



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on January 26, 2012

Media Shaping the Presidential Election

How does establishment media bias shape the theme of presidential elections? Most veteran conservatives have long known that television personalities and major newspaper reporters give far more political donations to Democrats than Republicans, with almost no donations at all to genuine conservatives. The Washington Examiner reported in 2010 that, according to a Center for Responsive Politics survey about employees donations in 2008 at the three major news networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS), “The Democratic total of \$1,020,816 was given by 1,160 employees’ of the three major broadcast television networks, with an average contribution of \$880. By contrast, only 193 of the employees contributed to Republican candidates and campaign committees, for a total of \$142,863. The average Republican contribution was \$744.” This corresponds with earlier studies of the party registration of major media personalities and reporters conducted by the Media Research Center.



Even affiliates of NewsCorp, which owns Fox News and the *Wall Street Journal*, [gave](#) to Democrats in 2008 by a three-to-one margin, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. NewsCorp and the other media continue to give heavily to Democrats in the 2012 cycle as well, though NewsCorp CEO Rupert Murdoch [gave \\$1.25 million](#) to the Republican Governors Association in the 2010 cycle.

Although the establishment media has a strong bias for liberalism and government intervention, it’s not political donations alone that reveal the real media influence on elections. The establishment media’s real major influence — what truly shapes the election — is whom it chooses to shine its spotlight on. That’s the key bias and the reason for the “flavor of the month” of Republican presidential frontrunners throughout 2011.

“Flavor of the Month” Media Spotlight

When Representatives Michele Bachmann of Minnesota and Ron Paul of Texas finished at the top of the August Iowa straw poll, the media chose to cover the Bachmann candidacy alone. The day after Bachmann finished first in the straw poll (with Ron Paul a mere 152 votes behind, out of 16,892 votes cast), she landed interviews on all five national Sunday political television shows. Meanwhile, Paul was booked on none. Within days, Bachmann was at the top of the national polls in the presidential race.

Author, talk-show host, and Current TV commentator David Sirota [told](#) CNN’s *Reliable Sources* after the Iowa straw poll, “Ron Paul doesn’t fit the narrative,” saying that Ron Paul’s divergence from the



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Republican Party neoconservative agenda creates media bias against him. Paul is a social conservative and the most fiscally conservative candidate in the race. But unlike all of the other Republican candidates, he opposes unnecessary U.S. forces being deployed abroad and supports abolition of the Federal Reserve Bank. "And, so," Sirota concluded of Rep. Paul, "he's being sort of written out of the story because he can't be put through the prism of the red versus blue summer camp color war idea that dominates so much of our politics. It's really sad, because here's a guy who has had political success, who by every other metric that any candidate would be judged by would be included as a frontrunner or at least in the debate about who is going to win or could win the Republican nomination."

But a month after the Iowa straw poll, after a few verbal miscues by Bachmann, the media had redirected its spotlight to Texas Governor Rick Perry. Perry became the September "flavor of the month." Perry botched several debate performances, and the media cast about looking for another neoconservative alternative to Mitt Romney. That chance for another flavor of the month came when Herman Cain won the Florida "Presidency 5" straw poll September 24, the weekend after Ron Paul won the California GOP straw poll.

Paul had won a straw poll in a larger state, and by a more decisive margin, but Cain's agenda was more in line with the media narrative of a neoconservative being electable. Despite never holding elected office, Cain got non-stop media coverage, while Ron Paul's win was hardly discussed at all by major media. And within weeks, Cain had replaced Perry as the national poll leader for the Republican nomination.

MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski [asked](#) Rep. Paul on *Morning Joe*, "So congressman, why is Herman Cain at the top of the polls?" Rep. Paul acknowledged the media bias: "I think he's gotten some very big boosts. You know, the week where he really soared, he won a straw vote in Florida. And he was on the news constantly.... [The previous week] I won the straw vote in California. Zero coverage." When the Cain campaign imploded from allegations of marital infidelity, the media spotlight turned to Newt Gingrich. Gingrich likewise soared in the polls for a month, riding the media spotlight until his record of kowtowing to Freddie Mac's mortgage agenda was examined.

The Two Establishment Media Themes

Why Rep. Paul was spurned by the major media time after time had everything to do with two-pronged media bias.

The first level of bias is the standard partisan bias. One example of this was ABC News' George Stephanopoulos' debate moderation January 7. Stephanopoulos had [served as a campaign advisor](#) for three Democratic campaigns (Michael Dukakis, Dick Gephardt, and Bill Clinton), and during the debate continued as if he were a Democratic Party functionary. In a January 7 GOP debate, moderator Stephanopoulos [asked](#) GOP presidential hopefuls whether a state ban on contraception would be constitutional, even though no state had actually called for banning contraception. Stephanopoulos was simply seeking to manufacture a phony campaign issue for Democrats in the fall.

The standard partisan bias from the old three major networks works against Ron Paul because much of the leftist media have adopted the warmongering neoconservative foreign policy agenda, while many others see Paul as too dangerously electable against an Obama administration that has stripped the nation of much of the Bill of Rights and engaged in several unconstitutional wars without congressional consent. Other parts of the leftist media have a grudging respect for some of Paul's positions, and will



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occasionally give him a voice on their shows. But these opportunities are limited, as Paul is painted as being an unelectable candidate in what leftist media elites see as an evil Republican Party dominated by yahoos and backwoods goobers.

The other, more important, bias against Paul is the neoconservative bias represented by the Fox News Channel and Clear Channel radio talk shows. Most media bias against Rep. Paul's candidacy can be summed up as "ignoring Dr. Paul." Among the prime examples of media bias in this manner during the Iowa straw poll, CNN anchor Drew Griffin and CNN deputy political director Paul Steinhauser [talked](#) on the day of the Iowa straw poll about the candidates:

Steinhauser: We have live pictures of Ron Paul, but you know what, we're talking about Sarah Palin and we're talking about Rick Perry, the two people not in the race yet.

Drew Griffin: And guess what Paul, if you get video of Sarah Palin, or get a sound byte from her, bring that back to us. You can hold the Ron Paul stuff.

The remarks caused Comedy Central's Jon Stewart to [quip](#): "How did libertarian Ron Paul become the 13th floor in a hotel?"

Fox News and talk radio are famously the only pro-Republican national major media outlets, but they have also been famously pro-war in the case of Iraq and other Middle East wars. Fox News viewers were almost twice as likely to believe weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq and that there were strong ties between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda as those who relied primarily on print media for information, according to a Pew Charitable Foundation study published in October 2003. Thus, few should be surprised that Public Policy Polling found that likely voters who don't watch Fox News viewed the anti-war Rep. Paul favorably by a 62-38 percent margin. Meanwhile, regular viewers of Fox News viewed Ron Paul favorably by the opposite margin of 38-62.

"Unelectability" and Electability

But Fox News' primary bias was not ignoring Ron Paul. Instead, Paul has been continuously portrayed as a dangerous candidate who would give Iran the atomic bomb, abolish all drug laws (even those of the states), and coddle terrorists, none of which is true. In addition, Fox portrays Paul as an unelectable spoiler for the GOP. LewRockwell.com's James Ostrowski [explained](#) that "the MSM [mainstream media] repeats the Big Lie — a statement for which no evidence exists but which is repeated endlessly — that Ron Paul cannot beat Obama. That becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as many voters make their decision based on the Big Lie. In fact, the polls show that Ron Paul can beat Obama and that Romney cannot — if he faces a strong third party challenge which is likely."

One example among the many for this self-fulfilling prophecy is Fox News' Chris Wallace, who commented on Fox News December 14. Wallace said that not only can't Ron Paul win, but if he did win in Iowa, it wouldn't have counted. "Well, and the Ron Paul people aren't going to like me saying this," Wallace [told](#) Neil Cavuto of the possibility of a Ron Paul win in Iowa, "but, to a certain degree, it will discredit the Iowa caucuses because, rightly or wrongly, I think most of the Republican establishment thinks he is not going to end up as the nominee. So, therefore, Iowa won't count and it will go on."

Paul didn't end up winning Iowa. But Wallace's logical somersaults are dizzying. How can a candidate win and then be declared unelectable? It's a clear contradiction in terms, an oxymoron.

The establishment line is essentially: Ron Paul can't win because the establishment doesn't like him. And even if he does win, it doesn't count. But winning becomes more difficult when a candidate is cast



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as “unelectable,” for the simple reason that many voters believe they waste their votes when they cast them for “unelectable” candidates. In essence, by defining who the “electable” candidates are via how they portray them, the media are effectively offering a short list of candidates to choose from. And that short list, as Bachmann and others have discovered, is subject to change even before the first vote is cast.

Certainly the reality is very different from the media-created perception. In Rasmussen national head-to-head polls pitting individual GOP contenders against Obama, [only Romney and Paul score](#) within the margin of error in a final runoff election.

Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney is viewed by most of the media as the Republican frontrunner. He won the first-in-the-nation primary in New Hampshire by a significant margin over second-place finisher Ron Paul (39-23 percent). He also was originally thought to have won the first-in-the-nation caucus in Iowa by a razor-thin margin over former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, who, based on a new tabulation of the caucus vote, ended up with a slim margin over Romney. Santorum and Romney each garnered 25 percent of the Iowa caucus vote, followed by Ron Paul’s strong third-place showing at 21 percent.

Romney’s campaign is seen as the most viable because of his position in the polls both nationally and in early caucus states, as well as his fundraising ability. Romney has raised more money than any of his Republican rivals, and is the [top donation recipient from employees of elite Wall Street banking concerns such as Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, and Bank of America](#). Romney drew heavily from establishment and veteran Republican functionaries in Iowa and New Hampshire, which carried the states for him.

The under-funded Santorum campaign — which focused upon Iowa for six months and came in first by a slim edge — faded in New Hampshire. Moreover, Santorum and other Republican candidates besides Paul and Romney face very practical electability issues, such as [ballot access in Virginia](#) and other states.

But what really makes a candidate “electable”? Interestingly, during the 2008 primary season Obama was dogged by these same charges made by his opponents — especially those in the Hillary Clinton camp — that he was unelectable. In the end, Obama turned out to be all-too electable.

Several practical factors can quantify a candidate’s electability, factors proven true by decades of experience. These practical measures can be summed up as “expanding the base.”

Youth, Independent Vote

Obama won the 2008 general election because he was able to expand the Democratic base by attracting new voters, especially young voters, as well as independent voters to the Democrat’s campaign. Young people under 30 voted for Obama over John McCain by a 61 percent to 39 percent margin, according to [Gallup](#), and they also backed Obama heavily in the primaries. Independent voters, who had traditionally heavily favored Republicans, swung to Obama 51-49 percent in an election that ended in an Obama win by a 53-46 percent popular vote victory.

Meanwhile, the establishment Republican nominee John McCain — who recently endorsed frontrunner and establishment candidate Mitt Romney during the 2012 cycle — shrank the Republican party base. McCain lost every age group except 65 and older, which he won by a 54-46 margin.

In short, Obama won because he expanded his party’s base by bringing in first-time voters and



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independents to his campaign. This created the first national election where a Democrat won more than 50 percent of the popular vote since Jimmy Carter in 1976 (Bill Clinton won the presidency twice for the Democrats in the 1990s, but with less than 50 percent of the popular vote. He won a plurality in races with strong third-party candidacies).

By expanding and energizing the Democratic Party's electoral base with young voters in 2008, Obama has actually made his reelection more likely. The Republican who would be the most electable would be the answer to this question: Which candidate is most able to expand the Republican base by drawing in new (young) voters and independents?

The results from the entrance polls at the January 3 Iowa caucus revealed that Ron Paul drew more than twice as many young people and independents as any of his rivals.

Tom Curry, MSNBC's national affairs writer, [noted](#):

The Texas congressman and 1988 Libertarian presidential candidate did quite well among self-described independents who accounted for 23 percent of Tuesday night's caucus participants — winning 43 percent of such voters.

Paul was also the strongest contender among first time caucus goers who accounted for about four out of ten attendees. He won about a third of their votes.

Entrance poll interviews revealed that 15 percent of caucus goers were voters age 17 to 29, and 48 percent of them opted for Paul.

But more significantly, more than one quarter of caucus attendees were age 65 and over and Romney was the winner among that group, winning three out of ten of them.

CNN entrance polls [found precisely the same thing](#), specifically that Paul won the most first-time caucus-goers and more than twice as many young voters as his rivals. He also won more than twice as many independent voters as his rivals.

Romney did fairly well with independent voters (19 percent compared with Paul's 43 percent) in the Iowa caucus, better than his other opponents. But Romney drew heavily from elderly voters and won only the 65 and older age group. In short, Romney's base is dying off, while Ron Paul's is expanding. Moreover, Romney is putting together the same losing demographic garnered by his ally McCain, an effort that put Obama in the White House after the 2008 election.

New Hampshire's [exit polls](#) echoed the same result, with Rep. Paul winning more young voters, first-time voters and independents than any other candidate. (He even came in second, with 3.7 percent from write-in votes, in the Democratic primary won by Obama.) Romney won all of the older age groups and GOP veterans in New Hampshire.

Ron Paul, in short, is putting together Obama's winning, base-expanding demographic. The media bias and buzz about Ron Paul's supposed "unelectability" may actually be an attempt to kill the best chance the Republicans have to recapture the White House in 2012.

Romney used his narrow victory in Iowa to target President Obama in his [victory speech](#). "He said three years ago, after being inaugurated, he was on the *Today* show, and he said look, 'if I can't get this economy turned around in three years, I'd be looking at a one-term proposition.' And we are here to collect." Romney may have a point on that. Obama could never win 50 percent of the popular vote with the economy in the current doldrums, even if the Republicans ran their least electable candidate. Presidents get the credit or blame for the economic situation from voters, even though Congress has



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exclusive control of the nation's purse strings under the U.S. Constitution.

However, the economy may show some growth before the election, making the election close. The December jobs numbers indicated an uptick in the economy, with an unemployment level that [dropped](#) to 8.5 percent with some 200,000 new jobs created. This trend may or may not continue into the November election. If it doesn't continue, just about any Republican could beat Obama in a two-way race. But if the economy does improve briskly, Obama's polling numbers will increase and the race will be close.

That's when the issue of electability becomes key. And it's then that Ron Paul's strong hold on young and independent voters becomes key for Republican chances of recapturing the White House with the 2012 election. The question is: Will the media's cacophony about Ron Paul's unelectability become a self-fulfilling prophecy? There are a lot of establishment Republicans and Democrats who are undoubtedly hoping for such a thing to occur.

Photo of Mitt Romney, Ron Paul, and Newt Gingrich (l-r): AP Images



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