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## Media Relations

### UNH Survey Center: Romney An Early Favorite In 2012 NH Presidential Primary

February 15, 2011

DURHAM, N.H. -- Mitt Romney is the early frontrunner for the 2012 Republican nomination for president among New Hampshire Republicans. However, the great majority of voters are undecided about who they will eventually support.

These findings are based on the latest WMUR Granite State Poll, conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center. Seven hundred fifty-seven (757) randomly selected New Hampshire adults were interviewed by telephone between Jan. 28 and Feb. 7, 2011. The margin of sampling error for the survey is +/- 3.5 percent. Included in the sample were 357 likely 2012 Republican Primary voters (margin of sampling error +/- 5.2 percent) and 259 likely 2012 Democratic Primary voters (margin of sampling error +/- 6.1 percent). Also, a subsample of 712 likely November 2012 general election voters was included (margin of sampling error +/- 3.7 percent).

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#### Republican Primary

Although the First in the Nation New Hampshire Presidential Primary is a year away, prospective Republican candidates have already been spending time in New Hampshire introducing themselves to voters and testing their messages. The Granite State Poll has been monitoring voter sentiment about potential candidates since February 2009 in order to understand the dynamics of the New Hampshire campaign. But because primary elections are extremely volatile, any measure of voter preference this far in advance of the election is not indicative of the eventual outcome.

Among likely Republican Primary voters, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, the 2008 New Hampshire runner-up, has consistently been the most popular and has garnered the most Republican support. In the most recent Granite State Poll, 40 percent of likely Republican Primary voters said they would vote for Romney, 10 percent would vote for former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, 7 percent favor Minnesota governor Tim Pawlenty, 7 percent support former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, 6 percent prefer former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, 6 percent favor 2008 Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin, 5 percent support Texas Congressman and 2008 candidate Ron Paul, 3 percent support businessman Donald Trump, 1 percent favor former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, and 1 percent prefer Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour.

Romney has consistently led his potential Republicans since the UNH Survey Center began tracking in February, 2009 and has been above 35 percent throughout most of that period.

"Romney is doing well in part because his brand of Republicanism fits with most New Hampshire Republicans, who can be characterized as 'Rockefeller Republicans,'" said Andrew Smith, director of the UNH Survey Center. "New Hampshire is one of the least religious states in the country and social conservatives have difficulty winning here. Fiscal issues are much more potent in the Granite State."

It is critical to point out that primary voters behave very differently than general election voters in that they do not have party cues to rely on, and almost all will vote for their party's eventual presidential candidate, no matter who that might be. Most primary voters do not settle on a choice until the very end of the campaign, so early poll numbers are a better gauge of a candidate's popularity now than an indication of who voters will end up supporting. In the most recent poll, 78 percent of likely Republican primary voters say they are still trying to decide who they will eventually vote for in 2012, 15 percent are leaning toward a candidate, and only 7 percent say they have definitely decided who they will vote for.

#### Favorability Ratings

Support for Republican candidates is currently based almost exclusively on their name recognition and

favorability ratings. Mitt Romney consistently has had the highest favorability ratings among all likely Republican candidates. Currently, 73 percent of likely Republican primary voters say they have a favorable opinion of Romney. Romney's net favorability rating, the percentage who have a favorable opinion of him minus the percentage who have an unfavorable opinion, is a very high +57 percent.

Rudy Giuliani is the second most popular Republican candidate with a net favorability rating of +30 percent, followed by Tim Pawlenty (+25 percent), Mike Huckabee (+22 percent), Rick Santorum (+18 percent), South Dakota Senator John Thune (+4 percent), Ron Paul (+1 percent), and Newt Gingrich (+1 percent). The least popular Republicans are Haley Barbour (-1 percent), Mitch Daniels (-1 percent), former New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson (-5 percent), Sarah Palin (-17 percent), and Donald Trump (-43 percent).

### **A Democratic Primary?**

While no Democrat has indicated that they plan to challenge President Barack Obama in 2012, his rather low job approval ratings may attract another Democrat, should they fall lower. When asked if they plan to vote for Obama in the 2012 New Hampshire Democratic primary, only 66 percent of likely New Hampshire Democratic Primary voters say they do plan to vote for Obama, 10 percent say they plan to vote for some other candidate, and 24 percent are undecided about what they will do.

### **2012 Presidential Election**

Looking ahead to the 2012 general election, the likelihood of President Obama winning again in New Hampshire depends heavily on the Republican candidate he would face. In a hypothetical race between Obama and Mitt Romney, the current GOP primary favorite, Romney leads with 49 percent to 41 percent for Obama, 3 percent for some other candidate, and 7 percent are undecided.

Obama does much better against 2008 GOP vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin. Obama leads Palin by a wide 57 percent to 34 percent, with 4 percent favoring some other candidate and 6 percent undecided. And when Obama is matched with Minnesota governor Tim Pawlenty, who has been campaigning in New Hampshire for several months, Obama holds a modest 44 percent to 37 percent lead with 3 percent favoring some other candidate and 15 percent undecided.

Romney leads largely because he does much better than either Palin or Pawlenty among independent voters. Romney leads Obama by 45 percent to 32 percent among political independents while Obama leads Pawlenty by 37 percent to 26 percent and Palin by 56 percent to 23 percent.

For complete tabular results, visit [http://www.unh.edu/survey-center/news/pdf/gsp2011\\_winter\\_primary021511.pdf](http://www.unh.edu/survey-center/news/pdf/gsp2011_winter_primary021511.pdf).

The UNH Survey Center has conducted survey research projects at the University of New Hampshire since 1976. The center has grown rapidly during the past 30 years and now conducts approximately 40 to 50 major survey projects each year. More information: <http://www.unh.edu/survey-center/>.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

### **PHOTO**

Andrew Smith, director of the UNH Survey Center.

[http://www.unh.edu/news/img/Andy\\_Smith.jpg](http://www.unh.edu/news/img/Andy_Smith.jpg)

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T-hall

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