

Ford Widens GOP Lead, Gallup Finds

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President Ford has widened his lead over Ronald Reagan and other possible candidates for the Republican nomination in 1976.

In the latest Gallup survey, 45 per cent of Republicans select Mr. Ford as their first choice for the nomination next year. Reagan is named next most often, by 19 per cent, followed by Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, 11 per cent.

Reagan, the man most likely to challenge Mr. Ford if a struggle for the '76 nomination develops, has been losing ground to the President since March.

The latest results confirm the fears of conservative strategists who have been urging Reagan to formally announce his candidacy before he falls too far behind Mr. Ford. Reagan presently trails the President by 26 percentage points. The margin was 21 points in June and 12 points in March.

This is the question asked to determine the first choices of Republican voters for the 1976 nomination:

"Here is a list of people (respondents were handed a card with the names of ten men whose names have figured prominently in speculation for the '76 GOP nomination) who have been mentioned as possible presidential candidates for the Republican nomination in 1976. Which ONE would you like to see nominated

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as the Republican candidate in 1976?"

The latest results with the trend for this year appear below:

First choices of Republican voters for nomination:

	Latest June March		
	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.
Gerald Ford	45	41	34
Ronald Reagan ..	19	20	22
Barry Goldwater ..	11	13	17
Nelson	7	5	10
Rockefeller			
Charles Percy ...	4	4	3
John Connally ...	3	3	x
Howard Baker ...	3	4	4
James Buckley ..	2	1	1
Mark Hatfield ...	2	2	3
Elliot Richardson	1	3	3
No preference ...	3	5	3

x Not included in March list.

Should Reagan decide against challenging Mr. Ford, the President would move into an even wider lead over the rest of the Republicans on the list.

Because all Republicans were asked to indicate their second choice for the nomination, it is possible to see which candidate would be supported by those who made Reagan their first choice.

Results show the largest share of the Reagan vote going to Mr. Ford — not to the other avowedly conservative men on the list. Approximately one-third, 31 per cent, of the Reagan supporters opt for the President as a second choice, giving Mr. Ford a 51 per cent majority. Here's how the list looks with Reagan's vote redistributed:

First choices of Republican voters for nomination (with Reagan vote redistributed):

Ford	51 pct
Goldwater	15
Rockefeller	9
Percy	5
Connally	5
Baker	3
Buckley	2
Hatfield	2
Richardson	2
No preference—others	6

As well as solidifying his hold on GOP voters, Mr. Ford has vaulted into the lead among independents as first choice for the GOP nomination.

Previously, in June, Mr. Ford was fourth, trailing Reagan as well as Rockefeller and Goldwater, with ten per cent of the vote.

In the latest survey, Mr. Ford is the first choice of 31 per cent of independents, followed by Reagan, 23 per cent, and Goldwater, 12 per cent.

Here's how three choices of independents look today and the trend for this year.

First choice of independent voters for nomination:

	Latest June March		
	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.
Gerald Ford	31	10	17
Ronald Reagan ..	23	18	20
Barry Goldwater ..	12	11	11
Charles Percy ...	7	8	7
Nelson	6	14	11
Rockefeller			
Howard Baker ...	4	4	6
Elliot Richardson	4	5	7
John Connally ...	3	6	x
James Buckley ..	2	4	2
Mark Hatfield ...	2	3	3
No preference ...	6	19	16

x Not included in March list.

In addition, the President is an easy first choice of those independents who are presently leaning Republican.

With Republican political affiliation at a low point, the vote of independents is crucial to the GOP if the party is to retain control of the White House. It is important, therefore, for Republicans to select the candidate who has wide appeal among independents, a group which now makes up one-third of the American electorate.

The latest findings are based on in-person interviews with 348 respondents who classify themselves Republicans and 498 who say they are independents, out of a total sample of 1515 adults, 18 and older. Interviewing was conducted in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period.