



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on January 2, 2012

“Photo Finish” Forecast for Iowa Caucuses

“The Republican caucus in Iowa is headed for a photo finish” among the three top candidates, PPP said in a statement accompanying the statistics, though the pollsters seem to be looking for a continued surge by Santorum to bring the former Pennsylvania Senator an upset win in the first major voting event in the presidential nominating process. Santorum gained eight points since the PPP survey of a week ago and among those who said they've decided in the last seven days, he is ahead of Romney 29-17 percent, with Paul and Gingrich tied at 13 percent.



There remain a number of unanswered questions concerning who will turn out and vote in the Republican caucuses, including the number of Democrats and independents. Non-Republicans may register with the party at the caucuses and change their affiliation later if they choose. PPP has estimated 24 percent of the total vote will be cast by independents and Democrats though there is no sure way of measuring that in advance. With an unpopular President unopposed in the Democratic caucuses and a stagnant economy fueling discontent with incumbents, independents and Democrats may be motivated in large numbers to participate in the closely contested battle among Republican challengers, all promising to bring change to the political culture in Washington. Paul's libertarian views on domestic political and economic issues and non-interventionist stance on foreign policy make him the most clearly recognizable anti-establishment candidate, and the poll shows he has the greatest strength among independents and Democrats. The Texas congressman leads with 30 percent among independents and Democrats who plan to vote in the Republican caucus, compared to 14 percent each for Romney and Santorum.

Voter turnout is another variable that could be affected by anything from voter mood swings to weather conditions. Age is yet another factor. The poll shows Paul in fifth place with older voters, with just 11 percent support among “seniors.” But with voters under 45, Paul is well out ahead of the competition, capturing 30 percent of that age group, compared to 19 percent for Santorum and 14 percent for Romney. Paul has “a very decent chance at winning on Tuesday — it just depends on whether his unusual coalition of young voters and non-Republicans really comes out to caucus,” the PPP release said. That touches on yet another variable: how dedicated a candidates supporters are.

“It has been said Ron Paul supporters would walk through broken glass, barefoot to help the Texas congressman win Iowa and beyond,” the [USA Today](#) noted in a feature-length assessment of the impact Paul and his constitutional conservatism have already had on a presidential campaign in which the first vote has yet to be cast. Paul's well organized campaign probably will not have much problem getting its supporters to the polls. As Drake University professor Dennis Goldford said in a recent interview: “Enthusiasm times organization equals turnout.”

Photos of Ron Paul, Mitt Romney, and Rick Santorum: AP Images



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