Where is the Santorum Surge Coming From?
The More Conservatives Know,
the More They Like Santorum

Knowledge of current events has a dramatic relation to which candidate Republican voters support for the 2012 presidential nomination, according to the latest results from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind Poll. In the national survey, Republicans answered a series of questions about current events. The results show that current front-runner Rick Santorum is the biggest beneficiary of increased knowledge among conservative Republicans, and Santorum takes a big lead among conservatives paying the most attention to current events.

"Conservatives who are paying attention to current events are pleased with Santorum," said Dan Cassino, a professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson University, and an analyst for the PublicMind Poll. "The opposite happens with Ron Paul. The more conservatives pay attention, the less they like what they hear from him."

Among those Republicans who identify themselves as conservative, more knowledge of current events leads to dramatically reduced support for Ron Paul, and vastly increased support for Rick Santorum. Support for Romney and Gingrich remains relatively stable as voters move up on the knowledge scale. Santorum's margin comes from voters who might otherwise support Paul, or who are otherwise unsure of whom to support.

"This is important because of the inability of Mitt Romney to garner the support of a majority of Republican voters," said Cassino. The same poll found Republican support divided among Mitt Romney (33%), Rick Santorum (33%), Newt Gingrich (15%), and Ron Paul (7%). "Santorum is tapping into those voters who are the most attentive but can't buy into Paul."

Conservative Republicans who were unable to answer any questions correctly and thus rank low on the knowledge scale have a 31% chance of supporting Romney, a 16% chance of supporting Paul, and a 19% chance of supporting Santorum.

But for conservatives who score highest on the scale of current events knowledge, Santorum's support nearly triples to 51%, Romney's falls to 26%, and Paul's craters, with support from just 1% of self-described conservatives.

The story is very different for Republicans who identify as moderates. Moderate Republicans with higher levels of political knowledge gravitate to Romney, and away from Santorum. So, moderate Republicans who know the least about current events have a 31% chance of supporting Romney, a 9% chance of supporting Paul, and a 25% chance of supporting Santorum. But at the highest levels of political knowledge, Romney's support increases to 51%, while Santorum's decreases to 16%. Degree of knowledge has no effect on support for Paul and Gingrich.

"In the context of a general election, these results would be good for Romney: everyone wants to appeal to moderates," said Cassino. "But this isn't a general election yet, and there may not be enough moderates in the Republican primary electorate to get him through."

Not surprisingly, political knowledge has almost no impact on the general election vote choices of conservatives or liberals: in both cases, more knowledge makes ideological voters even more likely to support their party's candidate.

However, among moderate voters, the effect of knowledge is significant. Moderate independents with high levels of political knowledge are 16 points more likely to always support Obama in the general election than those with low political knowledge. An analysis shows that 58% of moderate Republicans support the Republican candidate in any match-up with Obama when they have average levels of knowledge, but among those with high levels of knowledge that figure falls to 35% who favor the Republican nominee in any match-up.

"Moderate Republicans should generally be more loyal than this," said Cassino. "It suggests that some Republican Party voters have been turned off by the primary. Regardless of who is the eventual nominee, getting these moderates back into the fold will be job one."

On average, Republicans (and independent voters who lean Republican) were able to answer 3.4 of the 8 questions correctly, no better or worse than voters on the whole. Romney and Santorum supporters were about equally informed, with supporters of both candidates getting about 4 questions correct, on average, and Paul supporters were the least knowledgeable among those with candidate preferences, on average answering only about 3.2 questions correctly.

"As always, the lack of knowledge among voters is a little frightening," said Cassino. "We can only hope that people start to pay more attention to what's going on as the election gets closer."

The FDU poll of 903 registered voters nationwide was conducted by landlines and cell phones from Feb. 6 through Feb. 12, 2012, and has a margin of error of +/-3.3 percentage points. Republican preferences are based on an oversample including 578 Republicans and voters who lean Republican, and has a margin of error of +/-4 percentage points. The effects of the political knowledge scale on vote choice were calculated using multinomial logistic regression, a technique that allows researchers to isolate the impact of one variable on a decision. The results described control for the effects of partisanship, age, education and gender, all factors which commonly predict vote choice.

Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: http://publicmind.fdu.edu
For more information, please call 201.692.7032

Methodology, Questions, and Tables

The survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from Feb. 6 through Feb. 12, 2012, using a randomly selected national sample of 903 registered voters contacted on both landlines and cell phones to comprise all voters. The margin of error for a sample of 903 randomly selected respondents is +/- 3.3 percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers. PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a land-line phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected. Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phones, including cell-phone only and dual cell-phone and land-line households, interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender among the voting population. The Republican sample of 578 is comprised of 378 registered Republican voters contacted through RDD combined with an oversample of 200 Republicans randomly selected from registered voter lists. The margin of error for a randomly drawn sample of 578 is +/-4.

To run as the Republican candidate for President, who would you prefer… [if unsure, ask: Which way do you lean?]					
	Current Events Questions Answered Correctly (out of 8)				
	None	Two	Mean (3.5)	Six	All (8)
Conservative Republicans					
Romney	31%	33%	32%	29%	26%
Gingrich	15%	17%	18%	18%	18%
Paul	16%	9%	5%	2%	1%
Santorum	19%	27%	33%	44%	51%
Unsure	20%	15%	11%	7%	4%
Moderate Republicans					
Romney	31%	36%	40%	47%	51%
Gingrich	17%	17%	16%	16%	15%
Paul	9%	9%	8%	8%	8%
Santorum	25%	23%	21%	18%	16%
Unsure	17%	15%	14%	12%	10%

Figures represent predicted probabilities of a given answer based on the self-identified ideology and partisanship listed, with other characteristics at mean levels. All results are based on multinomial regression analysis, and all results discussed are significant at p<.05 (two-tailed).

In a race between [Republican Candidate], the Republican, and Barack Obama, the Democrat, who would you vote for? [Rotate Order of names, place in question]			
	Current Events Questions Answered Correctly (out of 8)		
	None	Mean (3.5)	All (8)
Probability that Respondent prefers Obama in all match-ups			
Conservative Republican	4%	2%	1%
Moderate Republican	6%	8%	12%
Moderate Independent	26%	31%	40%
Conservative Independent	19%	10%	5%
Probability that Respondent prefers the Republican in all match-ups			
Conservative Republican	81%	94%	98%
Moderate Republican	74%	58%	35%
Moderate Independent	35%	20%	9%
Conservative Independent	45%	73%	92%

Figures represent predicted probabilities of a given answer based on the self-identified ideology and partisanship listed, with other characteristics at mean levels. All results are based on multinomial regression analysis, and all results discussed are significant at p<.05 (two-tailed).

K1. To the best of your knowledge, have the opposition groups protesting in Egypt been successful in removing Hosni Mubarak?

	Total	Party Identification				
		Democrat	Lean Dem	Indep	Lean Rep	Republican
Yes	41%	40	39	42	44	41
No	22%	21	33	19	23	21
Don't know	37%	40	28	40	33	38

K2. How about the opposition groups in Syria? Have they been successful in removing Bashar al-Assad?

	Total	Party Identification				
		Democrat	Lean Dem	Indep	Lean Rep	Republican
Yes	7%	9	5	8	6	4
No	55%	51	66	52	56	56
Don't know	39%	40	29	40	39	40

K3. Some countries in Europe are deeply in debt, and have had to be bailed out by other countries. To the best of your knowledge, which country has had to spend the most money to bail out European countries?

	Total	Party Identification				
		Democrat	Lean Dem	Indep	Lean Rep	Republican
Germany	27%	24	29	28	28	28
US	21%	18	21	18	26	23
Greece	3%	2	2	6	2	5
Italy	-	-	2	-	-	-
Other European Country	2%	1	3	1	3	1
Other	8%	8	8	10	10	7
Don't know	39%	47	34	37	30	36

K4. There have been increasing talks about economic sanctions against Iran. What are these sanctions supposed to do?

	Total	Party Identification				
		Democrat	Lean Dem	Indep	Lean Rep	Republican
Anything about Nuclear Program or Uranium enrichment or WMDs…	45%	41	45	44	48	50
Anything else (Specify)	14%	12	16	15	19	13
Don't know	41%	47	38	41	33	38

K5. Which party has the most seats in the House of Representatives right now?

	Total	Party Identification				
		Democrat	Lean Dem	Indep	Lean Rep	Republican
Republicans	65%	66	73	62	56	69
Democrats	14%	11	13	10	30	13
Don't know	20%	23	13	28	15	18

K6A. In December, House Republicans agreed to a short-term extension of a payroll tax cut, but only if President Obama agreed to do what? [Open-Ended]

	Total	Party Identification				
		Democrat	Lean Dem	Indep	Lean Rep	Republican
Anything about Keystone XL Pipeline or oil pipeline or Canadian Pipeline…	9%	11	6	8	6	12
Anything Else	18%	16	28	13	27	16
Don't know	72%	73	66	78	67	73

K6B. It took a long time to get the final results of the Iowa caucuses for Republican candidates. In the end, who was declared the winner? [Open-Ended]

	Total	Party Identification				
		Democrat	Lean Dem	Indep	Lean Rep	Republican
Gingrich	5%	8	4	4	3	5
Huntsman	-	--	-	-	-	-
Paul	-	1	-	1	-	-
Perry	-	-	-	-	-	-
Romney	23%	19	22	24	29	23
Santorum	39%	32	42	35	46	44
Someone Else	-	-	-	1	-	-
Tie	-	-	-	-	-	-
Don't know	33%	40	32	36	22	28

K7. How about the New Hampshire Primary? Which Republican won that race? [Open-Ended]

	Total	Party Identification				
		Democrat	Lean Dem	Indep	Lean Rep	Republican
Gingrich	6%	7	8	8	4	5
Huntsman	-	-	-	-	-	-
Paul	1%	-	3	1	-	-
Perry	-	-	-	-	-	-
Romney	51%	43	47	47	62	60
Santorum	2%	1	1	1	4	2
Don't know	40%	49	41	43	30	31

K8. According to official figures, about what percentage of Americans are currently unemployed? [Open-Ended]

	Total	Party Identification				
		Democrat	Lean Dem	Indep	Lean Rep	Republican
Less than 5%	-	-	4	-	-	-
5.1 to 7.0%	1%	2	-	-	-	1
7.1 to 8.0%	3%	2	-	4	4	5
8.1 to 9.0%	40%	34	43	33	48	44
9.1 to 10.0%	9%	6	6	10	12	13
10.1 to 11.0%	4%	5	3	5	6	3
Greater than 11%	17%	17	23	14	15	17
Don't know	26%	34	21	35	15	17

Number of Questions Answered Correctly	Overall	Democrat	Lean Dem	Indp	Lean Rep	Republican
0	12%	11	11	17	9	11
1	12%	17	8	15	7	11
2	15%	16	16	11	18	16
3	12%	11	12	13	18	9
4	11%	9	7	10	10	16
5	10%	9	7	8	15	11
6	13%	11	19	15	10	14
7	10%	11	13	9	10	9
8	3%	5	7	2	3	2

Number of Questions Answered Correctly	Romney	Gingrich	Paul	Santorum	Don't Know
0	8%	10%	16%	6%	19%
1	10%	10%	12%	9%	16%
2	13%	23%	17%	12%	16%
3	12%	11%	15%	15%	11%
4	15%	12%	9%	16%	6%
5	13%	7%	9%	13%	11%
6	13%	16%	15%	16%	8%
7	13%	7%	6%	11%	10%
8	4%	3%	2%	3%	2%
Mean	*3.93*	*3.43*	*3.16*	*4.00*	*2.97*

Sample Characteristics %

Gender

Male	50
Female	50

Party ID

Democrat	32
Ind. Lean Dem.	11
Independent	15
Ind. Lean Rep.	14
Republican	24
Other/ref.	4

Age

18-29	13
30-44	28
45-59	29
60+	28
ref.	2

In addition to being American, would you say you are…?

White	71
Black	13
Hispanic or Latino	11
Asian	2
Other/ref.	3

Census regions

Northeast	20
North central	22
South	31
West	27

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