

Jan. 20, 2011

ABC News/Washington Post poll: GOP 2012

GOP War Horses Lead the 2012 Parade

A year from the first votes, three Republican war horses of the 2008 campaign are bunched in initial preferences for the 2012 presidential nomination – but with none exceeding about 20 percent support, indicating a wide-open contest for the right to challenge Barack Obama.

Twenty-one percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents in this ABC News/Washington Post poll favor Mike Huckabee for their party's nomination; 19 percent back Sarah Palin and 17 percent prefer Mitt Romney. The numbers don't change significantly when results are narrowed to registered voters: Huckabee 20 percent, Romney 18, Palin 16.

All other potential candidates score in the single digits – and a whopping 14 were tested in this national poll, produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#). The election season's just more than a year away, with the Iowa caucuses currently scheduled for Feb. 6, 2012, and the New Hampshire primary tentatively set for eight days later.

It's no wonder the three current leaders are 2008 veterans: Name recognition counts for much in early polls of election preferences, and these three (particularly Palin, of course) have the advantage of exposure on the national stage. It can matter: George W. Bush carried a healthy lead from day one of pre-2000 primary polling all the way to the White House.

Then again, a famous name and an early lead don't in and of themselves promise success. Rudy Giuliani held a 7-point lead over John McCain a year before the 2008 GOP primaries began, and on the Democratic side Hillary Clinton held a staggering 24-point lead over a little known Illinois senator named Barack Obama. It didn't work out that way.

Among other potential candidates tested in this poll, Newt Gingrich receives 9 percent support; Chris Christie, 8 percent (the New Jersey governor on Sunday said he wouldn't run), with the rest all below 5 percent.

There are differences in support profiles among the top potential candidates. Palin does slightly better among women (22 percent support) than men (15 percent), and does best with lower-income and less-educated leaned Republicans. Huckabee, like Palin, also has more appeal to less-educated Republicans; Romney, by contrast, does best with those who are more educated and better-off financially.

Huckabee, for instance, is supported by 25 percent of Republicans who do not have college degrees, vs. 12 percent of those who do; and Palin's favored by 23 percent of non-college Republicans but just 9 percent of college graduates. Romney, instead, wins support from just 10 percent of Republicans who have not been through college – while leading his competitors, with 30 percent support, among those who have.

In another difference, Huckabee does about equally well with moderates as with “very” conservative Republicans, and Palin’s support is similar in both cases, while support for Romney falls off among the most conservative. Among moderates, 24 percent favor Huckabee, 22 percent Romney, 20 percent Palin; but among very conservative Republicans, while Huckabee holds 21 percent, Romney skips to 12 percent. Palin (14 percent), Gingrich (14 percent) and the newly not-running Christie (11 percent) do about as well in the very conservative group.

If name recognition were the only factor, Palin might be running better than she is. But there are other considerations. In an ABC/Post poll last month, 59 percent of Americans said they would not even consider voting for Palin for president – including 36 percent of leaned Republicans, a large group to lose even before the race has begun.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Jan. 13-16, 2011, among a random national sample of 1,053 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. These results, among 425 Republicans or Republican-leaning independents, have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 5.5 points. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y, with sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>

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Full results follow.

1-35 previously released.

36. (ASKED OF LEANED REPUBLICANS) I’m going to read a list of possible candidates for the Republican nomination for president in 2012. After you hear the list, please tell me, if the 2012 Republican presidential primary or caucus in your state were being held today, for whom would you vote? Which candidate would you lean toward?

NET LEANED VOTE PREFERENCE

	1/16/11	7/18/09
Haley Barbour	1	1
Chris Christie	8	NA
Mitch Daniels	2	
Jim DeMint	1	"
Newt Gingrich	9	10
Mike Huckabee	21	26
Jon Huntsman	1	NA
Sarah Palin	19	19
Tim Pawlenty	2	4
Mike Pence	2	NA
Rick Perry	3	"
Mitt Romney	17	21
Rick Santorum	1	NA
John Thune	*	"
Other (vol.)	1	2
None of these (vol.)	6	5
Would not vote (vol.)	*	1

No opinion

6

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END