

Two GOP Contenders Gaining Ground in Latest Polls

Three new polls released in the past 24 hours indicate two candidates are gaining ground on the rest of the Republican presidential primary field.

A new *CBS News/New York Times* poll released today shows front-runner Donald Trump has widened his lead over the rest of the field to nearly 20 points. Trump polled at 35 percent, while U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz came in second with 16 percent.

Dr. Ben Carson (13 percent), U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio (9 percent), and U.S. Sen. Rand Paul (4 percent) rounded out the top five. Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee and Ohio Gov. John Kasich all polled at 3 percent each.

The polling numbers do not likely reflect any reaction to Trump's statement about halting Muslim immigration to the U.S. There is a 6 percent margin of error.

Based on the new numbers, Trump's national polling average during the month of December is 31 percent, which is nearly seven points higher than it was 30 days ago. Cruz's average has increased by about five points during that same period to 16 percent.

One area of the country where he's seen his appeal grow the most has been in the early voting state of South Carolina. Two new polls there show him moving up 6 points in the past 30 days.

In a Winthrop University poll of 828 likely voters, Cruz came in second place at 16 percent, just eight points behind Trump, and two points ahead of Carson. Rubio garnered 11 percent, and Bush received 9 percent. The poll had a margin of error of 3.4

percent.

FOX News has also released a poll of 437 likely voters, in which Cruz tied with Rubio for third place with 14 percent each. Carson was in second with 15 percent, 20 points behind Trump. The margin of error of that poll was 4.5 percent.

Cruz's December polling average is 15 percent in South Carolina, while Carson sits at 14.5 percent, and Rubio is averaging 12.5 percent. Trump's numbers in South Carolina also are moving upward. His December average is 30 percent, about two points higher than it was 30 days ago, and about five points higher than three weeks ago.