

South Carolina Palmetto Poll

With polls opening in less than 24 hours for the important South Carolina presidential primary election, the final Palmetto Poll shows Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich locked in a gritty battle fraught with personal attacks and breaking news about the candidate's personal lives. On Tuesday morning, January 17th, Mitt Romney enjoyed a comfortable lead over Newt Gingrich who was down by double digits. Romney was pouring money into the Palmetto State and appeared to be headed to victory.

Then, the Gingrich debate performance, along with various endorsements gave some important momentum to the former speaker's campaign. Rick Santorum appeared five or so points behind Gingrich on Tuesday morning, but with the Gingrich surge he began a battle with Ron Paul for third place. Rick Perry's exit, and his subsequent endorsement of Gingrich, left the door open for a come-from-behind-upset. However, that possibility was muted by personal revelations by Gingrich's ex-wife and controversial responses in the final debate on Thursday night, January 19th.

Our polling has shown that breaking revelations take some time to sink in to the electorate. Voters are slower to get the news the media provides, and that lag can change their decisions and effect outcomes. By Thursday night, with the personal revelations still in the air, we showed a lead change from Romney to Gingrich. However, our belief is that the electorate was still learning of the details of the latest revelations when we were polling.

The surge in national support for Gingrich after his debate appearance in Myrtle Beach Monday night of this week was not reflected in the preferences of those in South Carolina until Wednesday and then Thursday. We expect a reaction by the electorate to the personal revelations about Gingrich to be registered on Saturday, however, we do not think they will be

substantial enough to erase the slim lead Newt Gingrich has over Mitt Romney. The margin for Romney has evaporated in three days, and we believe that Newt Gingrich - who led our December 19th poll with 38% to Romney's 21% - will win the South Carolina primary on Saturday, January 21, 2012.

Our head-to-head matchup of the candidates has consistently shown Mitt Romney competitive, but our final poll ranking has Newt Gingrich in the lead.

Q1. In the primary election for president for whom will you vote?

	<i>January 20</i>	<i>December 19</i>	<i>November 11</i>
<i>Mitt Romney</i>	26 %	21%	22%
<i>Newt Gingrich</i>	32 %	38%	10%
<i>Rick Santorum</i>	9%	2%	1%
<i>Ron Paul</i>	11%	10%	3%
<i>Rick Perry</i>	--	5%	9%
<i>Undecided</i>	20%	16%	31%

The final Palmetto Poll was put in the field on Friday, January 13, but on Wednesday, January 18 we recalibrated the process to measure changing dynamics. The final numbers of this poll come from polling on just Wednesday (January 18) and Thursday (January 19). For this reason our final margin of error is 4.73 for a sample size of 429. The sample is of GOP voters, two-thirds of which were chosen for their previous party allegiance, while one-third were general election voters who indicated they planned to vote on Saturday, January 21st.

We asked our respondents after they chose a candidate to tell us what they liked most about the person they selected. We had a wide variety of responses, but the two most popular appeared to be: “he has honesty and integrity” and “his overall political ideology” – meaning conservative principles. Much has been made of the “electability” issue of the candidates, but in our poll the response: “he has the best chance of beating President Barack Obama,” was the

fourth choice of voters, after the previous two above and “he has better ideas for strengthening the economy.”