls currently remain extraordinarily low."

Republican Presidential Primary

If the Republican Presidential Primary were held today, John McCain (29%) and Rudy Giuliani (28%) would be in a statistical tie for first place, followed closely by Former Massachusetts Governor, Mitt Romney (22%). Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, though not an official candidate, would come in fourth place with five percent of the vote. None of the other candidates in the race attract much support at all at this time. Nine percent of Republican Primary voters remain undecided.

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John McCain	29%
Rudy Giuliani	28%
Mitt Romney	22%
Newt Gingrich	5%
Mike Huckabee	2%
Sam Brownback	1%
Chuck Hagel	1%
Duncan Hunter	1%
Ron Paul	1%
Tom Tancredo	1%
Jim Gilmore	*
George Pataki	*
Tommy Thompson	*
Undecided	9%

*=Less than 0.5%

According to Myers, "the 2008 Republican Presidential Primary is currently shaping up to be a lopsided contest between three top-tier candidates and everyone else. Mitt Romney no longer looks like a distant third place candidate, but a real contender, primarily because he is polling well among self-identified conservatives. Gingrich could become a factor in the race, but he would have to overcome his high negatives to run more competitively. Each of the other Republican Presidential hopefuls has their work cut out for them if they intend to break out of the pack and compete more successfully against today's early front-runners."

Variations in Candidate Preference

Respondents were asked the reasons why they would vote for their first choice candidate. The results are shown below for the top three Republican candidates.

	McCain	Giuliani	Romney
Electability	6%	5%	6%
Position on issues	29%	17%	41%
Best experience	25%	9%	5%
Leadership qualities	20%	58%	26%
Character	17%	10%	24%

McCain voters are drawn to his candidacy based on his position on the issues (29%), his political experience (25%), and to some extent, his leadership qualities (20%). More so than any other candidate, Giuliani stands out in terms of perceived strong leadership qualities (58%), but much lower in terms of his position on the issues (17%).

Romney voters are drawn to his candidacy based on his position on the issues (41%), and to some extent, his leadership qualities (26%) and strong personal character (24%).

According to Myers, “these results suggest that Giuliani may be the least well-rounded candidate among the top three today. Almost all of his support is based on his perceived leadership qualities. McCain and Romney, on the other hand, both derive support based on a broader set of characteristics.”

Variations in Support

The following table shows variations in support for the Republican candidates.

	McCain (29%)	Giuliani (28%)	Romney (22%)
Party Registration			
<i>Republicans</i>	74	77	76
<i>Independents</i>	26	23	24
Ideology			
<i>Liberal</i>	4	2	2
<i>Moderate</i>	43	49	25
<i>Conservative</i>	53	49	73
Gender			
<i>Male</i>	54	54	50
<i>Female</i>	46	46	50
Age			
<i>18-34</i>	4	11	9
<i>35-54</i>	52	47	40
<i>55-64</i>	19	23	16
<i>65+</i>	25	19	35
Annual Income			
<i><\$35K</i>	13	11	19
<i>\$35-50K</i>	12	11	16
<i>\$50-75K</i>	28	31	26
<i>\$75-100K</i>	20	14	18
<i>>\$100K</i>	27	33	21
Education			
<i>HS or less</i>	23	19	19
<i>Some college/2 yr</i>	30	29	29
<i>Graduated college (4 yr)</i>	26	34	31
<i>Graduate School</i>	21	18	21
Labor Union			
<i>Yes</i>	15	11	19
<i>No</i>	85	89	81

The most notable difference among the top three Republican candidates is that Romney's support is stronger than both McCain's and Giuliani's among conservatives and comparatively weaker among moderates. Romney's support is also strongest among Republican Primary Voters with lower household income.

Republican Presidential Nomination

Respondents were also asked which Republican candidate they think will ultimately win the Republican nomination. Twenty-eight percent of respondents believe that Giuliani will ultimately receive the Republican nomination, and 26 percent believe that McCain will receive the nomination. Twelve percent of respondents believe that Romney will receive the nomination. According to Myers, "Romney is currently polling stronger than how Republican Primary Voters think the nomination will end up. We will have to wait and see if he is able to change perceptions regarding his momentum over time."

Changes in the Republican Contest

Because it is early in the race and a lot could change over the course of the next year, it is useful to consider how the race might be different if any of the major candidates were not in the race. These results are shown below.

	McCain not in the race	Giuliani not in the race	Romney not in the race	Gingrich not in the race
McCain	-	42%	38%	30%
Giuliani	42%	-	34%	29%
Romney	28%	31%	-	23%
Gingrich	8%	7%	7%	-
Undecided	13%	12%	12%	10%

As of today, Newt Gingrich has not announced his intention to run in the 2008 Republican Presidential Primary. Without him in the race, Rudy Giuliani (30%) slightly edges out John McCain (29%), but again, there is no statistically significant difference in support. Mitt Romney would come in third, with 23 percent of the vote.

If Romney were not in the race, McCain (38%) and Giuliani (34%) would remain in a close race for first place. If Giuliani were not in the race, McCain (42%) would have a clear lead over Romney (31%), and likewise, if McCain were not in the race, Giuliani (42%) would have a clear lead over Romney (28%). These results generally suggest that it is in Romney's interest for both of the other candidates to remain in the race - at least for now.