

4131 Spicewood Springs Road
Suite O-2
Austin, TX 78759

Office: 512-345-9720
email: mikeb@baselice.com

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Santorum is the New Front Runner

The current Republican presidential primary election is one we have not witnessed before, and Rick Santorum is leading it. A few observations:

- Rick Santorum's recent victories on February 7th in the Missouri primary and in the Colorado and Minnesota caucuses were game changing in several respects. First, they showed that his Iowa performance was more than a single state victory. Second, it stopped Romney's momentum from Florida and Nevada. Third, they helped push Santorum into the lead in national surveys.
- Polling from 2011 in Michigan does not resemble current polling. With Santorum leading in some recent polls, a Santorum victory there spells trouble for Romney in his "home state." But so does an election result in which Santorum comes within a few points of Romney.
- People vote for who they know and like. The latest national Rasmussen Poll showed Rick Santorum with a 75% favorable image compared to 66% favorable image of Romney. Moreover, intensity is on Santorum's side as 40% of Republican primary voters have a very favorable opinion of him while 18% have a very favorable opinion of Romney.
- While there is often focus on the favorable or positive image of candidates, the unfavorable or negative image is equally important. The Quinnipiac Poll that concluded fielding on February 20th showed Santorum's unfavorable image among Republican voters to be only seven percent, while Romney's unfavorable rating was 26% and Gingrich's unfavorable rating was at 31%.
- March 6th – This is shaping up to be the day that the nomination process further defines the 2012 Republican primary as a two-person race between Santorum and Romney. Out of eleven states with caucuses and primaries, Santorum is poised to take seven of them as he already leads in several states including Ohio and Oklahoma. The Tennessee primary and the caucuses in Alaska, Idaho, North Dakota and Wyoming are the types of states in which Santorum should also perform well.

Mike Baselice is President of Baselice & Associates, Inc., an Austin-based Republican polling firm that conducts opinion research on a national basis, and most recently conducted the survey research for Rick Perry for President.