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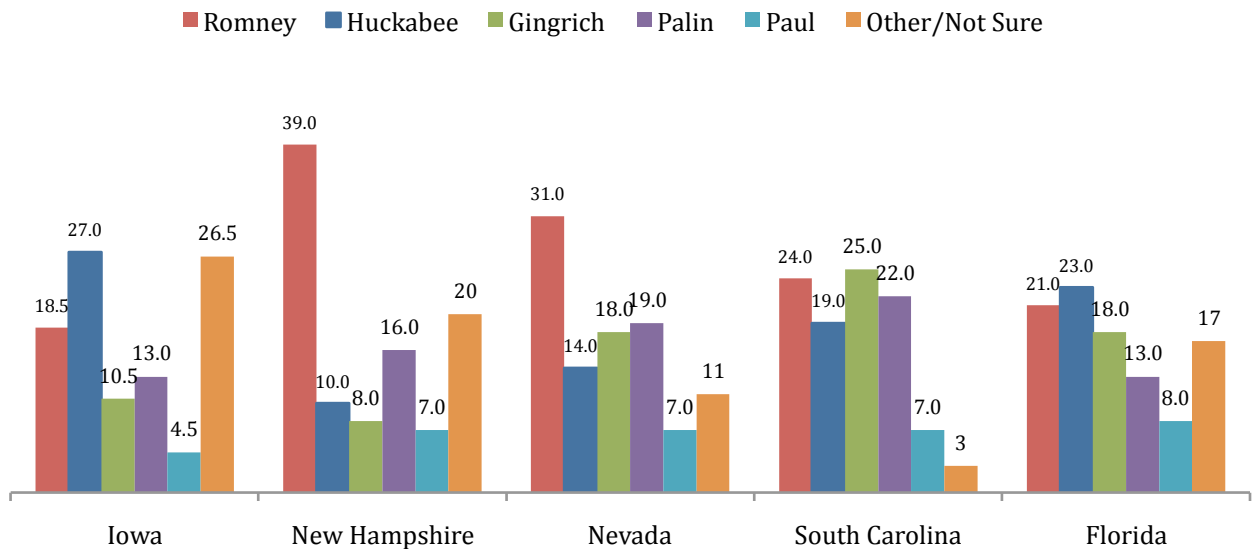
Polling News & Notes

Overlooked Recent Polling and Insights • January 20, 2011

Previewing the 2012 GOP Primaries: The 2012 presidential election is underway as Republican candidates are already testing the waters. What do the early polls reveal? Only a few surveys have been released in the states that will hold early GOP caucuses or primaries, but their predictive value is modest since it's not even clear yet who will run. However, these polls show a few trends.

First, despite high name ID—89% of Iowa GOP voters in a recent PPP survey had an opinion of her—Sarah Palin does not lead in any early state. In Iowa, she is a distant third at 13% behind Mike Huckabee (27%) and Mitt Romney (18.5%); in New Hampshire, she is 23 points behind Romney; and only in South Carolina does she garner more than 20% of the vote. Even among self-identified Iowa conservatives, Palin has a 67% favorable rating, yet trails Huckabee 30%-17%.

GOP Presidential Primary Trial Heats
(Selected States, Jan. 2011 Polls)



Romney, on the other hand, leads by double digits in New Hampshire (where he owns a summer house) and Nevada (where he won the 2008 caucus with his fellow Mormons making up 26% of the electorate), but falls short of Huckabee in Iowa and Florida, and runs behind Newt Gingrich in South Carolina. Other prospective but unknown candidates barely rate in the polls. Tim Pawlenty, Mitch Daniels, and John Thune all draw less than 5% in early states, but have time to introduce themselves and plenty of room to grow.

Early polls often count for little—John McCain trailed for months in early primary state polling before moving to the front of the GOP pack in January 2000. But these polls suggest Romney faces an uphill climb if chooses to compete in Iowa, while Palin must convince people who like her that she's capable of being president if she hopes to have a chance at the Republican nomination.

All these early polls point to a wide-open race for the GOP nod. For the first time in many of our lifetimes, Republicans are left without a clear frontrunner. A real spectacle awaits the country: how candidates conduct themselves and the quality of their campaigns will decide the outcome.

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