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Rick Santorum's momentum could raise importance of New Jersey, Pennsylvania primaries

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In a Republican primary race where it seems like anything could happen, former Pennsylvania Sen. **Rick Santorum**'s Tuesday victories could put primaries in New Jersey and Pennsylvania on the map.

Santorum won contests Tuesday in Minnesota, Colorado and Missouri -- once again calling into question the front-runner in the Republican presidential contest.



AP Photo | JEFF ROBERSON

Rick Santorum had a great night Tuesday in the Midwest.

"In any other year, we would say Santorum has no chance, no way, no how," said G. Terry Madonna, director of the Center for Politics and Public Affairs at Franklin & Marshall College.

Madonna said it was conceivable the Pennsylvania primary April 24 and the New Jersey primary June 5 could be game-changers.

Douglas Steinhardt, chairman of the Warren County Republican Committee, said he was glad

the Garden State switched its primary back to June after holding it in February in 2008.

"Seeing that there is no clear front-runner at this point," Steinhardt said, "I think the relevance is later in the year when your delegates can actually make a difference."

David P. Redlawsk, a professor of political science at Rutgers University Eagleton Institute of Politics, said it was tough to assess what would happen after Santorum's surge.

"Candidates have consistently risen and fall throughout the year," Redlawsk said.

Can he win?

Santorum's entire campaign has been dogged by questions of his electability.

Northampton County Councilwoman Peg Ferraro, a Republican, said she doubted Santorum could win over independents, Democrats and many Republicans.

"I think he's going to have a strong core Republican base here in the Lehigh Valley," she said, "but I think there are many people who will not support him because they just want someone who they think can beat (President Barack) Obama."

Steinhardt said he was backing Gov. Chris Christie's pick, Mitt Romney, and thinks a lot of local voters will do the same.

"Gov. Christie is very strong in New Jersey and his endorsements mean a lot to the Republican voters in the state," he said.



Express-Times File Photo | BILL ADAMS

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney visited Allentown in June.

The latest Gallup daily tracking poll on Saturday showed Romney still leading the pack with 34 percent of Republicans behind him, a 7 percentage point lead over Santorum, who has picked up 11 points since wider-ranging polling released Tuesday. PPP national polling released Saturday showed Santorum up 38 to 23 over Romney. The realclearpolitics.com polling average on Sunday had Romney over Santorum by 5.8 percentage points.

Redlawsk said it was likely Romney would now aim his significant war chest at Santorum in a "slash and burn" strategy.

Although Santorum's campaign announced it had raised \$3 million last week, that still puts him roughly \$52 million behind Romney, according to the latest documents filed with the Federal Election Commission.

Madonna and Redlawsk were unsure if Santorum would have much of a hometown advantage because he lost the Pennsylvania U.S. Senate race so badly in 2006.

"It's not completely clear whether that still hangs over him," Redlawsk said of Santorum's nearly 18-point loss to Sen. Bob Casey Jr.

Santorum's edge

Santorum stands out from Romney, Newt Gingrich and Ron Paul because of his "consistent" conservative message, Redlawsk said.

"Santorum's best argument, at least with conservative Republicans, is that, 'You know who I am and I haven't changed,'" Redlawsk said.

Redlawsk said Gingrich was "all over the place with his ideas" and Romney has shifted many of his positions over time.

He admitted Paul was consistent -- just not in a way that appealed to GOP voters.

"Ron Paul is consistent in a way that doesn't fit the Republican Party," Redlawsk said. **"He would get us out of every war -- that's not the Republican Party."**

Madonna said a turning point in the race will be how Romney and Santorum court the voters they have alienated so far.

Romney does not do as well with voters who call themselves "true conservatives" such as Tea Party activists and evangelicals, Madonna said.

The key for Santorum, he said, is getting enough of those voters to believe he could be president.

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