

Poll: Obama leads Republican rivals

Written by By Eric Mayes
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President Barack Obama holds a slim lead in Pennsylvania, according to a new poll, which also gave the president a bigger edge in two other important swing states, Florida and Ohio.

“Obama is on a roll in the key swing states. If the election were today, he would carry at least two states. And if history repeats itself, that means he would be re-elected,” said Peter A. Brown, assistant director of the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute, which released the poll this week. If Pennsylvania voters had to choose today between Obama and Republican Mitt Romney, Obama would edge out Romney by a razor thin margin of 45 percent to 42 percent. The president would more easily win re-election over former Sen. Rick Santorum. Quinnipiac showed Obama winning a hypothetical contest with Santorum by 48 to 41 percent.

The poll makes it clear that, of the two present Republican contenders, Pennsylvania voters prefer Romney.

“He remains the stronger of the two major GOP contenders. Voters in Pennsylvania still see Romney as better able than the president to fix the economy,” Brown said.

Pennsylvania voters turned Santorum out of office in 2006, and the poll suggests they still distrust him.

“Although he is a native son, Rick Santorum runs worse against Obama in Pennsylvania than does Mitt Romney,” Brown said. “The former U.S. senator also is liked the least.”

Results were similar in Florida and Ohio.

In Florida, the poll showed Obama winning over Romney 49 to 42 percent. Santorum again fared worse than Romney in a potential vote, garnering support from just 37 percent of Florida voters, compared to 50 percent for Obama.

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Quinnipiac also showed Ohio voters choosing Obama 47 percent to Romney's 41 percent. The president would also beat Santorum in Ohio with 47 percent to 40 percent for Santorum.

While Obama held a lead in each of the three states, Brown noted that most polls have a margin of error of roughly three points, which means that Obama faces his greatest challenge in Pennsylvania.

Obama's lead in Ohio and Florida has widened over the last two months.

"Two months ago, President Obama and Gov. Mitt Romney were in a statistical tie in Ohio and Florida," Brown added. "The biggest reason for the president's improving prospects probably is the economy."

About 57 percent of respondents said they felt the economy was beginning to recover.

The poll did not break down support for each candidate by race, but did report that women in all three states prefer Obama by six to 19 percentage points.

It also found that for voters the biggest issues were, in descending order: the economy, unemployment and health care reform.

Social issues like abortion and gay marriage, which have been at the core of Santorum's campaign, ranked ninth on the list of concerns.

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