

# The 2012 Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs Election Survey

## Romney's Vice Presidential Decision

Amidst speculation that Mitt Romney may soon announce his vice presidential selection, a new national survey by the Public Policy Research Lab at Louisiana State University offers guidance on the type of candidate most attractive to registered voters. The survey reveals that rather than trying to balance the ticket with a religious conservative, Romney would benefit most by selecting a moderate running mate.

The Public Policy Research Lab at Louisiana State University surveyed 1,009 registered voters about whether they would be more (or less) likely to support Governor Romney if he ran with a woman, a Hispanic or racial minority, a religious conservative, or a moderate. Romney yielded his biggest net advantage (+5.0 points) by selecting a moderate as his vice presidential pick and his biggest net loss (-11.4 points) by selecting a religious conservative.

Thirteen percent of registered voters said they would be more likely to support Mitt Romney if he picked a moderate vice president while 8.3 percent said they would be less likely to support Romney with a moderate running mate. The net gain for Romney for selecting a moderate vice president would be 5 points. A religious conservative, in contrast, would hurt Romney's chances at winning the general election. Eight percent of registered voters said they would be more likely to support Romney were he to select a religious conservative as his vice presidential pick while 19.5 percent said they would be less likely to support his campaign under this particular scenario. The net loss to Romney for picking a religious conservative would be 11.4 percentage points.

One of the key challenges confronting presidential candidates is whether to focus on mobilizing the base or on appealing to independent voters and across party lines. A religious conservative vice presidential pick would, not surprisingly, help Romney with his Republican base but the effect is fairly small and it would hurt his prospects among independent voters. Fourteen percent of Republican voters said they would be more likely to support Romney if he nominated a religious conservative compared to 11.1 percent who said they would be less likely to Romney. The net gain among Romney's Republican base would be approximately 3 points.

The damage among independent voters under this scenario would be far more substantial. 10.9 percent of independent voters said they would be more likely to support Romney if he ran with a religious conservative while 17.8 percent said they would be less likely to support Romney with religious conservative as vice president. The net lose to Romney would be 6.9 points.

Even among Republican voters, Romney would gain more by nominating a moderate as vice president. Fifteen percent of Republican voters said they would be more likely to support Romney if he ran with a moderate compared to 9 percent who said they would be less likely to support Romney if he ran with a moderate running mate.

Nominating a Hispanic or racial minority or a woman appeared to make very little difference in Romney's overall support. Romney would actually lose the most support among Democratic voters by picking a woman or minority as vice president, presumably because they would perceive such a move as political pandering. Among Republicans, Romney would gain 3.3 percentage points by nominating a racial minority and would gain 5 points by nominating a woman. Among independents, the gains would be 1.1 for a racial minority and 2.2 points for a woman.

But if Romney generally benefits most from nominating a moderate vice president, his biggest gains in the battleground states comes from nominating a woman. Overall, 9.7 percent of registered voters in battleground states said they would be more likely to support Romney if he ran with a woman compared to 3.1 percent who said they would be less likely. The comparable percentages for a moderate were 12.6 more likely and 9.9 percent less likely. Romney would still lose the most from nominating a religious conservative: 8.6 percent said they would be more likely to support Romney with a religious conservative as a running mate and 17.9 percent said they would be less likely to support him. Because we have fewer respondents in battleground states (N=220), these numbers should be treated with caution.

One of the other takeaways from the survey is that the selection of the vice president is only likely to matter at the margins. Substantial majorities under each of the scenarios said the selection of the vice president would not affect their decision to support Governor Romney or President Obama. Seventy percent of registered voters said it would not make a difference if Romney nominated a religious conservative and 75.4 percent said it would not matter if he nominated a moderate. Voters were even less likely to say it would matter if he nominated a Hispanic or racial minority (89.5 percent) or a woman (84.2 percent).

When asked specifically who Mitt Romney should nominate in an open-ended question, most voters said they did not know or that they had no preference. When it came to naming specific individuals, Marc Rubio was the most common response (9.8 percent) followed by Sarah Palin (4.3 percent) and Rick Santorum (4.1 percent). However, far more respondents said they either did not know (38.6 percent) or they had no preference (16.8 percent). Overall, the results reveal that there is no strong consensus either among all registered voters, Republicans or Independents on who the vice presidential nominee should be. Many of the names mentioned by the media at the top of the list - Tim Pawlenty, Rob Portman, and Bobby Jindal - are scarcely mentioned (if at all). For specifics Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal was mentioned by only four respondents, and Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty was mentioned by only five respondents.

While vice presidential selections are among the most highly scrutinized and publicized decisions made by a party nominee, voters generally decide who to support based on the name at the top of the ticket. A bad choice can, however, hurt a candidate. When asked what most contributed to John McCain's loss in 2008 in an open-ended question, 1 in 5 registered voters identified the selection of Sarah Palin as his vice presidential pick. This was the most common response followed by comments - both positive and negative - about the Barack Obama's campaign. Notably, 15.3 percent of Republicans specifically mentioned Sarah Palin as the most important factor in the 2008 loss compared to 25.3 percent of Democrats and 24.0 percent of independents.

*About the Survey:* The 2012 Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs Election Survey is based on 1,009 randomly selected registered voters, including an oversample of 2008 first time voters from 2008. Final results are weighted to match population characteristics of registered voters, including age, race, and gender. The margin of error for the survey is approximately +/- 4.0 percentage points. Due to the oversample of hard-to reach first time 2008 voters the survey required a relatively long field period (from April 20 - June 17).

## *Topline Questionnaire*

**Preference for Type of Vice Presidential Candidate:** (1) Would you be more or less likely to support Romney for President if he ran with a woman as the VP? (2) Would you be more or less likely to support Romney for President if he ran with a Hispanic or other racial minority individual as the VP? (3) Would you be more or less likely to support Romney for President if he ran with a Religious Conservative individual as the VP? (4) Would you be more or less likely to support Romney for President if he ran with a Moderate individual as the VP?

- More likely
- Wouldn't make a difference
- Less likely

	More Likely	Less Likely	No Difference	Net Gain/Loss
<b>All Voters</b>				
<i>Female</i>	6.4%	7.3%	84.2%	-0.9
<i>Minority</i>	4.2%	5.3%	89.5%	-1.1
<i>Religious Conservative</i>	8.1%	19.5%	69.7%	-11.4
<i>Moderate</i>	13.3%	8.3%	75.4%	+5.0
<b>Republican Voters</b>				
<i>Female</i>	9.2%	4.2%	84.3%	+5.0
<i>Minority</i>	4.6%	1.3%	92.4%	+3.3
<i>Religious Conservative</i>	14.0%	11.1%	71.0%	+2.9
<i>Moderate</i>	15.3%	9.0%	74.2%	+6.3
<b>Independent Voters</b>				
<i>Female</i>	7.1%	4.9%	85.4%	+2.2
<i>Minority</i>	5.6%	4.5%	89.5%	+1.1
<i>Religious Conservative</i>	10.9%	17.8%	68.1%	-6.9
<i>Moderate</i>	15.6%	8.7%	71.7%	+6.9
<b>10 Swing States*</b>				
<i>Female</i>	9.7%	3.1%	85.5%	+6.6%
<i>Minority</i>	3.8%	4.7%	90.8%	-0.9%
<i>Religious Conservative</i>	8.6%	17.9%	71.0%	-9.3%
<i>Moderate</i>	12.6%	9.9%	74.5%	+2.7%

*\* We defined the 10 Swing States as the following: (Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin)*

Who would you most like to see Romney pick as a VP candidate?  
<Open End>

As you are no doubt aware - John McCain lost the 2008 presidential race to Barack Obama. In your own words - what do you think most contributed to McCain's loss?  
<Open End>

Generally speaking do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what?

Consider Yourself Democrat, Republican, etc.

Democrat	33.6
Republican	26.2
Independent	33.5
Other	6.6

Which of the following categories best describes your level of education? Please stop me when I get to that category.

Education

Less than High School	2.0
High School	11.2
Some College	31
College Degree	55.8

Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban?

Hispanic Ethnicity

Don't Know/Not Sure	0.2
Yes	6
No	93.7

Which of the following best describes you? Are you White, Hispanic, African-American, Asian, or something else?

Race

White/Caucasian	74.4
Black/African American	12
Asian/Asian American	1.9
American Indian/Native American	3.2
Other	8.4

In what year were you born? (Recoded in Age Categories)

Age

18-24	7.5
25-34	13.2
35-44	18.7
45-54	27.4
55-64	11.1
65 and over	22.2

What is your current marital status?

Marital Status

Total

Don't Know/Not Sure/No Answer	0.4
Married	69.1
Single	18
Divorced	7.3
Separated	0.9
Widowed	4.2

Are you currently employed full-time, employed part-time, retired, unemployed and looking for work, or not employed and not looking for work?

Employment Status

Don't Know/Not Sure	0.8
Employed full-time	49.5
Employed part-time	10.6
Retired	21.9
Unemployed and looking for work	7.6
Not employed and not looking for work	7.8
On disability	1.8

We would like to know what your family income was last year before taxes. This information will remain strictly confidential and will only be used for statistical purposes. Please stop me when I get to the category that includes your family income.

Household Income

Don't Know/No Answer	5.6
Under \$30,000	10.5
\$30,000-\$74,999	37.6
\$75,000 or more	46.2

Record Gender

Gender	Total
Male	47.8
Female	52.2