



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on January 1, 2012

Paul Attracting Iowa Independents and Democrats

The [Des Moines Register poll](#), released Saturday night, shows Romney with 24 percent and Ron Paul the choice of 22 percent in the *Register* survey of likely Republican caucus participants. Romney, who was the leader in the first *Register* poll in June, appears to be enjoying a comeback after Georgia businessman Herman Cain, who has since dropped out, and former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich surged to the lead in the paper's October and November polls, respectively. Gingrich, the choice of 25 percent in November, has dropped to 12 percent in the latest survey, putting him in fourth place behind the rising Rick Santorum. The former Senator from Pennsylvania has gone from six percent in November to 15 percent in the December survey, conducted last Tuesday through Friday by Selzer & Co. of Des Moines. Texas Governor Rick Perry has also moved into double digits with a showing of 11 percent, while Rep. Michele Bachmann of Minnesota, an Iowa native who edged out Ron Paul by only 152 votes in last August's Ames Straw Poll, dropped from 22 percent in June to 7 percent in the latest poll. Former Utah Governor and Ambassador to China Jon Huntsman, who has focused his campaign on the New Hampshire primary, is holding steady at one percent in Iowa.



Despite the volatility in the polls, the results show a steady rise for Paul, who has emerged in the last few weeks as the leading challenger to Romney, the early frontrunner whose record in liberal Massachusetts has left many of the party activists looking for a conservative alternative to the former Bay State Governor. The choice of only seven percent of likely caucus voters in the *Register's* June survey, Paul moved up to 12 percent in October and 18 percent in November. His 22 percent in the latest poll puts him in a statistical dead heat with Romney, since the two-point difference is well within the margin of error.

The fluctuation in numbers may reflect widespread last-minute decision making on the part of likely caucus voters, and at least some of Santorum's surge may be coming at Paul's expense. Data from just the last two days of the *Register's* four-day poll show Santorum moving into second-place, with Paul falling into fourth place, [CNN](#) reported.



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Even in the past week, separate polls have shown different leaders among the top contenders in the Hawkeye state. A [Public Policy Polling](#) released on December 27 showed Paul still in the lead with a four-point advantage over Romney, 24-20 percent. Polling procedures have also come into question, with the latest CNN poll having drawn media criticism over its methodology. The “quirk” in the survey, said [Nate Silver in his New York Times political blog](#), was that the CNN poll questioned only registered Republicans. Because Independents and even Democrats may vote in the Republican caucuses simply by changing their registration at the door, the pollsters overlooked a large number of likely caucus voters.

The results may have underrepresented Paul's strength, since the maverick Republican does better than the other GOP candidates in appealing to non-Republican voters. The *Register* poll, for example, shows Paul, at 42 percent, far ahead of all the Republican candidates among Independent voters, with Romney a distant second at 19 percent. Public Policy Polling showed Paul beating Romney 39-12 percent among Democrats and Independents combined.

About 15 percent of Iowans participating in the Republican caucuses in 2008 identified themselves as either Independents or Democrats, Silver noted, and the Public Policy Polling data was based on an estimate that 24 percent of those voting at the GOP gatherings this time will be non-Republicans. The latest *Washington Post/ABC News* factored in an estimate of 18 percent. Both could be on the low side. Unlike 2008, when Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton led a field of Democrats competing in Iowa, the lack of any serious competition for Obama this year makes it likely that significantly larger numbers of Democrats and independents will avail themselves of the opportunity to vote for or against Republican hopefuls. “There is room to debate what the right number is,” wrote Silver, “but it will certainly not be zero, as the CNN poll assumes.”

Paul is likely to benefit the most from the crossover of Democrats unhappy with Obama and with the stagnant economy. As Paul West of the *Los Angeles Times* [observed](#) on Friday, Paul's organized campaign in Iowa has been distributing leaflets encouraging both Independents and Democrats to become Republicans “for a day.” They are being urged to vote for the antiestablishment, libertarian candidate as a way to bring real change to Washington. Iowa voters who believe that change is overdue appear to be open to that invitation.

“Ron Paul's got a lot going for him, especially in the economic area,” Jon Long, a 65-year-old, semi-retired accountant, told the *Los Angeles Times*. Long, a registered Democrat who voted for Joe Biden in the caucus contests of 2008, voted for the Obama-Biden ticket in the fall because he “believed a lot of the rhetoric.” He plans to vote for Paul on Tuesday, he said, calling the Texas Congressman “principled enough not to say stuff just to get elected.”

Terry Hout of Osceola, an Independent who has never voted in a caucus before, now calls his 2008 vote for Obama a mistake. His wife, Cheryl, agrees and plans to join her husband in voting for Paul on Tuesday.

“We're looking for something new to revive the country,” she told the *Times*. “We're so close to losing our whole country. China owns us. They could just walk right in and take us. It's scary.”

Update: Later in the day after this article was published, PPP released a new Iowa poll. To see our article on the subject, [click here](#).

Photo of Ron Paul: AP Images



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