

The Question for Romney: Is Electability Enough?

What's with Mitt Romney?

He's been the constant in an otherwise shifting Republican landscape, the steady leader or co-leader of the field, the standout choice in ratings of electability – yet with weaknesses in core GOP groups, shortfalls in views of his personal attributes and no apparent momentum.

And then there's that little matter of the Massachusetts health care law.

It all adds up to a conundrum of a candidacy. In a year when the Democratic incumbent clearly is vulnerable, 33 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents pick Romney as the GOP candidate most likely to defeat Barack Obama in the 2012 election, a dozen points above his closest competitor. Yet fewer, 24 percent, support him for the nomination, basically steady the past three months, and slightly down from his peak support, 30 percent, in July.

The question for Romney, who's scheduled to visit Iowa today, is whether electability is enough. Compared with his rating on beating Obama, just half as many leaned Republicans in this ABC News/Washington Post poll, 17 percent, see Romney as the most honest and trustworthy; 22 percent instead pick Herman Cain. On best reflecting core Republican values, 20 percent choose Romney, but essentially as many, 19 percent, go for Newt Gingrich.

Nor does Romney clearly lead on other attributes – being “closest to you on the issues” (on which he runs evenly with Cain), best understanding the problems of people like you (again just 17 percent for Romney, vs. 21 percent for Cain) or even on Romney's supposed strong suit, being best able to handle the economy (22 percent, vs. 19 percent for Cain).

Romney's religion does not appear to be a major impediment; 77 percent of leaned Republicans say his being a Mormon makes no difference in their vote choice, while 20 percent say it makes them less likely to support him. Compunctions about voting for a Mormon started much higher, 36 percent, early in the 2008 contest, but subsided over that year to the same level as today.

Romney's role in enacting mandatory health care while governor of Massachusetts, however, is another matter: Far more potential Republican voters, 48 percent, say this makes them less likely to back him, including a third much less likely. Seniors and lower-income Republicans stand out as more critical of Romney on this issue, as do conservatives compared with moderates.

Ideological acceptability, indeed, may be Romney's greatest challenge. This poll, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), finds that just 13 percent of conservatives say Romney best understands the problems of people like them, 16 percent say he's closest to them on the

issues and 16 percent say he best reflects the GOP's core values. Among moderates these rise to 25, 27 and 29 percent, respectively.

Romney's overall support for the nomination, in turn, declines from 31 percent among moderates to 21 percent among conservatives and 15 percent among leaned Republicans who describe themselves as very conservative – a group accounting for nearly three in 10 potential GOP voters. Romney wins just half of Cain's 30 percent support among very conservatives and only manages to run alongside both Gingrich and Perry, at 17 percent each, in this group.

For all that, the notion that Romney simply can't break through doesn't bear out: In fact he leads as the second choice among Republicans and Republican-leaningers who currently favor other candidates. In this group, 27 percent identify Romney as their backup.

Second choice of non-Romney supporters	
Romney	27%
Cain	14
Gingrich	13
Perry	11
Bachmann	10
Paul	7
Huntsman	4
Santorum	3

The actual equation, of course, depends on who stays in the race, who goes, and how other dynamics play out, in a contest in which, among those with a current preference, 69 percent say they yet may change their minds. While Romney, for instance, has a numerical lead for second choice among Cain supporters, Cain has a numerical lead for second choice among Romney supporters. Sliced another way, among those who currently support neither Romney, Cain nor Perry, 30 percent pick Romney as their second choice, 22 percent Cain, 15 percent Perry.

While "last man standing" may not be as straightforward a path as he might prefer, Romney's acceptability as a second choice suggests a possible route for him to the nomination – assuming that other candidates do drop out over time, and that he, in fact, can win over their supporters.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Oct. 31-Nov. 3, 2011, among a random national sample of 1,004 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents, and 438 leaned Republicans. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points for the full sample and 5.5 points for leaned Republicans. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by Abt-SRBI of New York, N.Y.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>. Media Contacts: [David Ford](#), (212) 456-7243, and [Julie Townsend](#), (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

1-15, 19-30, 36-38 previously released.

16-18, 39-40 held for release.

31. (ASKED OF LEANED REPUBLICANS) Regardless of who you may support, which of the Republican candidates do you think [ITEM]? (IF NEEDED) I can repeat the list. Is it (Michele Bachmann), (Herman Cain), (Newt Gingrich), (Jon Huntsman), (Ron Paul), (Rick Perry), (Mitt Romney), or (Rick Santorum)?

Full item wording:

- a. best understands the problems of people like you
- b. is the closest to you on the issues
- c. best reflects the core values of the Republican Party
- d. has the best chance to defeat Barack Obama in the general election
- e. is the most honest and trustworthy
- f. would do the best job handling the economy

11/3/11 - Summary Table

	Understands	Issues	Values	Defeat	Honest	Economy
Michele Bachmann	6	6	5	1	6	4
Herman Cain	21	20	13	21	22	19
Jon Huntsman	1	2	1	*	2	2
Newt Gingrich	11	12	19	5	8	13
Ron Paul	7	7	4	3	8	7
Rick Perry	11	10	10	11	7	10
Mitt Romney	17	20	20	33	17	22
Rick Santorum	1	1	3	0	2	1
Other (vol.)	0	0	0	0	0	0
All of them (vol.)	1	*	1	6	1	1
Any 2 or more equally (vol.)	2	4	2	2	2	2
No one/None of them (vol.)	6	3	2	3	7	2
No opinion	16	15	20	13	17	17

Trend where available:

- a. best understands the problems of people like you

	11/3/11	9/1/11	7/17/11
Michele Bachmann	6	9	11
Herman Cain	21	3	5
Jon Huntsman	1	1	2
Newt Gingrich	11	6	4
Sarah Palin	NA	19	23
Ron Paul	7	8	9
Tim Pawlenty	NA	NA	1
Rick Perry	11	17	5
Mitt Romney	17	13	18
Rick Santorum	1	2	3
Other (vol.)	0	1	1
All of them (vol.)	1	1	1
Any 2 or more equally (vol.)	2	3	1
No one/None of them (vol.)	6	8	4
No opinion	16	10	12

- b. is the closest to you on the issues

	11/3/11	9/1/11	7/17/11
Michele Bachmann	6	10	10
Herman Cain	20	3	5

Newt Gingrich	12	6	5
Jon Huntsman	2	1	3
Sarah Palin	NA	14	20
Ron Paul	7	10	10
Tim Pawlenty	NA	NA	1
Rick Perry	10	21	5
Mitt Romney	20	15	21
Rick Santorum	1	3	3
Other (vol.)	0	1	1
All of them (vol.)	*	*	*
Any 2 or more equally (vol.)	4	2	*
No one/None of them (vol.)	3	4	1
No opinion	15	11	15

c. best reflects the core values of the Republican Party

	11/3/11	9/1/11	7/17/11
Michele Bachmann	5	10	11
Herman Cain	13	3	4
Newt Gingrich	19	6	9
Jon Huntsman	1	1	1
Sarah Palin	NA	12	20
Ron Paul	4	6	8
Tim Pawlenty	NA	NA	1
Rick Perry	10	19	7
Mitt Romney	20	18	19
Rick Santorum	3	4	3
Other (vol.)	0	*	1
All of them (vol.)	1	1	*
Any 2 or more equally (vol.)	2	5	1
No one/None of them (vol.)	2	2	1
No opinion	20	14	14

d. has the best chance to defeat Barack Obama in the general election

	11/3/11	9/1/11	7/17/11
Michele Bachmann	1	4	7
Herman Cain	21	1	2
Newt Gingrich	5	5	6
Jon Huntsman	*	1	2
Sarah Palin	NA	8	14
Ron Paul	3	4	3
Tim Pawlenty	NA	NA	2
Rick Perry	11	30	6
Mitt Romney	33	20	32
Rick Santorum	0	1	1
Other (vol.)	0	1	1
All of them (vol.)	6	4	7
Any 2 or more equally (vol.)	2	5	2
None of them (vol.)	3	4	4
No opinion	13	10	11

e. No trend.

f. would do the best job handling the economy

	11/3/11	9/1/11
Michele Bachmann	4	5
Herman Cain	19	4
Newt Gingrich	13	7
Jon Huntsman	2	*
Sarah Palin	NA	11
Ron Paul	7	8

Rick Perry	10	22
Mitt Romney	22	22
Rick Santorum	1	2
Other (vol.)	0	2
All of them (vol.)	1	0
Any 2 or more equally (vol.)	2	2
No one/None of them (vol.)	2	4
No opinion	17	12

32. (ASKED OF LEANED REPUBLICANS) Which is more important to you in choosing a candidate for president: (their personal qualities such as experience and leadership ability) or (their positions on specific issues)?

	Personal qualities	Positions on issues	Both (vol.)	No opinion
11/3/11	52	39	8	1
10/27/08 LV	51	32	15	2
10/11/08 LV	50	37	13	1
9/7/08 RV	44	42	14	*
9/6/00 RV	45	39	15	1
8/20/00 RV	39	48	12	*
10/31/99 RV	45	44	11	*

33. (ASKED OF LEANED REPUBLICANS) As governor of Massachusetts, Romney signed a law that requires people to pay a fine if they can get health insurance but fail to do so. Does this make you more likely to vote for him for president, less likely, or doesn't it make a difference in your vote? IF MORE/LESS LIKELY: Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- More likely -----			----- Less likely -----			Makes no	No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	difference	opinion
11/3/11	9	4	6	48	15	33	41	1

34. (ASKED OF LEANED REPUBLICANS) Would you say you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of the Mormon religion? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
11/3/11	34	11	23	38	19	19	28
12/9/07	47	13	35	36	21	14	17

35. (ASKED OF LEANED REPUBLICANS) Does the fact that Mitt Romney is a Mormon make you (more) likely to vote for him, (less) likely to vote for him, or doesn't it make a difference in your vote?

	More likely	Less likely	Wouldn't matter	No opinion
11/3/11	1	20	77	1
Compare to: Iowa, likely Republican caucus-goers				
12/17/07	2	20	78	*
Compare to: New Hampshire, likely Republican voters				
12/3/07	3	9	88	*

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