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# Poll: Romney slightly ahead in Florida

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TALLAHASSEE — Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney holds a slight edge in Florida over his closest GOP rival, Arizona Sen. John McCain, with just five days to go before Tuesday's presidential primary, according to a poll released today.

"Romney gets the support of most of those voting on the economy and immigration, while McCain is backed by those most concerned about terrorism," said Mason-Dixon managing director Brad Coker.

On the Democratic side, New York Sen. Hillary Clinton maintains a commanding lead over her closest rival, Illinois Sen. Barack Obama, among Florida voters.

Mason-Dixon's Jan. 22-23 survey of 400 likely Republican voters showed Romney beating McCain 30 percent to 26 percent.

Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, criticized for a risky strategy of ignoring early primary states to concentrate on Florida, came in at 18, just ahead of the 15 percentage points scored by former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee.

Among Republican voters polled, 10 percent remained undecided.

A Jan. 21-23 survey of 400 likely Democratic voters showed Clinton pulling 47 percent of the vote to Obama's 25 percent. Former North Carolina Sen. John Edwards was a distant third, with 16 percent.

Those Democratic voters surveyed included 10 percent who remain undecided.

"Florida is a friendly territory for Clinton, as its older and heavily female Democratic electorate plays to her strength," said pollster Brad Coker. "Obama has significant support among African-American voters and runs better among younger voters."

The tightness of the GOP race puts additional pressure on the top three contenders to perform well, and avoid gaffs, in tonight's nationally televised debate at Florida Atlantic University, Coker said.

"You could have something in the debate that could change these numbers," Coker said. "The Republican side has been very volatile."

Obama is suffering from a big disadvantage because of a pledge Democratic candidates made to early primary states not to campaign in Florida, Coker said. The Democratic National Committee punished Florida by stripping it of all its delegates for moving its primary up before Feb. 5.

"When he's been able to come in and appear personally, he generates excitement and enthusiasm," Coker said. "Because of the rules thing, he has not been able to take advantage of his greatest strength."

The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 5 percent.

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<< [Back](#)