

**OCTOBER 17, 2011**

How News Media and Blogs Have Eyed the Presidential Contenders  
During the First Phase of the 2012 Race

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**The Media Primary**

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## Introduction

In the first months of the race for president, that weeding out period before citizens ever vote or caucus, Texas Governor Rick Perry has received the most coverage and the most positive coverage from the news media of any GOP contender, according to a new study by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism.

But in what is already a fluid race, Perry lost that mantle to Herman Cain two weeks ago, after the Florida straw poll and a faulty debate performance, according to the study, which combines traditional media research methods with computer algorithms to track the level and tone of coverage of candidates for president. The analysis also shows that Cain's narrative actually started to become more positive in late August, six weeks before he began to rise in the polls.

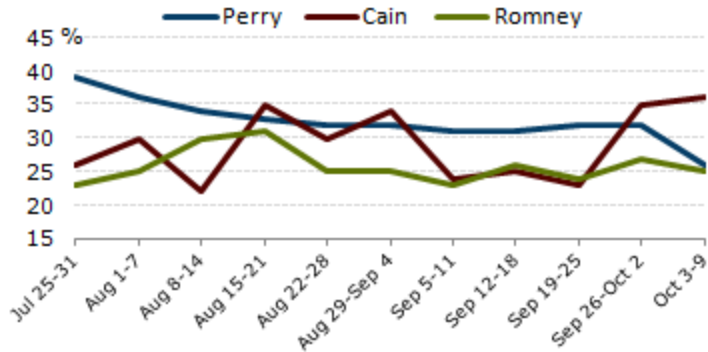
Meanwhile, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney remains the one constant—portrayed as the ever-present if not passionately embraced alternative in the GOP field. Despite often leading in the polls, Romney has typically received less coverage and less positive coverage than his chief rival of the moment—and that remained true in early October after Perry faltered. Overall, he is second in the amount of attention received and the tone of that narrative has been unwaveringly mixed.

One man running for president has suffered the most unrelentingly negative treatment of all, the study found: Barack Obama. Though covered largely as president rather than a candidate, negative assessments of Obama have outweighed positive by a ratio of almost 4-1. Those assessments of the president have also been substantially more negative than positive every one of the 23 weeks studied. And in no week during these five months was more than 10% of the coverage about the president positive in tone.

These are some of the findings of new work by the Pew

### Positive Coverage: Perry Falls, Cain Rises and Romney Stays Steady

Percent of Coverage



Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

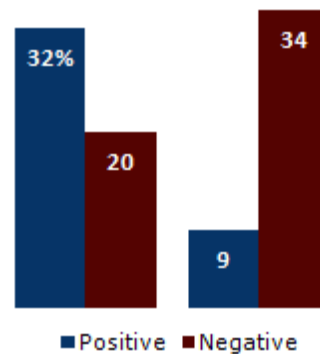
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### Best and Worst Coverage

Percent of Coverage

**Perry** enjoys best ratio of positive to negative coverage

**Obama** has the worst positive to negative treatment



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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## The Media Primary

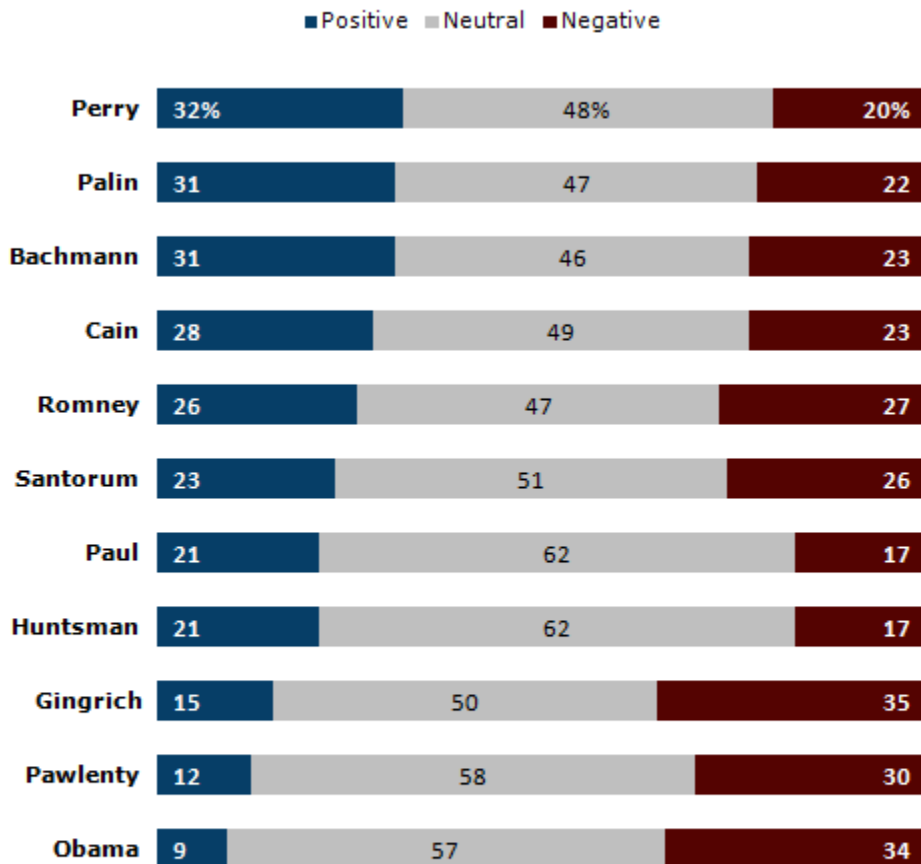
Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism that combines PEJ's ongoing weekly content analysis with computer algorithmic technology developed by Crimson Hexagon. In combination, the two research methods assess coverage across more than 11,500 news media outlets each day. A separate analysis also tracks the level of discussion and tone across hundreds of thousands of blogs. The study covers the 23 weeks from May 2, when candidates began to announce, to October 9, one week ago—that first phase of what might be called The Media Primary.

The blogosphere, it turns out, is proving a much rougher environment than the news media for candidates, including contenders associated with the Tea Party movement. But one candidate has emerged as the winner of the blog primary so far—Texas Congressman Ron Paul.

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### Tone of News Coverage of All Candidates

Percent of Coverage



**Date Range:** May 2 – October 9, 2011 for all candidates but Tim Pawlenty. His data reflects May 2 - August 14.

**Note:** Blogs are not included.

*Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology*

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The research, across such a wide range of outlets, and using a combination of conventional and computer tools, make it possible to quickly compare shifts in news coverage and in blogs with

events in the campaign and movements in the polls. The project will continue to provide reports tracking the level and tone of candidate coverage on a weekly basis throughout the campaign season.

Despite his recent stumbles, **Rick Perry** received the most flattering coverage of any candidate over the five months studied. Positive coverage about his candidacy in the news media outweighed negative 32% to 20% (the remaining assessments were neutral). His coverage began to be less positive the week of September 12-18, before his Florida debate performance. But Perry endured only one week in which coverage was more negative than positive overall, October 3-9. And while he did not enter the race until August, he has received more coverage than any other candidate during the five months studied.

The tone of coverage of **Mitt Romney**, by contrast, has been mixed—26% positive and 27% negative—numbers that are less positive than those for Perry, Cain, Michele Bachmann or non-candidate Sarah Palin. Yet what stands out most is consistency. While other major candidates have risen and fallen in the amount and tone of coverage received, the basic arc of Romney's narrative has wavered little from week to week from May to early October.

Overall, news coverage of **Herman Cain** has been moderately more positive (28%) than negative (23%). But most of that flattering narrative has come recently—the result of eight straight weeks when positive assessments of his candidacy outweighed negative. The first two weeks of October have been particularly positive. From May through July, however, Cain was largely ignored, and his coverage was more negative or mixed.

Minnesota Congresswoman **Michele Bachmann's** coverage overall has been substantially more positive (31%) than negative (23%). But she had the wildest ride of any candidate in the race. In five months, she moved in the media narrative from a long shot to a surprise contender, to an object of scrutiny about her health and husband. She re-emerged as the Iowa straw poll winner, and now she is back where she started, an unlikely contender discounted in the narrative. At the same time, she has been largely pummeled in the blogs throughout the time studied.

Former Alaska Governor **Sarah Palin** continued to display a gift for fascinating the media during these past five months. Though she never entered the race, finally announcing on October 5 that she would not run, Palin seemed to generate significant coverage whenever she hinted she might get into the contest. That was enough to make her the fourth-most-covered Republican figure in news coverage, and the most-discussed candidate in blogs. And despite her complaints about what she calls the “lamestream media,” Palin enjoyed coverage that was considerably more positive than negative—by a factor of almost 3-2. Bloggers, meanwhile, were much more disapproving.

The two biggest losers among the GOP have been former House Speaker **Newt Gingrich** and former Minnesota Governor **Tim Pawlenty**, whose candidacy lasted less than three months. While Gingrich generated much more coverage than Pawlenty, both candidates received negative assessments that outweighed positive ones by a ratio of more than 2-1. Both candidates also endured negative coverage virtually every week.

The GOP field also has what might be called the long shot duo. They are former Pennsylvania Senator **Rick Santorum** and former Utah Governor **Jon Huntsman**. Their candidacies are

## The Media Primary

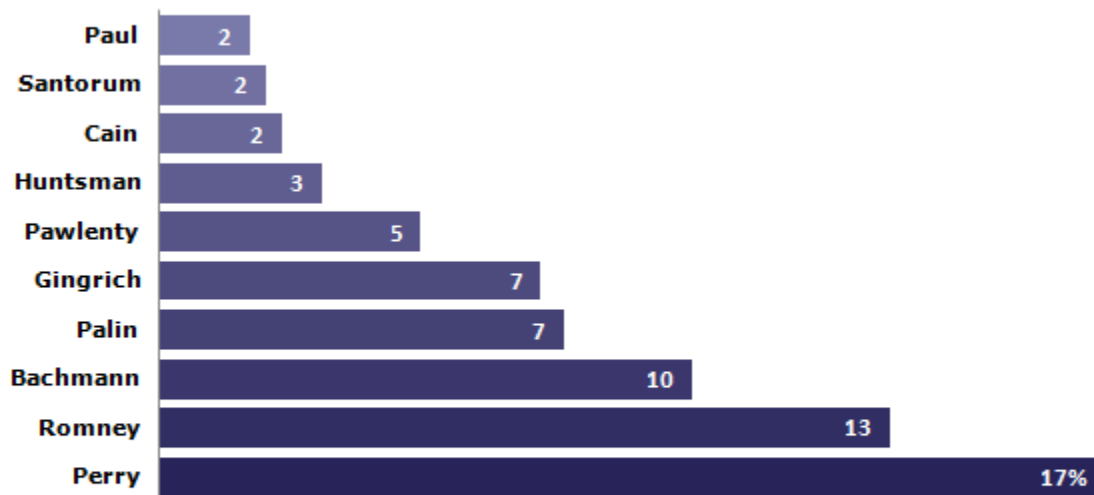
distinguished in the media by two elements. They both generated only modest amounts of coverage. And that coverage has been mixed between positive and negative assessments.

The same could be said of the narrative in the news media of Texas Congressman **Ron Paul**, who received the least coverage of any candidate overall (although from July on, Newt Gingrich received less coverage than Paul did). The difference with Paul is that he has received, by far, the most favorable coverage of any candidate in the blogosphere—48% positive and only 15% negative.

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### Amount of News Coverage of GOP Candidates

*Percent of Campaign Stories*



**Date Range:** May 2 – October 9, 2011 for all candidates but Tim Pawlenty. His data reflects May-August 14.

**Note:** This data is derived from the News Coverage Index which examines 52 news outlets. A political figure must be in at least 50% of the story to register as a primary newsmaker.

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As for **Barack Obama**, 9% of the news coverage about him over the last five months has registered as positive while 34% has been negative and 57% has been neutral or largely straight news accounting of events. In each of the 23 weeks studied, his negative coverage exceeded his positive coverage by more than 20 percentage points. And in none of those weeks did his negative coverage fall below 30%. The tone of Obama's coverage on blogs, while still overwhelmingly negative, was slightly better—14% positive and 36% negative.

The study examined four basic elements of each candidate's narrative. It measured how much attention each candidate received in news media. It also examined the tone of that coverage. Then, separately, it assessed the amount of attention and tone in blogs.

To analyze the level of attention, researchers identified all of the campaign coverage from a core list of mainstream news outlets using PEJ's weekly analysis, called the News Coverage Index. That core list includes 52 different news outlets from newspapers, cable news, broadcast television, the 12 most popular news websites in the country, and radio news (NPR, syndicated radio headlines and three talk radio personalities).

To assess the tone of coverage, PEJ researchers then employed computer algorithmic software from Crimson Hexagon. Researchers conducted a tone analysis and then “trained” the algorithm to follow the same rules as they had themselves. PEJ also conducted inter-coder tests to ensure the computer coding was replicable and valid by comparing human coding to the results derived by the algorithm. The project also had different people build the algorithms separately to ensure that they were achieving consistent results. Each computer algorithm was then additionally tested for reliability by having multiple researchers review the content assessed and the results.

The tone analysis was conducted on two different samples. The first was of the coverage and commentary on more than 11,500 news outlets, based on their RSS feeds. While the content is text based, the material on various television news sites often closely resembled the stories that had aired on television, and in some cases were exact transcripts. The second was from hundreds of thousands of blogs. (Facebook and Twitter feeds were not included after researchers found that the political assessment offered there was typically quite brief or referred to blog or news content.)

### **Among other findings:**

- While almost all of the Republican candidates fared worse in blogs than they did in the coverage and commentary in news outlets, there were three exceptions. The conversation about Mitt Romney and Herman Cain in the blogosphere was similar in tone to their news coverage. And Ron Paul did markedly better in the blogosphere than in the press.
- In contrast to news coverage, however, the tone of conversation about each candidate in the blogosphere tended to change relatively little over time. In other words, while news coverage might move from more positive to more negative depending on events, we saw no such movement in blogs. Those candidates treated negatively overall in the blogs experienced negative coverage every week and in fairly static percentages. The same was true for those whose coverage overall was positive.
- One question is whether media coverage is a leading indicator that may drive public opinion or is a lagging indicator that follows poll numbers (a description of improving standing in the horse race would be considered positive in the study). The data suggest that the relationship between a candidate’s poll numbers and the tone of his or her coverage, varied widely. Bachmann’s poll numbers, for instance, jumped well before the tone of her coverage improved. The coverage for Cain, in contrast, turned more positive in August, weeks ahead of his rise in the polls. In the case of Romney, his move up in the polls in early June was not accompanied by any particular change in the tone of his media narrative.
- One factor in the broader media narrative is which candidates are vetted by reporters, beyond their public comments each day. While the quantitative aspect of this report cannot answer that, changes in tone and a more subjective look at coverage during those moments of shift offer some hint. The news media appeared to launch an examination of the records and resume of some candidates—notably Michele Bachmann and Rick Perry—after their rise in the polls, while largely sparing other candidates, such as Ron Paul and, so far, Herman Cain.

## The Media Primary

- Debates, now growing in number, are having an impact on the media narrative, perhaps because the candidates find themselves in less scripted encounters during these events. The study finds that debates have coincided with some notable shifts in tone of coverage. The June 13 CNN debate, for instance, produced some good reviews and a boost in status for Michele Bachmann while furthering doubts about Tim Pawlenty. And some difficult debate performances, most notably on September 22, have injected some critical coverage into what had been very favorable media treatment of Rick Perry.
- There have been four distinct phases to this early media primary. The first one, which generated the first significant amount of campaign coverage, was the Donald Trump phase that began in late April. That was followed by the candidate announcement cycle (mid-May through June) and then the debt doldrums period from early July through the beginning of August, when campaign coverage was completely overshadowed by the debt drama in Washington D.C. The next phase began in mid-August, when Rick Perry entered the race and instantly changed its dynamic.
- Finally, given the breadth of content across the blogosphere, it is impossible to know quantitatively how many of those opinions evaluating a GOP candidate negatively are coming from blogs that tilt liberal and Democratic and those evaluating them positively are coming from conservative and Republican blogs. Given the nature of the blogosphere, conservative primary voters may not read commentary on liberal blogs, and vice versa. Clearly some of the comments critical of candidates, however, are coming from within their own parties. Moreover, some of it is from bloggers evaluating the contenders by the same criteria as the news media—based on their chances for winning.

## ABOUT THE STUDY

The study was conducted by the staff of the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism using a mix of traditional content analysis conducted by researchers and the same researchers using computer technology from Crimson Hexagon.

Researchers first coded news content themselves by candidate for whether it was positive, negative or neutral. Then they trained the computer algorithm using the same content until the computer was able to reliably conduct a semantic analysis that assessed the content in the same way that the researchers had done themselves.

The unit of measure of tone is each assertion or statement contained in a story or blog post, not the story or post in its entirety. Hence each assertion in a story is assessed separately and the numbers represented here are the percentages of all those assertions for the relevant time period.

As an example, the following assertion in an October 4 story by Gannett News Service correspondent Chuck Raasch was coded by the algorithm as positive: "By contrast, businessman Herman Cain, who has risen to a virtual second-place tie with Perry, is making good impressions. Some 70 percent said the more they learned about Cain the more they liked him."

Statements that represent a straight news accounting of events are assessed as neutral.

As an example, the following section of an Associated Press story by Brian Bakst on August 4 was analyzed by the algorithm as neutral: "One GOP rival, fellow Minnesotan Michele Bachmann, plans to keep her ads up throughout next week, spokeswoman Alice Stewart said. The third candidate with a commercial presence is Texas Rep. Ron Paul; an official with his campaign said ad plans are still being finalized."

One finding of this analysis is that substantial portions of news coverage are straight factual accounting, usually more than half. A smaller percentage but still sizable portion of blog posts also are made up of mixed or neutral recitation of facts.

Negative assertions were those that contained clearly negative evaluations about candidate or their chances or raised concerns about their fitness in some way. The following section of a story that raised questions about Michelle Bachmann's health in the Daily Caller news website by Jonathon Strong on July 18 was deemed negative: "'She has terrible migraine headaches. And they put her out of commission for a day or more at a time. They come out of nowhere, and they're unpredictable,' says an adviser to Bachmann who was involved in her 2010 congressional campaign. 'They level her. They put her down. It's actually sad. It's very painful.'"

A number of people at the Project for Excellence in Journalism worked on this report. Associate Director Mark Jurkowitz and Director Tom Rosenstiel wrote the report. The creation of the monitors using the Crimson Hexagon software was supervised by Tricia Sartor, the manager of the weekly news index, and senior researcher Paul Hitlin. Researchers Kevin Caldwell and Nancy Vogt and content and training coordinator Mahvish Khan created and ran monitors using the computer technology. Tricia Sartor produced the charts. Nancy Vogt and Katerina-Eva Matsa copy edited.



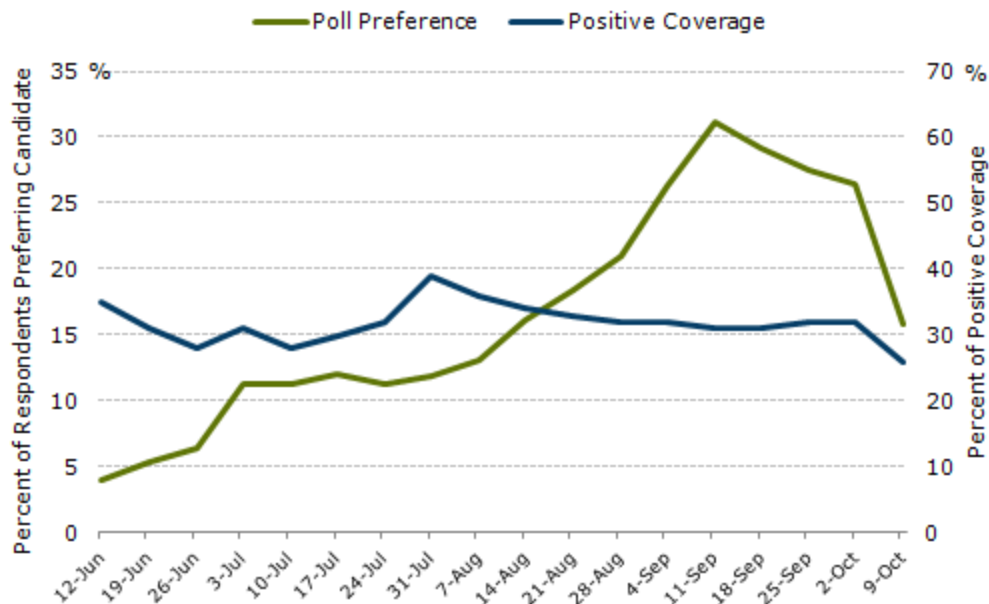
## THE CANDIDATES:

### RICK PERRY

Even with his poll numbers beginning to drop in mid-September and his campaign losing momentum, Texas Governor Rick Perry stands as the candidate who fared best in the early Media Primary. He emerged as the dominant newsmaker as soon as he entered the race. And the margin by which his positive coverage exceeded his negative coverage was higher than for any GOP candidate studied. He also had only one week in which his coverage was more negative than positive.

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#### Perry: Positive Coverage and Support in the Polls



**Note:** The dates shown represent the end of the sampled news week.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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That favorable media attention began well before he joined the race, moreover, and it continued after he began to lose altitude in the polls.

There was also a major difference between how Perry fared in news coverage and on blogs. In the blogosphere, the tone of the conversation about him was almost twice as negative as positive.

#### *Quantity of Perry News Coverage*

Once Perry made his intentions known on August 13, no other Republican hopeful matched his ability to generate coverage. Even after receiving minimal press attention in May, June and July, the coverage he generated after he entered was so heavy that he was the leading newsmaker among Republicans for the five months covered by the study.

## The Media Primary

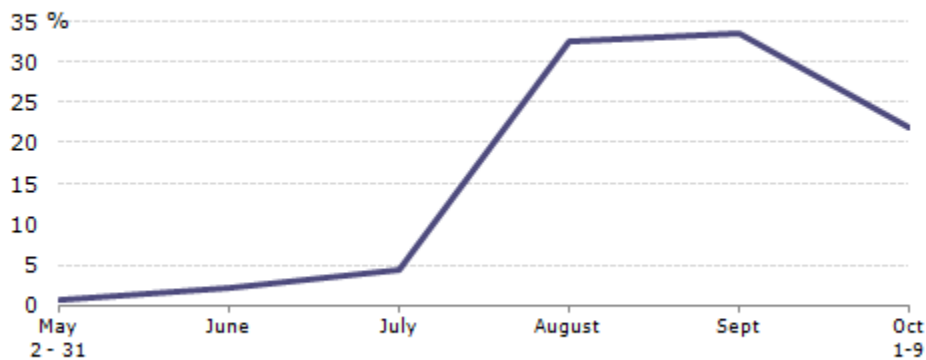
To measure quantity of exposure, researchers had two metrics. The first was to measure the number of stories in which a candidate was mentioned at least 50% of the time, a metric we call lead or primary newsmaker. Over the five months, Perry was the primary newsmaker in 17% of campaign stories examined. From July on, researchers also began to code a broader measure of exposure as well—whether a candidate was mentioned in 25% percent of a story. Perry was the top newsmaker by either measure.<sup>1</sup>

In August, Perry was a primary newsmaker in roughly three times as many stories as his closest GOP rival, Mitt Romney. And in September, he generated more than twice as much attention as the No. 2 newsmaker, again Romney.

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### Amount of Perry News Coverage Over Time

*Percent of Campaign Stories*



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One factor in Perry's knack for making news was his strong rhetoric. On August 15, two days after entering the race, he created a furor by bluntly warning that if Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke guy "prints more money between now and the election," that would be "treasonous in my opinion." That week, Perry dominated campaign news. The next week, after he jumped into the lead in several GOP presidential primary polls, Perry was the dominant newsmaker in close to half of all the campaign stories.

From that point on, he was at center stage in the campaign narrative. He ended up being a primary newsmaker in 33% of all the campaign stories in August and 34% in September.

While much of the coverage was fueled by his poll numbers, a series of controversial statements—ranging from his characterization of Social Security as a "Ponzi Scheme" to accusing his GOP rivals of failing to have a "heart" on immigration policy—also kept him in the headlines.

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<sup>1</sup> PEJ describes a candidate who is mentioned in at least 25% of a story as having a "significant presence" in that story. From July through mid October, Perry was a "significant" newsmaker in 41% of campaign stories, making him the No. 1 newsmaker by that metric.

***Tone of Perry's News Coverage***

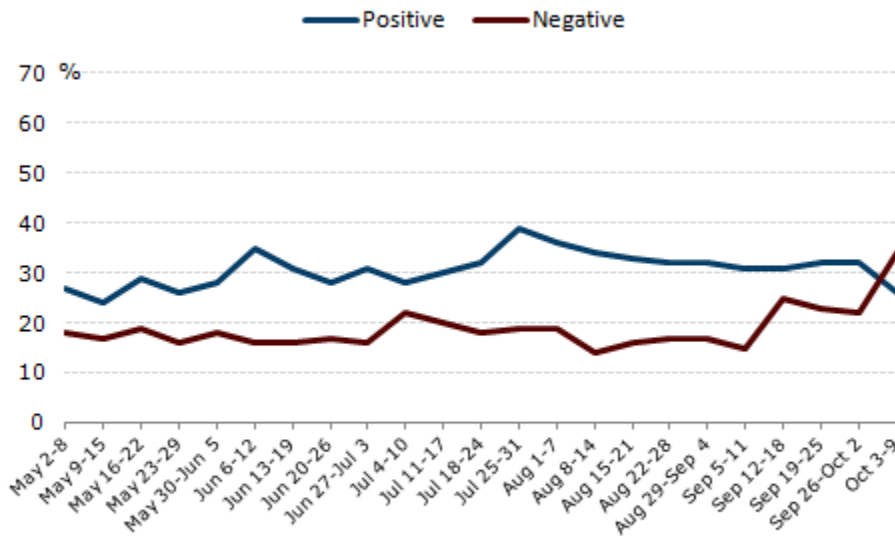
From May through early October, 32% of the news coverage of Perry was positive, 20% was negative and 49% was neutral or straight factual reporting, according to the analysis conducted by PEJ using the computer technology developed by Crimson Hexagon.

In some ways, Perry was the candidate the press was waiting for.

He began to emerge as a possible candidate the week of May 23, when he said he would consider running. Yet in every one of the 12 weeks between when Perry hinted at a run and when he actually joined the race, on August 13, he enjoyed more positive coverage than negative in the news media. Indeed, in all but one of those 12 weeks that positive-to-negative gap exceeded nine points.

**Tone of Perry News Coverage Over Time**

*Percent of Coverage*



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

*Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology*

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One trigger for the storyline that the Texas Governor would be a welcome entrant was the early problems afflicting Newt Gingrich's campaign. After the former House Speaker lost many of his top campaign aides, a June 10 Reuters story concluded that given "a lackluster Republican field that has not inspired activists hungry for an exciting outsider candidate," there is "a major opening for perhaps the last person who could shake the very foundations of the presidential contest, Texas Gov. Rick Perry."

And the drumbeat kept getting louder. In one of Perry's best weeks of coverage—July 25-31 when his narrative was 39% positive and 19% negative—the smart money was already shifting to the candidate-in-waiting.

“At the betting market Intrade, Texas Gov. Rick Perry has overtaken Mitt Romney and is now considered the most likely person to win the Republican presidential contest,” wrote the New York Times’ Nate Silver on July 26.

Even in the week of the Ames Iowa straw poll, which did not include Perry, he was a presence in the narrative. “While Perry continued to reap attention with his lengthy political tease, rivals were left to sweat in the Iowa sun, shaded only by his long shadow,” The Dallas Morning News wrote August 11.

Once Perry was in, the press focused explicitly on his impact on the polls. The last week in August, when a Gallup Poll had him vaulting to a 12-point lead over Romney, the August 24 headline on The Daily Beast, was one of hundreds: “Perry Takes Lead Nationwide.”

Fairly quickly, some in the press raised questions about Perry’s ideas and record—including some stories that bluntly raised the issue of his intellectual heft. “Is Rick Perry Dumb?” Politico headlined a story on August 29.

But questions about Perry’s readiness for the presidency did not become magnified enough in the media to be measurable across the broad swath of news coverage and commentary studied here until the week of September 12-18—the first time since he entered the race that a quarter of the coverage about him was negative.

That pattern continued the next week, when during a September 22 debate in Florida, he was deemed to have made several stumbles. The next day, the Washington Post asserted that Perry’s debate performance “did little to put to rest the idea that he’s not quite ready for primetime. Or at least, primetime debates.” At the same time, Perry came under attack for being insufficiently conservative on issues ranging from his program to provide schooling to the children of illegal immigrants and his mandating HPV vaccinations for young girls in Texas.

The polling averages compiled on the Real Clear Politics site show that the numbers for Perry began to drop on September 13, the same week his coverage began to be less positive.

Even then, however, Perry enjoyed more positive than negative coverage the last three weeks in September and the first few days of October. It was just not quite as positive as before. And he was still leading all other GOP contenders in the polls until the first week of October. Perry did not have a week in which his news coverage, across the broad spectrum of outlets was overall more negative than positive until the week of Oct. 3-9, when 26% of his coverage was positive, versus 34% that was negative.

### ***Quantity and Tone of Perry in Blogs***

If the news media largely treated Perry as an instant frontrunner enlivening a lackluster field, bloggers had a different view of him. While he was the leading newsmaker among Republicans in the news media, for instance, he only ranked No. 4 among the most-discussed candidates in the blogosphere. (Over the course of those five months, the data found about 100,000 opinions asserted in blogs about Perry. By comparison, Palin was the most talked about candidate in the blogosphere with about 137,000 opinions offered).

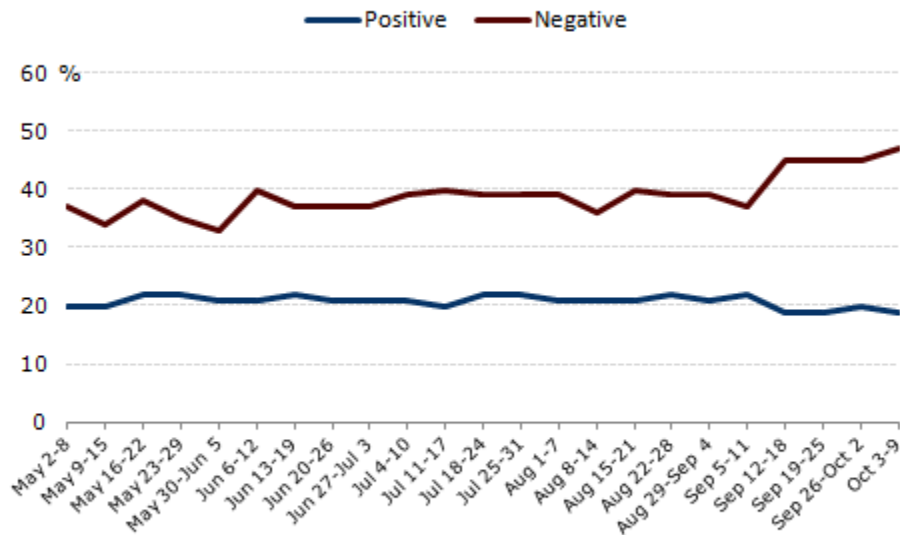
## The Media Primary

Those opinions among bloggers, moreover, tended toward the negative. Only 21% of the conversation about Perry tracked by the software was positive and 40% was negative, while 39% were mainly factual or neutral. That ratio is a little better than Michele Bachmann and Sarah Palin, but markedly more negative than Mitt Romney, Herman Cain and Ron Paul.

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### Tone of Perry Discussion in Blogs

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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A good deal of the criticism of Perry among bloggers focused on his ideology and philosophy. A post on the Secular News Daily site went after his role in organizing a major August 6 prayer event in Houston. “Why Texas Gov. Rick Perry and his prayerfest doesn’t understand America: It doesn’t matter whether someone is Christian, Muslim, Jewish or subscribes to no faith at all; we are all a part of this country.”

Some of the criticism was just people airing their views and offering their distaste for Perry, not necessarily making a specific argument. A few days after his entry into the race, for instance, someone posted a picture of an anti-Perry bumper sticker affixed to a car in Texas on theLivereal.org blog with the comment: “Proof that there are some sane people in Texas.”

Some of the praise of Perry in the blogosphere stemmed from the same factors that drove his upbeat narrative in the news media—a swift rise to the top of the pack.

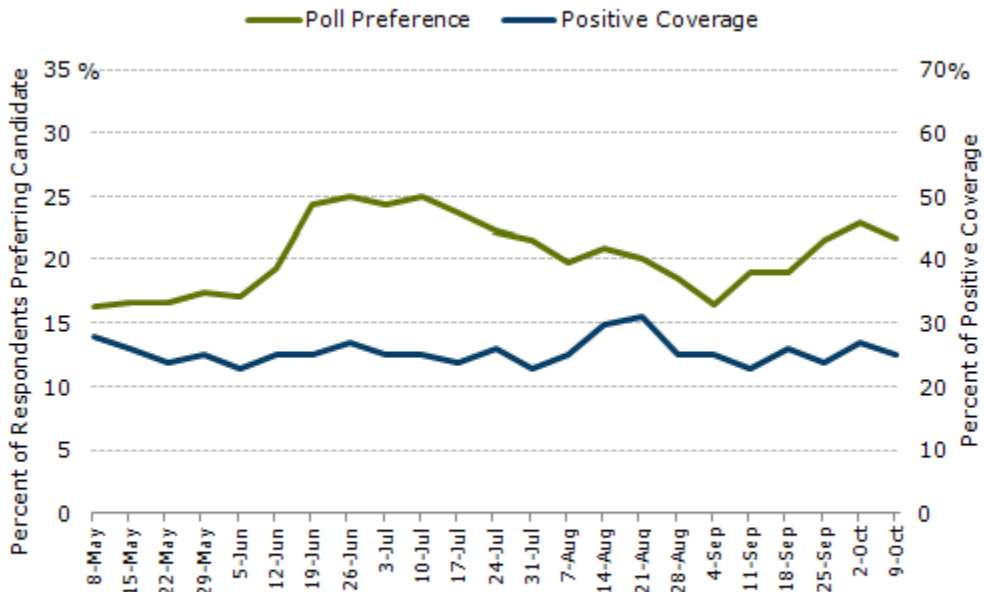
“Rick Perry has only been in the Republican race for president for less than two weeks, and he is already the frontrunner—by a lot,” declared the Opposing Views blog on August 24. “The latest Gallup poll released on Wednesday shows Perry with 29% of the vote, crushing the former perceived frontrunner Mitt Romney by 12 percentage points.”

**MITT ROMNEY**

To a large degree, Mitt Romney’s coverage in the news media reflected a simple narrative: He does not inspire tremendous passion or excitement with Republican voters but he has always been considered viable. That narrative has been sizable in quantity, consistent over time, and evenly divided.

Overall, Romney was the second most-covered candidate. And the tone of that coverage in the news media was decidedly mixed.

**Romney: Positive Coverage and Support in the Polls**



**Note:** The dates shown represent the end of the sampled news week.  
 Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology  
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That divided quality might contradict the idea that the mainstream media are inclined to favor a more traditional or establishment candidates considered to be moderate. Only Newt Gingrich and former candidate Tim Pawlenty, two men who faced an unrelenting barrage of bad press, had a higher percentage of negative coverage than Romney overall. And in 16 of the 23 weeks studied, his coverage was either split or with a margin between positive and negative coverage of no more than three percentage points.

That tone was mirrored in the discussion about Romney in the political blogosphere.

### ***Quantity of Romney Coverage***

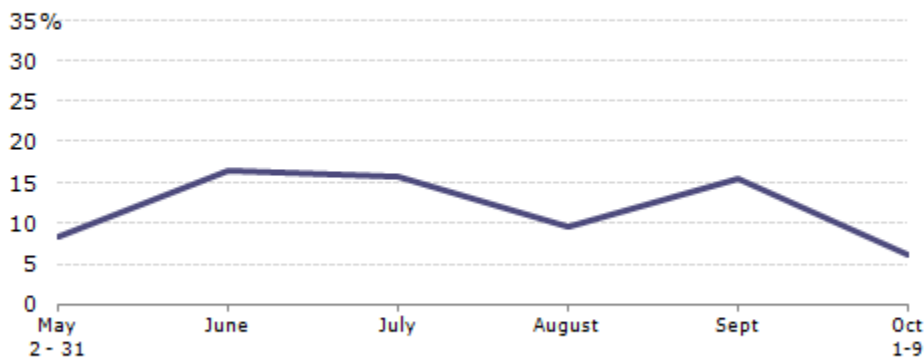
In the race for exposure, Romney trailed only Perry. Overall, he was a primary newsmaker in 13% of all the stories about the campaign in that period.<sup>2</sup>

With the exception of June, when he was the top newsmaker, there always seemed to be candidates getting more attention. In May, he was overshadowed by coverage of Newt Gingrich and to a lesser degree, Sarah Palin. In July, Bachmann was a bigger media draw. In August Perry generated about three times as much coverage. In September, Perry still enjoyed a roughly 2-1 margin.

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#### **Amount of Romney News Coverage Over Time**

*Percent of Campaign Stories*



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Romney did have some big weeks of attention, most notably from May 30-June 5 when he announced his candidacy. Even his announcement failed to completely win him the news agenda, however. The same day he announced he was running at a New Hampshire farmhouse, he had to share the spotlight with Palin, whose highly-publicized bus tour happened to take her to the Granite State as well.

### ***Tone of Romney News Coverage***

Overall, the tone of Romney's coverage in the news media was 26% positive, 27% negative and 47% neutral—a split that stands in contrast to most of the candidates studied.

Romney's toughest stretch of coverage in the news media occurred from early May into mid June when he had six straight negative weeks. To a large degree this early negative period reflected the media exploring the presumption, which he has not shaken, that he was a candidate who had ideological problems with the GOP's conservative base.

Romney's "basic political problem is that he comes from the Northeastern wing of the party," declared the influential conservative magazine, the Weekly Standard, on May 13.

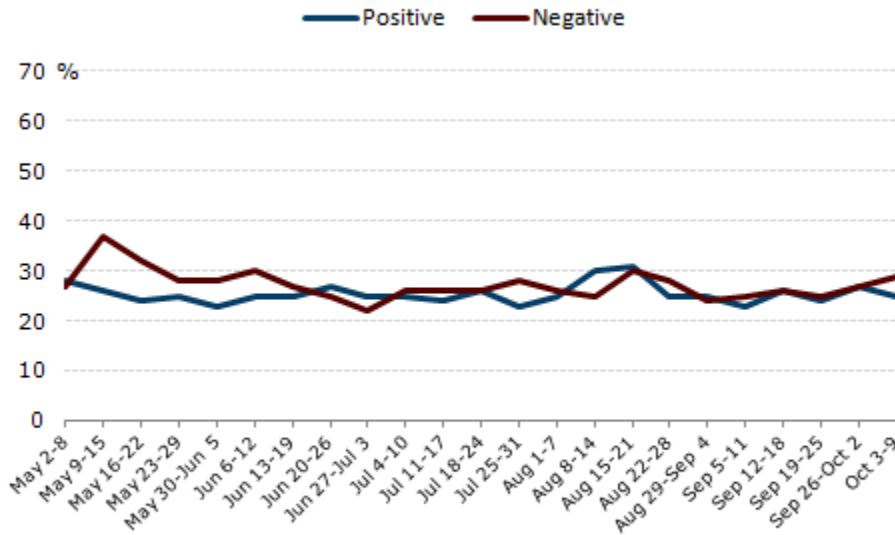
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<sup>2</sup> Romney was also second in the percentage of campaign stories in which he was a "significant" presence, mentioned in a quarter of the story. There he was present in 28% of campaign stories.

When Romney broke with most of his GOP rivals by saying he was convinced that global warming was real and that human activity contributed to it, Politico declared that, “conservatives trying to digest Romney’s evolving views on climate change are not very pleased with what they’ve heard over the years.”

### Tone of Romney News Coverage Over Time

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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The tone of Romney’s coverage began to improve a week after his poll numbers climbed and in the wake of a widely lauded showing in the June 13 CNN debate. The week of June 20, Romney saw the first week of press coverage that was more positive than negative, though it was still closely divided (27% positive vs. 25% negative).

Romney also generated positive attention in the press because of his ability to raise money. On July 16, for example, an Associated Press story reported that he “leads all Republicans in the contest for campaign cash, cementing his front-runner status among contenders hoping to take on President Barack Obama in 2012.”

But when Perry entered the race in August and shot ahead of Romney in the polls, some of the horserace narrative that had helped him earlier now turned on the ex-Massachusetts governor. Yet even with the quick Perry start, the media perception that Romney would remain a formidable Republican contender and that he might be the GOP hopeful most likely to defeat Obama, continued to generate some positive coverage.

When Perry slipped during the September 22 Fox News debate, triggering an increase in the Texas governor’s negative coverage, Romney did not benefit much in the media narrative. Instead his coverage remained mixed. From September 19 through October 9, his positive coverage ranged between 24% and 27% while his negative ranged between 25% and 29%. While



many pundits now foresee a clearer path to the nomination for Romney, the divided narrative that he began his candidacy with persists.

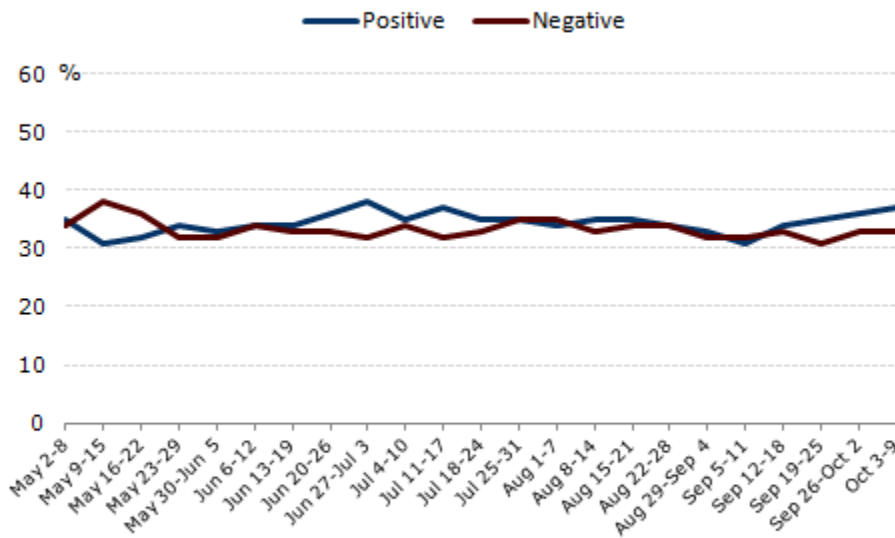
***Quantity and Tone of Romney in Blogs***

For those who think of social media as a hotbed of ideological passion, Romney might have seemed a candidate who might suffer there. Yet the data suggest something else. The former Massachusetts governor generated plenty of interest from bloggers, ranking as the second-leading Republican in terms of attention, with about 123,000 opinions tracked.

But the tone of the discussion of Romney in the political blogosphere was as divided as it was in the news coverage. Over the course of the five months examined, 34% of the opinions expressed about him in blogs were positive, 33% were negative and 32% were neutral or a recitation of straightforward facts.

**Tone of Romney Discussion in Blogs**

*Percent of Coverage*



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

*Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology*

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If the basis of his positive treatment in the news media was Romney’s perceived political viability, those numbers suggest that at least some bloggers are concerned with the same thing.

Romney scored points among bloggers for being a more mainstream candidate than some of his rivals. “He is the best choice for the GOP,” stated a June 2 post on the Independent Internationalist blog. “Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, Ron Paul, Herman Cain, and Rick Santorum are all sideshow candidates. Romney has the quality of being the adult in the room.”

And much of the unflattering commentary about Romney in the blogosphere has homed in on an issue that his political opponents often raise—whether he changes positions for political

expediency. This July 5 posting on the Fired Up! blog ran under the headline, “Mitt Romney and his summer flip flops.”

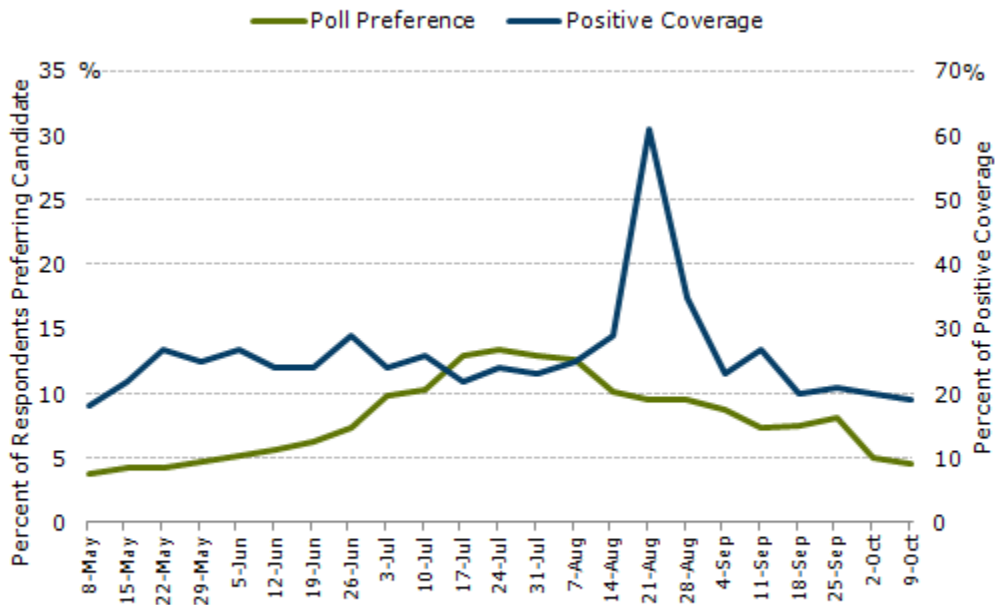
**MICHELE BACHMANN**

No candidate had more of a roller coaster ride in the 2012 campaign media narrative than Minnesota Congresswoman Michele Bachmann.

In five months, Bachmann went from a long-odds outsider to a surprise top tier candidate to long shot again. In between, she was subjected to one of the modern pitfalls of a suddenly rising candidate—a hurried and partial media vetting of resume and personal life that often produces unflattering coverage.

Overall, Bachmann’s coverage in news outlets was substantially more positive than negative.

**Bachmann: Positive Coverage and Support in the Polls**



**Note:** The dates shown represent the end of the sampled news week.

*Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology*

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But the trajectory was a jagged line, with distinct stretches of more positive than negative coverage and distinct periods when it was more critical. Over the 23 weeks examined, there were 13 weeks in which her coverage was more positive than negative and 10 during which it was more negative than positive.

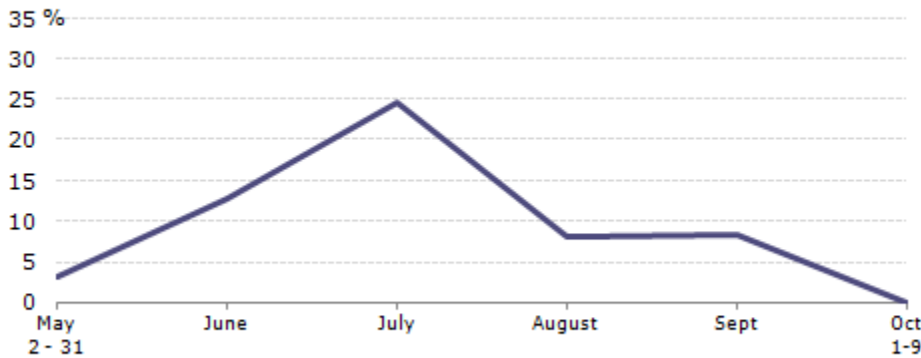
The other feature of Bachmann’s candidacy that stands out thus far is that it has received better treatment from news outlets than from social media. For a candidate aligned rhetorically with the populist Tea Party movement, she has not been as popular with political bloggers where negative commentary outstripped the positive by more than 2-1.

**Quantity of Bachmann Coverage**

Over the course of the five months from May to October, Bachmann trailed only Rick Perry and Mitt Romney in the competition for media attention. Overall, she was a primary newsmaker in 9% of all the stories about the campaign.<sup>3</sup> She started small. In May, Bachmann trailed five other GOP figures in the level of attention received—including Romney, Gingrich, Palin, Pawlenty and Paul.

That changed dramatically in June after what was perceived as a strong performance during the June 13 CNN debate. For the month of June overall, she was the second leading newsmaker among the Republican hopefuls behind Romney.

**Amount of Bachmann News Coverage Over Time**  
*Percent of Campaign Stories*



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And in July Bachmann was the most covered candidate of all, as the media began subjecting her to closer scrutiny.

Bachmann’s lead in the race for exposure, like her lead in the polls, was short-lived. In August, as the media gravitated to the race’s newest entrant, Texas Governor Perry, Bachmann became the third candidate, figuratively in the political calculus and literally in the amount of coverage received. For the month, she was a primary figure in 8% of stories. September was the same story. Bachmann again ranked No. 3 in coverage (at 8%), trailing Perry by about a 4-1 margin.

**Tone of Bachmann in News Coverage**

All in all, Bachmann enjoyed the third-best coverage of any candidate when it came to tone in the coverage and commentary in the news media from May to October. She tied with Palin and was close to Perry in the amount of news coverage that was clearly positive at 31% (Perry was 32%), but she received more negative coverage than both of them—23% (versus Perry’s 20% and 22% for Palin). Another 46% of that treatment of Bachmann was neutral or straight factual

<sup>3</sup> Bachmann was third in the percentage of campaign stories in which she was a “significant” presence, mentioned in a quarter of the story. There she was present in 19% of campaign stories.

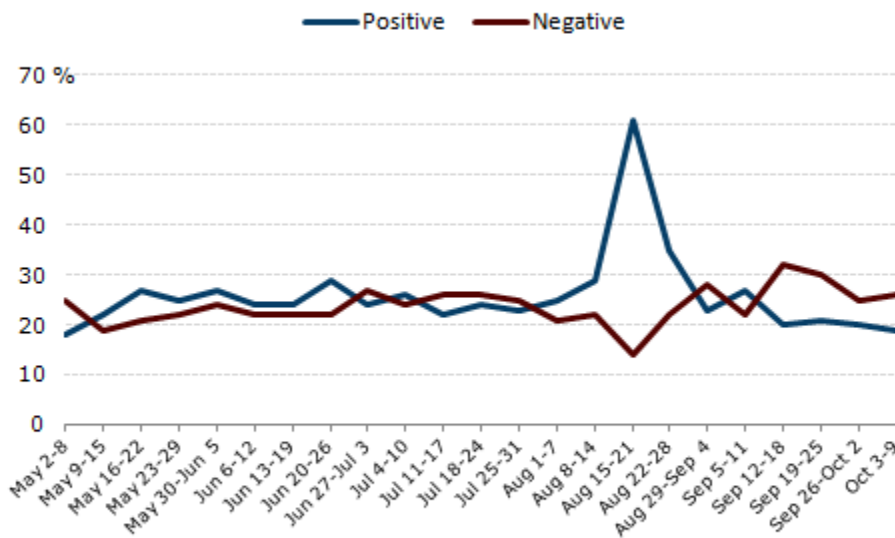
accounting of events about her, which was the lowest percentage of neutral coverage of any candidate studied.

The trajectory of Bachmann’s coverage was also bumpy. She had distinctly good weeks and bad weeks. The good ones simply outnumbered the bad.

The good weeks began early. From May 9 through June 26, Bachmann enjoyed seven consecutive weeks during which her coverage was more positive than negative, though some of those were fairly evenly divided.

### Tone of Bachmann News Coverage Over Time

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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The period included, but was not initiated by, her June 13 debate performance. According to the numbers, her best week in this early phase was from June 20-26, when the media linked the debate with a rise in the polls.

“A national poll of Republican voters after the debate found Bachmann had surged into second place at 19 percent behind Romney,” thanks in part to her “combative style in the CNN debate,” declared the political website Capitol Blue, less than a week after that debate.

A week later, however, the last week in June, coverage tilted toward the negative again (24% positive and 27% negative, and 49% neutral), as the media took a closer look at her as a major contender. Then, in July, Bachmann had three weeks of negative coverage.

The tone changed in part because the media began to focus on more personal matters—including her health and her husband, Marcus. One element was the accusation that Marcus operated a counseling practice that tried to convert homosexuals to heterosexuals through prayer. Some

coverage also focused on reports that Bachmann suffered from debilitating migraines—raising questions about her ability to function.

Columnist Kathleen Parker saw a suspicious link between the migraine story and the progress of Bachmann’s campaign, writing that her “migraine problem mysteriously hit the news cycle just in time to coincide with her moving ahead in the polls.”

Then the tone of the narrative about Bachmann changed again, this time for the better. The week after she won the August 13 Ames straw poll, she had her best week of coverage (61% positive, 14% negative), and in many media accounts, the Iowa win affirmed her status as a surprise serious candidate. The Washington Post concluded for example, that “her victory in Saturday’s straw poll cemented her status in the upper ranks of the GOP field.”

But that cement did not hold. After the week of August 22-28, Bachmann would have only one more week in which positive treatment in the media outweighed negative, Sept. 5-11.

Some of it was her own doing, including her remarks—that she said were a joke—that the recent hurricane and earthquake on the East Coast were warnings from God to U.S. politicians. That reopened questions about Bachmann’s religious beliefs and whether her views were outside the U.S. mainstream.

The other momentum stopper was a series of polls reacting to Rick Perry’s entrance in the race. On September 1, for instance, Fox News released a new poll showing Perry the preferred candidate of 26% of GOP primary voters and Bachmann plunging to 4%.

A few days later, top Bachmann advisor Ed Rollins was quoted downplaying Bachmann’s chances by saying that, “The Perry-Romney race is now the story, with us the third candidate.” Rollins would soon have a much reduced role in Bachmann’s campaign operation.

### ***Coverage and Tone of Bachmann in Blogs***

Bachmann got more attention than any Republican other than Sarah Palin and Mitt Romney in the blogosphere. There were almost 119,000 opinions tracked by bloggers about her over those five months.

But that doesn’t mean she was treated well. From May 2 through October 9, only 19% of the conversation on blogs about her was positive compared with 44% that was negative and 37% neutral. That put her among several prominent Republicans perceived to be potentially exciting to the party base—including Sarah Palin and Rick Perry—whose negative treatment in blogs far exceeded the positive.

Many Bachmann critics in the blogosphere attacked her for high-profile gaffes she made during the campaign, using that as a proxy to challenge her intellect. After she incorrectly stated that the actor John Wayne had been born in her hometown of Waterloo Iowa, when it was actually serial killer John Wayne Gacy, the Truth Wins Out blog posted a fairly typical comment.

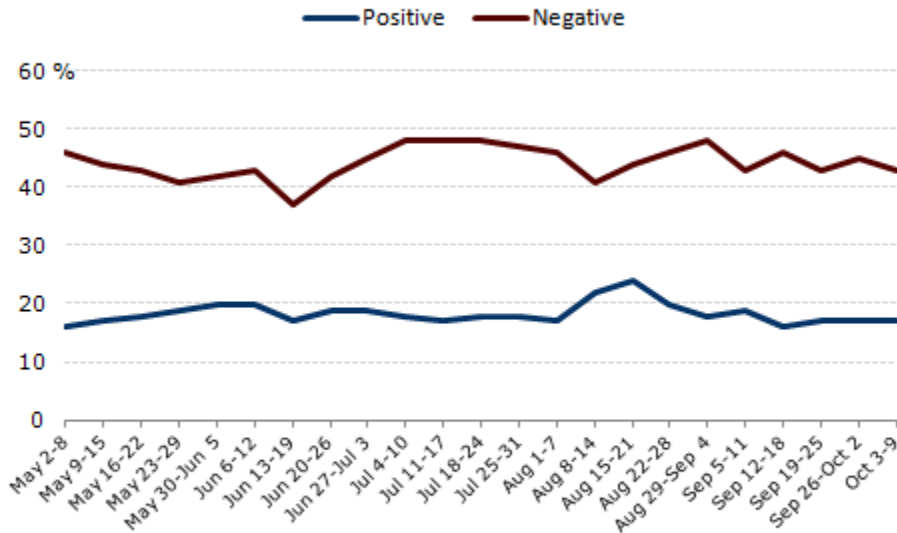
“Given Bachmann’s anti-intellectual style, it is not surprising that she either makes things up or fudges the facts,” the post asserted. But, one would think that by now—the day she launches her

presidential bid in Waterloo, Iowa—she would have hired competent staff to fact check her speeches and public statements.”

Other ideological foes of Bachmann painted her as an extremist, like the Mills River Progressive blog, which asserted that Bachmann “apparently wants to have herself a little ol’ Theocracy, based on conservative Christian principles.”

### Tone of Bachmann Discussion in Blogs

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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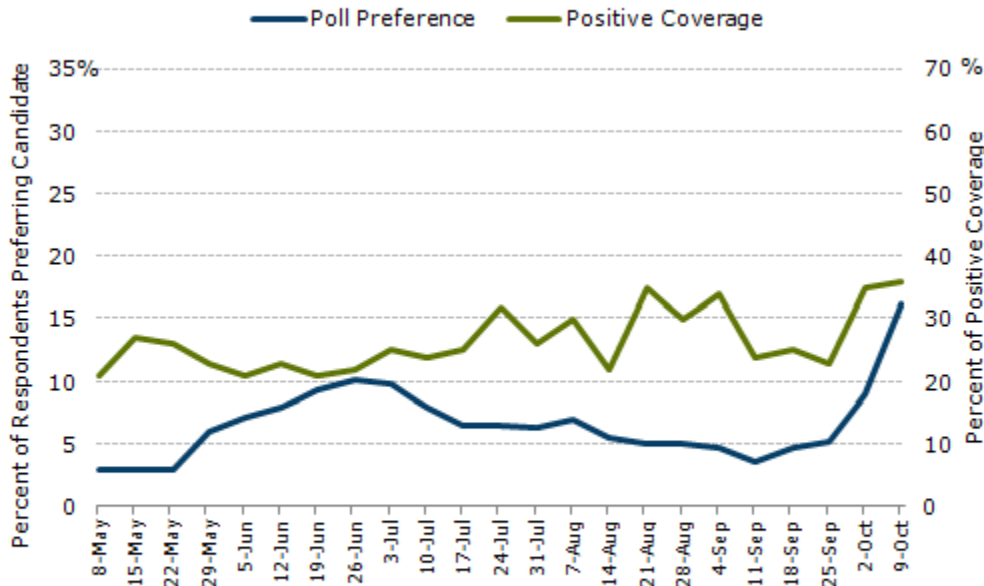
And much as was the case in the news coverage, a good deal of the positive conversation about Bachmann in the blogosphere were posts that linked to news about her rise in the polls and her emergence as a potentially serious candidate with lots of support from the party’s conservative wing.

“Sarah Palin was supposed to be the Tea Party’s choice for Republican presidential candidate,” declared the Death by 100 Papercuts blog on July 22. “But now it has a new darling—Michele Bachmann. Bachmann’s hard-right conservatism is winning over evangelical Republicans. She now leads the Iowa straw poll.”

### HERMAN CAIN

Taken overall, businessman Herman Cain’s campaign narrative in the news media does not reflect his current standing in the polls. From May to October, Cain was the No. 7 newsmaker among Republicans, finishing ahead of only Santorum, Paul and Huntsman. And the tone of that coverage was moderately more positive than negative.

## Cain: Positive Coverage and Support in the Polls



**Note:** The dates shown represent the end of the sampled news week.

*Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology*

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

But starting in August, the tone of his coverage began to improve noticeably, beginning a stretch of nine out of 10 weeks of positive coverage. And in September, he generated more news coverage than he had the previous four months combined.

Put simply, the research indicates that Cain is on a roll, a man who seems to have surprised the media with his strength in the race and whose narrative changed markedly for the better before he began to rise in the polls.

If he enters the primaries as a second major contender alongside Romney, he will share another characteristic with the former governor of Massachusetts. They were the only Republicans whose treatment in the blogosphere matched the tone of their narrative in the news media. And along with Paul and Romney, he was one of three candidates to have an overall positive tone to the conversation about him in blogs.

### *Quantity of Cain Coverage*

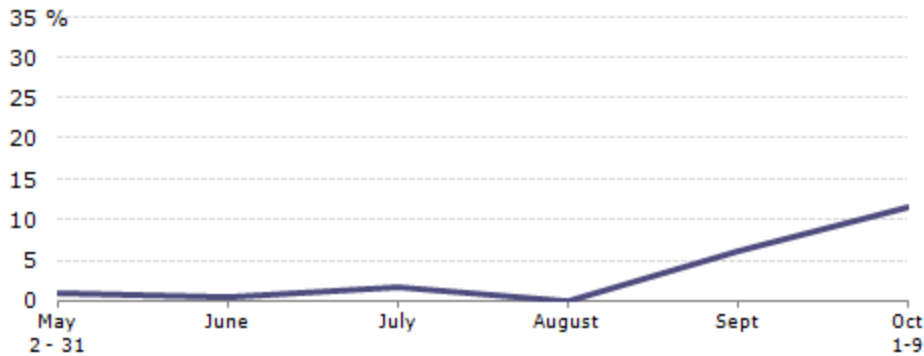
In the race for exposure, Herman Cain was a dominant newsmaker in 3% of the campaign stories studied, thanks to a significant jump of coverage in September when he won a straw poll in Florida and his campaign picked up momentum in public surveys.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cain was fourth in the percentage of campaign stories in which he was a “significant” presence, mentioned in a quarter of the story. There he was present in 8% of campaign stories.

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### Amount of Cain News Coverage Over Time

*Percent of Campaign Stories*



PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

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Cain was virtually ignored by the media from May through August, generating less coverage than any other candidate in those four months—including Ron Paul.

But that changed dramatically in September, when he registered as the No. 4 newsmaker and a dominant newsmaker in 6% of the coverage—behind only Perry, Romney and Bachmann. Then, in early October, he generated more coverage than anyone other than Perry.

#### *Tone of Cain News Coverage*

The tone of Cain's coverage told a tale of two campaigns.

In the first 13 weeks studied (May 2-July 31), his narrative was negative in 11 of those weeks. But from August on, his coverage was more positive than negative in every week but one, and often by substantial margins.

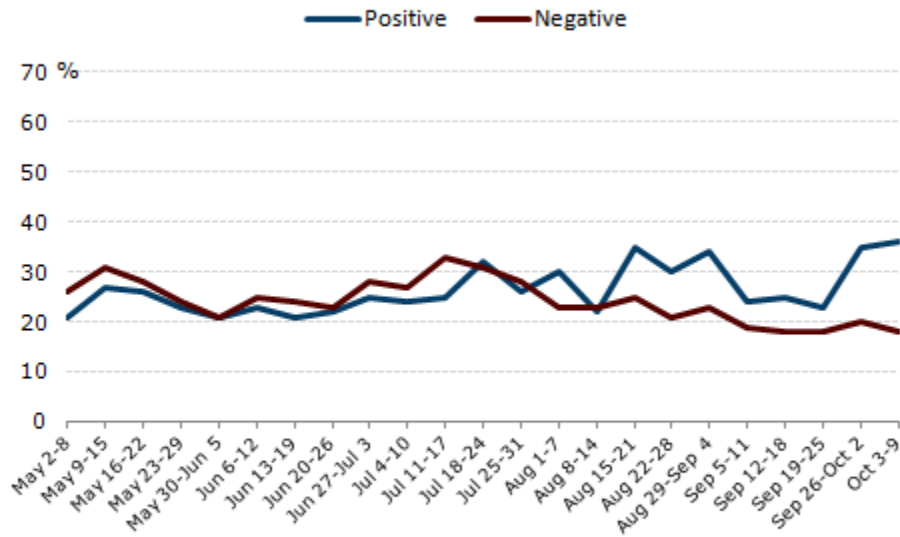
What happened to turn it around?

Certainly one major event was the September 24 Florida straw poll victory. "In one of the more stunning upsets in recent political history, Herman Cain won the straw poll, swamping favorites Rick Perry and Mitt Romney in a blowout of breathtaking proportions," declared the News-Press in Fort Myers.



## Tone of Cain News Coverage Over Time

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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But Cain's ascent in the media narrative began weeks earlier. The more positive turn coincided with the August 13 Ames straw poll, the entrance of Perry in the race, and the decline of Bachmann in polls and coverage.

Cain's fifth-place finish in Ames did not exactly have the media anointing him as one of straw poll success stories. But he helped shape his narrative by pronouncing himself satisfied with the results and forging ahead. And his message seemed to resonate on the campaign trail, where his energetic campaign won praise.

An August 22 story in the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported on his early organizing efforts for the Nevada caucuses. "David Damore, a political science professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, said Cain's strategy is smart," the story noted. "He said the former CEO of Godfather's Pizza could surprise Romney, U.S. Rep. Ron Paul, R-Texas, and other candidates who haven't laid early groundwork."

But it was the Florida straw poll that altered the way political insiders viewed him. The day after his Florida triumph, a piece on the conservative Town Hall site offered a political reassessment of the pizza magnate. "I am no longer dismissive of the idea of President Cain," the writer declared.

And the week following the straw poll, Cain had his best week in the media yet, with 35% of his news coverage being positive, versus 20% negative (and 45% neutral or straight factual reporting). He followed that even with even better numbers from October 3-9 (with positive doubling his negative 36% vs. 18%).

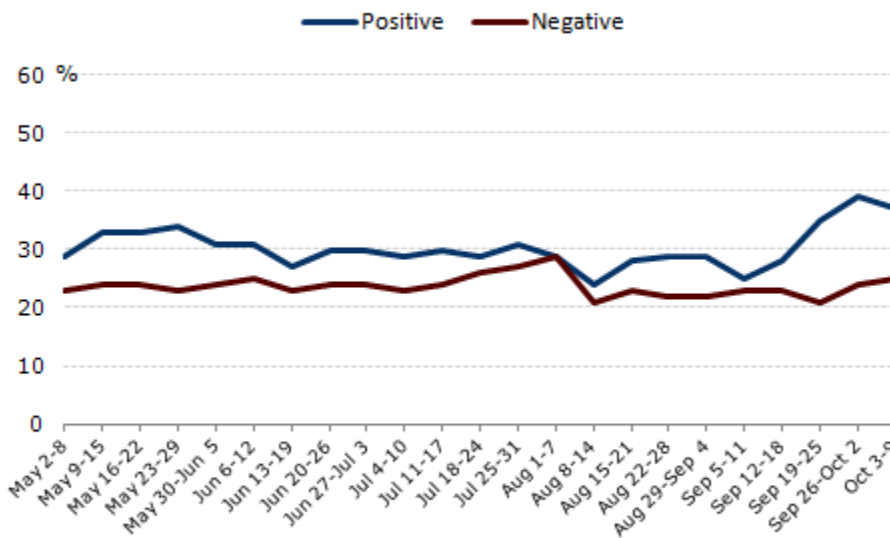
One question is whether Cain can sustain his rise or whether his trajectory in time will look like Bachmann’s. For now, he has not seen the kind of vetting that Bachmann did which led to a change in tone. But unlike Bachmann, who suffered when Perry joined the race, the field now appears set. And Cain’s improved coverage is already two months old.

**Quantity and Tone of Cain in Blogs**

Cain wasn’t among the most talked-about Republicans in the blogosphere—he ranked No. 7 in terms of generating attention (almost 52,000 assertions tracked). But he played much better among bloggers than many of his competitors. Overall, 28% of the assertions about him studied on blogs were positive, 24% negative and 49% were neutral—virtually the same numbers he had in the news media. In the ratio of positive opinion versus negative opinion of him measured among bloggers, only Ron Paul did better.

**Tone of Cain Discussion in Blogs**

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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People appeared to come down firmly on one side or the other about the former CEO of Godfather’s Pizza.

One post on the Conservative Blogs Central site lauded his clear stands on the issues. “He seemingly came out of nowhere and not many really gave him a snowballs chance of getting anywhere... But the unmistakable and undeniable fact of the matter is, everything he has said makes perfect sense, and the people of America are listening to him.”

Liberal bloggers saw him very differently. After Cain’s expressed his support for a community’s right to ban mosques, StreetWisePundit responded: “If you support Herman Cain, you are a

Theo-con and no amount of tea, nor red white and blue shirts, nor slogans about how you love the Constitution will ever be able to cover over your hypocrisy.”

### SARAH PALIN

Though she never entered the race, Sarah Palin did relatively well with the news media she often criticizes. She generated a good deal of attention, and a good deal of it was positive.

Overall, she was the No. 4 newsmaker among Republicans. And while the majority of that came in May and June, Palin made news whenever she hinted about getting in.

Over those five months, moreover, she enjoyed the second-best tone of coverage of any GOP figure studied in the news media, slightly ahead of Bachmann.

The data also suggest that Palin shared one other characteristic with Bachmann, as well as with Perry, two other candidates associated with the Tea Party movement. She had a far tougher go in the blogosphere than the news media.

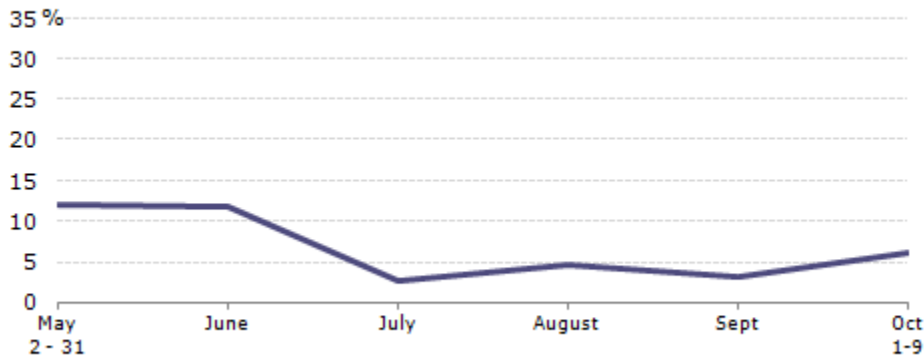
### *Quantity of Palin Coverage*

With the majority of her coverage coming in May and June, when she trailed only Gingrich and Romney in that category, Palin was a primary figure in 7% of all campaign stories studied, enough make her No. 4 in the competition for coverage among the GOP candidates.<sup>5</sup> That put her ahead of Cain, Gingrich, Huntsman, Paul, Pawlenty and Santorum.

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#### **Amount of Palin News Coverage Over Time**

*Percent of Campaign Stories*



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The week of May 23-29, she was the top GOP newsmaker because her bus tour and a report of her buying a \$1.7 million home in Arizona triggered speculation about her running. The following week (May 30-June 5) Romney announced his candidacy and appeared as a dominant newsmaker in 43% of the stories about the campaign. But Palin was close behind (37%) thanks

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<sup>5</sup> Palin was fifth in the percentage of campaign stories in which she was a “significant” presence, mentioned in a quarter of the story. There she was present in 6% of campaign stories.

to her showing up in New Hampshire on Romney’s big day and also for a mini-controversy she ignited by offering an unusual historical account of Paul Revere’s midnight ride.

As more candidates launched their campaigns and Palin remained on the sidelines, her coverage diminished. But it never disappeared and she seemed able to trigger a new round seemingly whenever she wanted. When she told Fox News’ Sean Hannity, that “I am still considering” a run for president on August 12, she managed to cut through the clutter of Iowa straw poll week and emerged as a dominant newsmaker in 7% of campaign stories.

Two weeks later (August 29-September 4) Palin was a dominant newsmaker in 12% of the campaign stories when word surfaced that she would be speaking in two states with early 2012 electoral tests—Iowa and New Hampshire.

***Tone of Palin News Coverage***

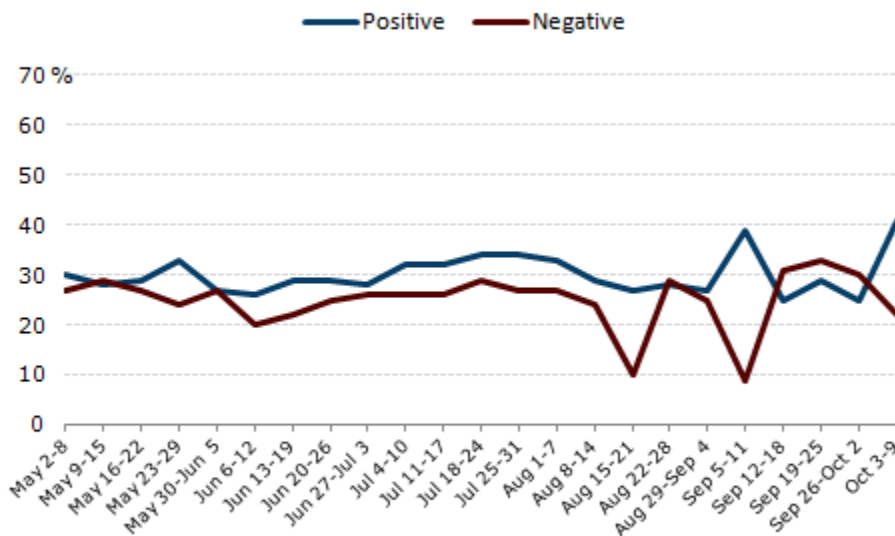
With a few exceptions, the tone of Sarah Palin’s coverage in the news media was upbeat. Overall, 31% of the coverage and commentary about her was positive and 22% was negative while 48% of the discussion was neutral.

In what may seem like a circular narrative, moreover, Palin’s ability to generate attention became a significant source of that positive coverage.

There was, for example, the buzz generated back in May amid news of a new documentary film, “The Undefeated,” that painted a glowing portrait of Palin. One story about that movie reinforced the idea “that Palin has transformed herself into an aspiring queen of all media.”

**Tone of Palin News Coverage Over Time**

*Percent of Coverage*



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

*Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology*

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## The Media Primary

Another example of Palin-centric media generating positive press coverage occurred in mid-August when she released a video of her visit to the Iowa State Fair. As an August 19 Los Angeles Times story stated, the video not only “is certain to fire up yet another round of will-she-or-won’t-she speculation about a presidential bid,” it also portrayed her in a very positive light with “Iowans praising Palin as ‘down to earth,’ a ‘normal person’ and ‘solid.’”

Her best overall week of coverage in terms of the ratio of positive to negative assessments—September 5-11, at 39% positive and only 9% negative—was driven by her star power among conservative supporters. After her Labor Day appearance before a Tea Party rally in New Hampshire, one of the headlines was “Palin draws double the size crowd as Romney.” That came on the heels of a September 4 story in the Des Moines Register about an Iowa appearance that began: “Thousands of people who waited through hours of steady rain cheered wildly and blew air horns when Sarah Palin took the stage Saturday afternoon.”

Some of the negative coverage, meanwhile, included stories critical of her failure to commit after an extended flirtation with running. An August 25 story in the New York Daily News, for instance, declared that “to those who want to unite behind one strong GOP nominee, she is becoming a distraction, one that hurts the Republican Party’s chances of beating President Obama.” The sentiment was echoed in the Wall Street Journal’s conservative opinion pages, which ran the damning headline “Palin Fatigue” in early September.

For the most part, the treatment of the Palin in the news media was also fairly consistent. Positive coverage about her outweighed negative coverage in 17 of the 23 weeks studied.

The tone of Palin’s media narrative did turn negative, however, in mid-September and remained so for the next three weeks. That was due in part to publicity focused on allegations about her in Joe McGinniss’s controversial book, “The Rogue,” which came out that month.

At the end of that stretch, she finally declared herself a non-candidate, generating her second-best week of coverage during the five months studied—41% positive versus 22% negative.

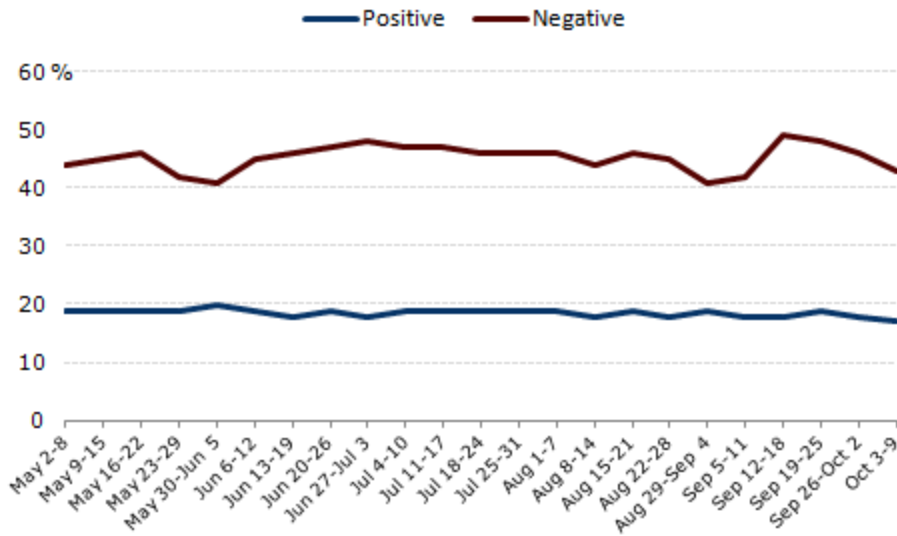
### ***Quantity and Tone of Palin in Blogs***

As much of a draw as Palin was in the news media, she proved to be an even hotter topic in the blogosphere. According to the analysis using Crimson Hexagon technology, there were almost 138,000 opinions tracked about the former Alaska governor in the blog posts examined between May and October. That made her the most-discussed Republican on blogs.

But much of that discussion was negative. Only 19% of the online conversation about Palin was positive compared with 45% negative and 36% neutral. (Those numbers closely matched Bachmann’s 19% positive, 44% negative, and 37% neutral).

## Tone of Palin Discussion in Blogs

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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Some of the criticism was about her fame. After she appeared on the cover of Newsweek this summer, The Reaction blog chastised Palin and the media for covering her. “She’s not serious about politics and certainly not serious about a presidential run. But she has to tantalize both her supporters and the media, as well as much of the political establishment, with the prospect of a run in order to keep her name out there, to keep all of us talking about her, to be able to push that egotistical cause as far as possible.”

For Palin’s supporters in the blogosphere, however, any hint of a run was invigorating. An August 31 posting on Marathon Pundit announcing Palin’s appearance at a New Hampshire Tea Party rally quoted the event chairman’s declaration that “she is an electrifying figure in conservative politics and a hero to the tea party movement.”

### RON PAUL

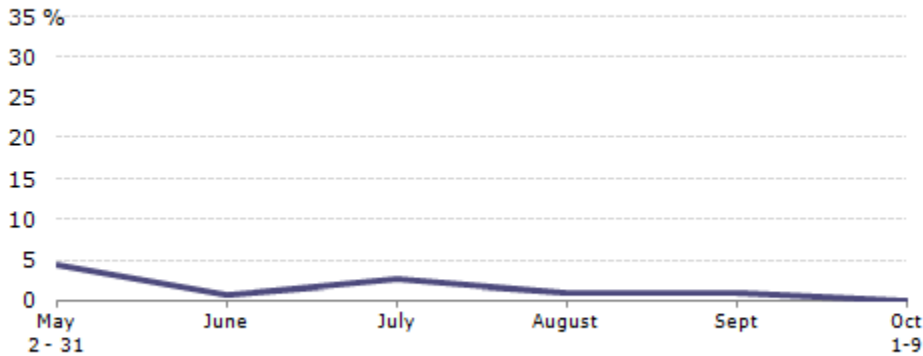
Texas Congressman Ron Paul and his supporters have complained that he is being ignored by the traditional media. PEJ’s data finds that he ranked last, No. 10, among the Republicans whose coverage was examined in this study, appearing as a primary newsmaker in only 2% of all election stories.<sup>6</sup>

Since July 1, however, Paul has moved up slightly, generating more coverage than Gingrich.

<sup>6</sup> Paul was eighth in the percentage of campaign stories in which he was a “significant” presence, mentioned in a quarter of the story. There he was present in 3% of campaign stories.

### Amount of Paul News Coverage Over Time

Percent of Campaign Stories



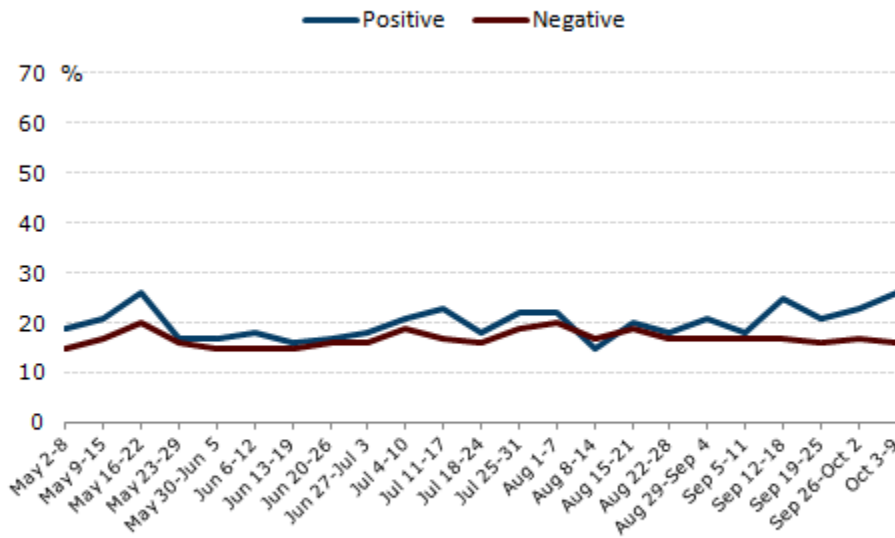
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The tone of Paul's coverage was fairly divided. It resembled the coverage of another candidate whose chances were treated in the press as slim, Jon Huntsman. In all, 21% of the coverage of Paul was positive, 17% negative and 62% neutral.

The arc of that coverage was also very consistent. Paul enjoyed a narrow edge in which positive coverage slightly outweighed negative every week except one. Ironically, that one negative week, and it was also closely divided (15% positive and 17% negative), occurred from August 8-14, the same week he registered a strong No. 2 showing in the Iowa straw poll.

### Tone of Paul News Coverage Over Time

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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Paul is the field’s only strict libertarian, in that he believes in a limited government role in both domestic and foreign/military policy, a stance that may also limit his electoral appeal. But some of his positive coverage cited his principled stands and enthusiastic supporters.

“Paul is the kind of conviction politician America needs,” wrote an analyst for the Hill, critical of what he called the “contemptuous treatment he receives from the mass media.”

An example of less-than-flattering treatment, was this August 16 column in the Los Angeles Times by conservative commentator Jonah Goldberg: “Ron Paul’s second-place finish [at the Iowa straw poll] proves that it’s in no meaningful way a real poll, as his supporters are akin to ‘Battlestar Galactica’ loyalists at a ‘Star Trek’ convention, incapable of winning many converts and themselves unwilling to switch teams.”

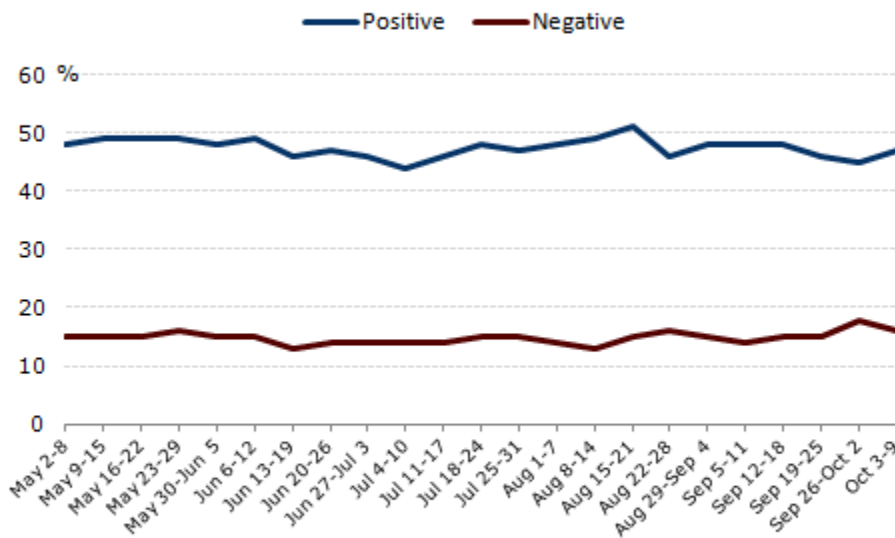
That helps explain why Paul’s strong showing at that Ames event did not elevate his narrative in news media.

Paul’s media base lies elsewhere—in the blogosphere. Paul has demonstrated a core of support in that media space that no other candidate can touch.

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### Tone of Paul Discussion in Blogs

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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Paul generated a good deal of attention on blogs, registering as the fifth most-discussed candidate with more than 89,000 opinions tracked about him.

Moreover, he and his candidacy fared better than any other candidate in the tone of that conversation. In all, 48% of the blogging conversation about Paul was positive compared with only 15% negative and 38% neutral. The next highest positive rating for any Republican was 34%, for Romney, and the next lowest negative rating was 24%, for Cain.



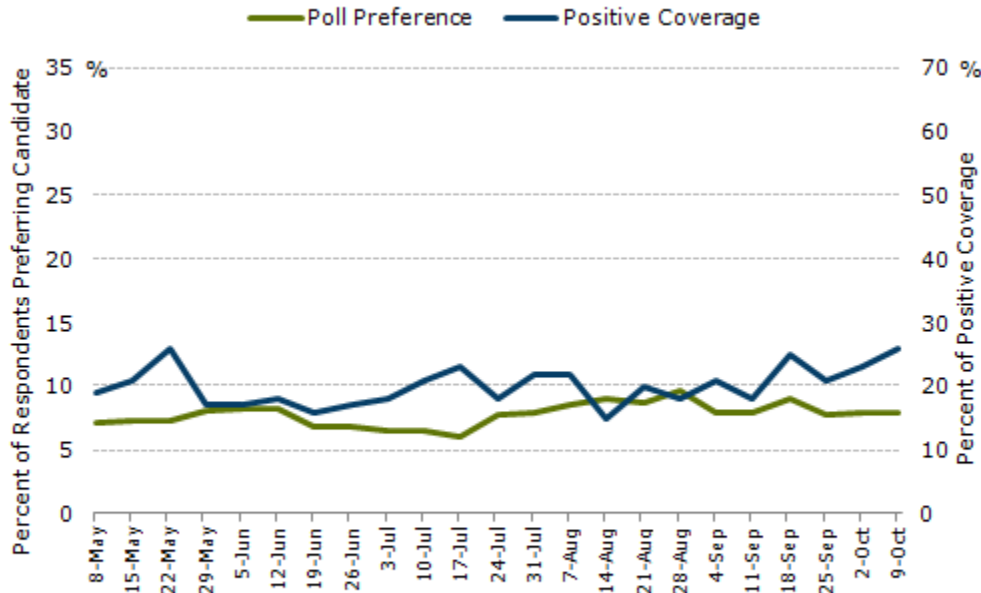
## The Media Primary

In the ideology-driven blogosphere, a major wellspring of Paul’s support is the idea that he is the candidate least likely to shift his thinking to fit political realities.

In early August, for example, the Insights blog reported on a poll showing Paul with an impressive 16% support in the GOP primary field, and found another nugget in the data.

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### Paul: Positive Coverage and Support in the Polls



**Note:** The dates shown represent the end of the sampled news week.

*Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology*  
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“An interesting side is as Rasmussen points out, 49% of people who would vote for Ron Paul, will not vote for anyone else in the Republican Party...I’m not surprised at all. Why would anyone who values the Constitution, free-markets and a non-interventionist foreign policy, cast a vote for any of the others?”

Added a writer on the The President blog: “In my humble opinion, Ron Paul is the only candidate running for president who hasn’t compromised his principles due to political pressure...Paul cannot be bought off and never caters to narrow special interest groups.”

### NEWT GINGRICH AND TIM PAWLENTY: TWO WHO NEVER GOT OUT OF THE STARTING GATE

There have been two clear losers in the early GOP media primary, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who is still in the race, and former Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, who ended his brief campaign on August 14.

Both men had the worst ratios of positive to negative coverage in the GOP field.

Neither man, moreover, had much respite from the critical narrative that dogged them. Gingrich has had just one week out of the 23 studied when the narrative about him was more positive than

negative. It was the same story for Pawlenty. Every week he was a candidate, negative coverage about him exceeded positive by at least 14 percentage points.

There was one significant difference in coverage between the two men. Gingrich generated more than twice as much coverage as Pawlenty. Much of that attention occurred in May and June when the press focused on a series of campaign missteps and problems, including the June 9 resignation of top staffers.

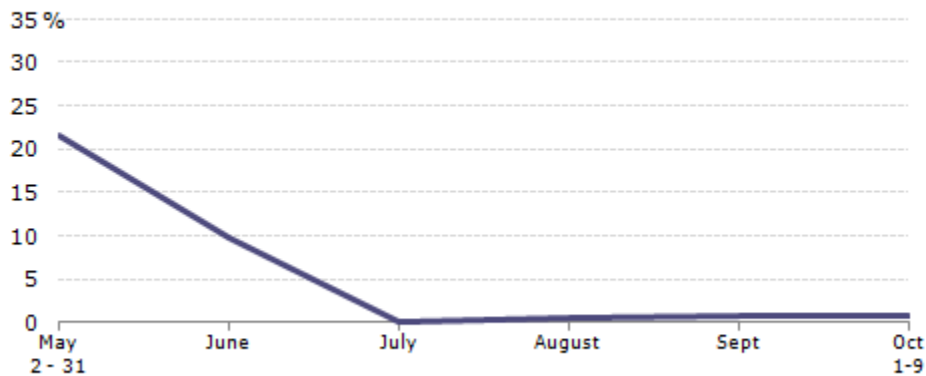
Gingrich and Pawlenty were pounded in the blogosphere as well.

### NEWT GINGRICH

Overall, Gingrich registered as the No. 5 newsmaker among Republicans. He was a dominant newsmaker in 6% of all the campaign stories.<sup>7</sup> But much of that came early. Indeed, in May and June, he attracted more attention than any of his GOP rivals, although much of it was unwelcome.

#### Amount of Gingrich News Coverage Over Time

*Percent of Campaign Stories*



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And overwhelmingly that coverage tended to be more negative than positive (in all 15% positive versus 35% negative and 50% neutral).

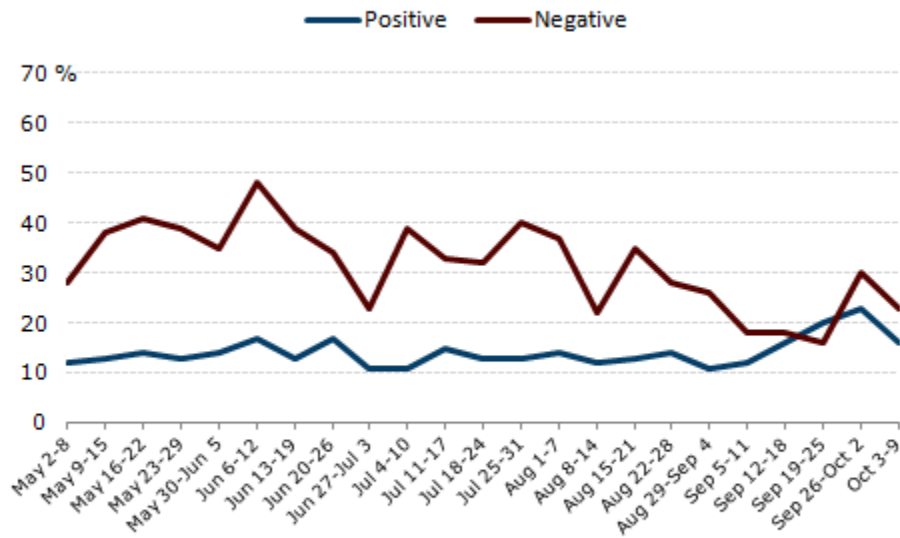
Almost immediately after his entry into the race on May 11, Gingrich made news he probably regretted with one of his trademark controversial comments—angering conservatives by criticizing Wisconsin Republican Paul Ryan’s proposed Medicare overhaul as “right-wing social engineering.” And his biggest week of coverage occurred after the mass staff desertions on June 9, an event that followed what many saw as an ill-timed vacation by the candidate.

After June, his coverage virtually vanished. From July on, he generated less coverage than any other Republican.

<sup>7</sup> Gingrich was tenth in the percentage of campaign stories in which he was a “significant” presence, mentioned in a quarter of the story. There he was present in 2% of campaign stories.

## Tone of Gingrich News Coverage Over Time

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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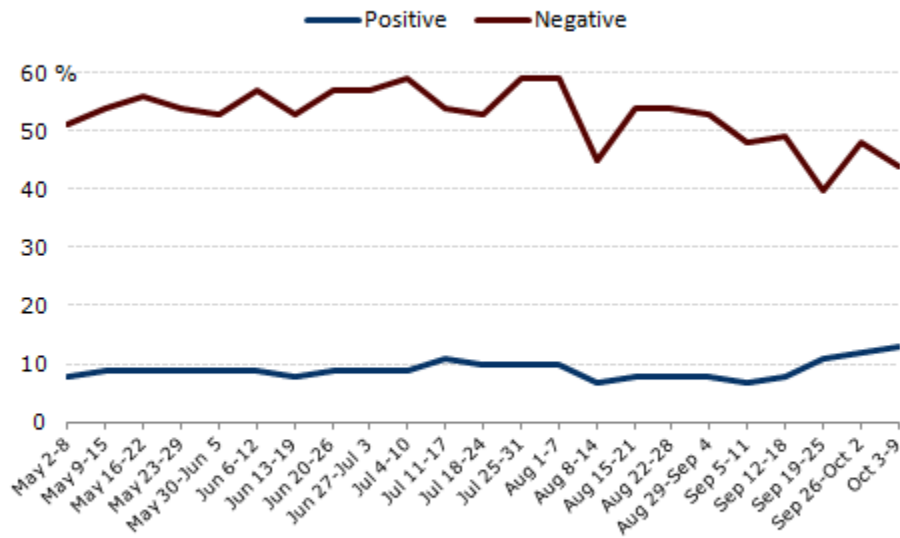
When candidates have problems that play into pre-existing negative perceptions in the media, the result can be challenging. A well-known public figure, Newt Gingrich entered the race with a reputation for having a nimble mind, but perhaps not the requisite discipline needed to run an effective campaign.

On May 15, only four days after entering the race, Gingrich reinforced that notion by launching the attack on Paul Ryan, who is widely respected by many conservatives.

Media reaction was swift and largely negative, with a Kansas City Star columnist calling it an “astonishing political pratfall” in a piece headlined: “The amazing political suicide of Newt Gingrich.”

### Tone of Gingrich Discussion in Blogs

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

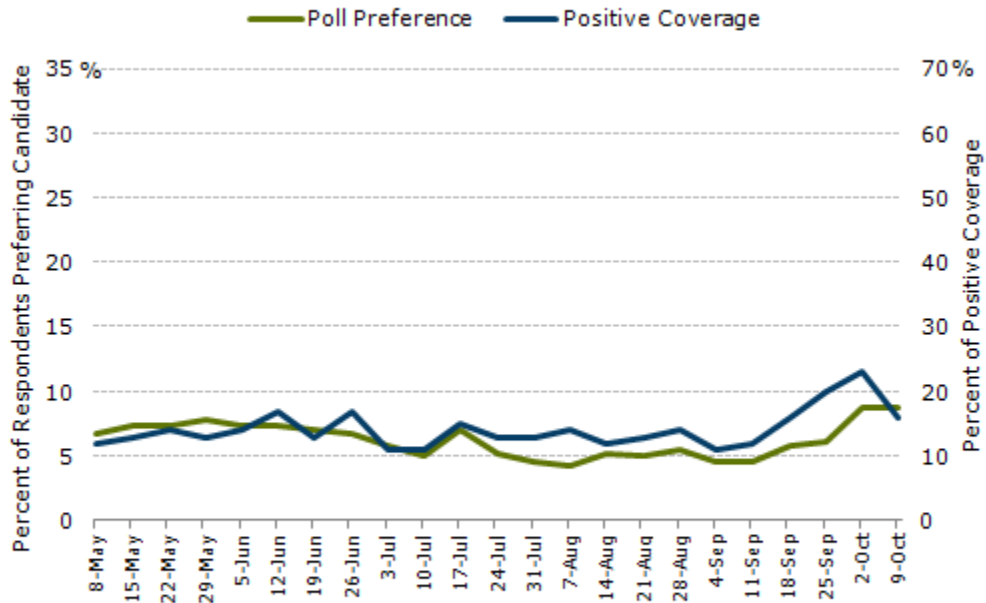
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Less than a month later, there was the near fatal blow of the June 9 staff walkout. “Newt Gingrich is nonetheless vowing to remain in the race for president,” the AP reported. “But whether the former House Speaker remains a viable candidate is now in serious doubt.”

Gingrich never really recovered from those early blows in the media narrative and the only week of positive coverage (20% to 16% negative) did not occur until September 19-25, the week of the Florida debate.

Gingrich fared even worse in the blogosphere. In terms of generating attention on blogs, he ranked No. 6, (with about 58,000 assertions). And negative discussion about him outstripped positive by 6-1 (9% positive, 53% negative and 38% neutral).

## Gingrich: Positive Coverage and Support in the Polls



**Note:** The dates shown represent the end of the sampled news week.

*Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology*  
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Gingrich’s campaign problems clearly helped fashion a negative narrative in the news media, but those missteps were magnified by bloggers, who not only repeated those events but offered their opinions on them as well.

In the immediate aftermath of Gingrich’s June 9 staff defections, for instance, “the zxbe collection” blog published the candidate’s statement that, "There is a fundamental strategic difference between the traditional consulting community and the kind of campaign I want to run," before adding this sarcastic response:

“Is that difference that they wanted to run a campaign to win it, as opposed to doing everything possible to lose it?”

### TIM PAWLENTY

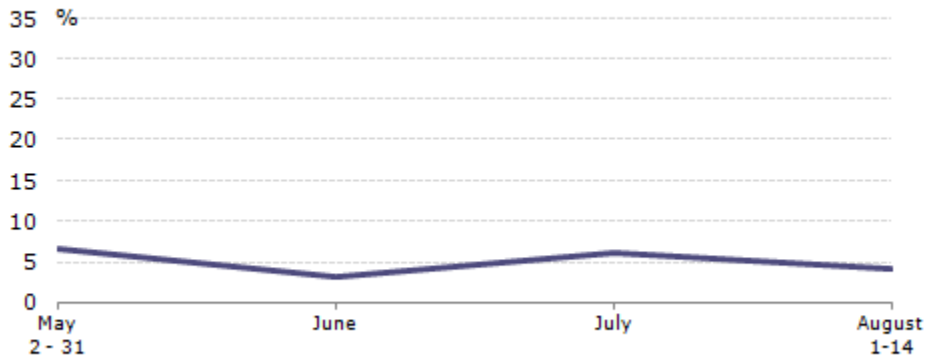
While not as well known a national figure as Gingrich, Tim Pawlenty also entered the race with some questions dogging him—most notably, could he find the fire and toughness to ignite Republican voters. He was never able to surmount those concerns in the media.

He registered as the No. 6 Republican newsmaker during the course of his campaign, which lasted about three months. In May, the month he declared his candidacy, he finished as fourth-leading newsmaker.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Pawlenty was sixth in the percentage of campaign stories in which he was a “significant” presence, mentioned in a quarter of the story. There he was present in 6% of campaign stories.

### Amount of Pawlenty News Coverage Over Time

Percent of Campaign Stories



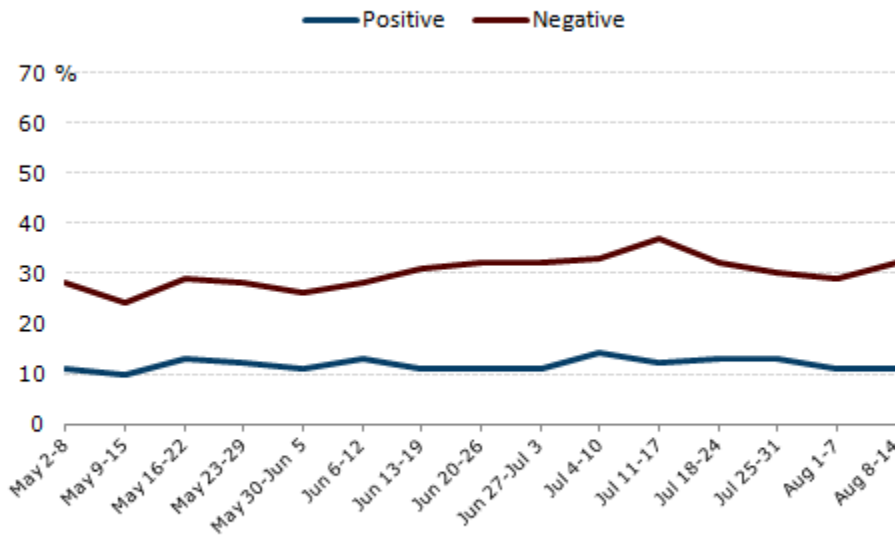
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But Pawlenty's campaign never did better than that. Even in leaving the race after a disappointing third-place showing in the Ames straw poll, Pawlenty had trouble attracting press attention, overwhelmed by the news of Perry's entrance.

In terms of tone, Pawlenty hardly did better. Overall, 12% of the coverage of him was positive, 30% negative and 58% neutral. (This study examined the tone of Pawlenty's coverage from May 1 through August 14, the day that he dropped out of the race.)

### Tone of Pawlenty News Coverage Over Time

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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One of Pawlenty's worst weeks of coverage (11% positive, 31% negative) followed the June 13 CNN debate where many pundits deemed him to have been too unaggressive, particularly when

he failed to follow up his earlier attacks on the health care program Romney instituted as Massachusetts governor.

Typical of the response was this analysis from the liberal online publication Salon, which declared that Pawlenty “struggled to gain traction [and] showed why on Monday, when the moderator—CNN’s John King—dared Pawlenty to attack ‘RomneyCare’ to Romney’s face [and] Pawlenty stumbled around before dodging the challenge and filibustering.”

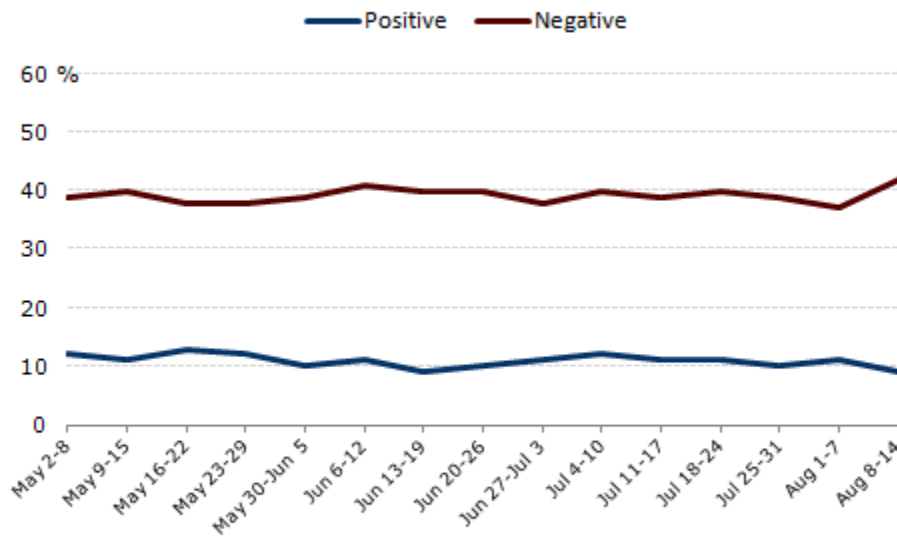
And when he exited the race after a disappointing showing in the Ames straw poll, the obituaries were pretty simple and to the point. An August 14 Reuters story said, “Pawlenty touted a record of balancing the budget, cutting spending and down-sizing government in Minnesota, but his ‘nice guy’ image failed to gain traction....”

Pawlenty didn’t generate all that much attention on blogs either, generating about 33,000 assertions, which put him No. 6 among the 10 Republicans during his shortened campaign. He also found the blogosphere acting as a megaphone to amplify the issues about his viability that arose in the news media. Overall 11% of the opinions studied about him on blogs were positive, 40% negative and 50% neutral.

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### Tone of Pawlenty Discussion in Blogs

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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Many traditional reporters commented on his reluctance to attack Romney in the June 13 CNN debate. But under a post bluntly headlined, “TPaw Chokes,” the Library Grape blog went considerably further in essentially writing Pawlenty’s political epitaph.

“This sort of [debate] format requires some level of flexibility with dissemination of talking points. Pawlenty has none,” the blog asserted. “It looks as though he’s afraid to hit Romney when he’s in the room...Pawlenty simply isn’t a top tier candidate.”

### JON HUNTSMAN AND RICK SANTORUM: THE LONG-SHOT DUO

Former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman and former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum share some basic similarities in their treatment by the media.

Each of these men generated relatively little news coverage between May and October, ranking No. 7 and 9 respectively among Republicans in that category. And the tone of each of their narratives was mixed, with positive coverage essentially balancing out negative coverage.

Indeed, their coverage patterns seemed to reflect the same fundamental dynamic. The media considered them longshot candidates to win the GOP nomination, partly based on poll results, and consequently they received considerably less coverage than such figures as Perry, Romney, Bachmann and even Palin.

In terms of tone, their coverage resembled the mixed quality of Mitt Romney, though there was much less of it. Still, they have fared considerably better than Newt Gingrich and Tim Pawlenty.

Both Huntsman and Santorum did poorly in the blogosphere, however. The conversation on blogs ran 2-1 negative against Huntsman and was even more unflattering, 5-1 negative over positive, for Santorum.

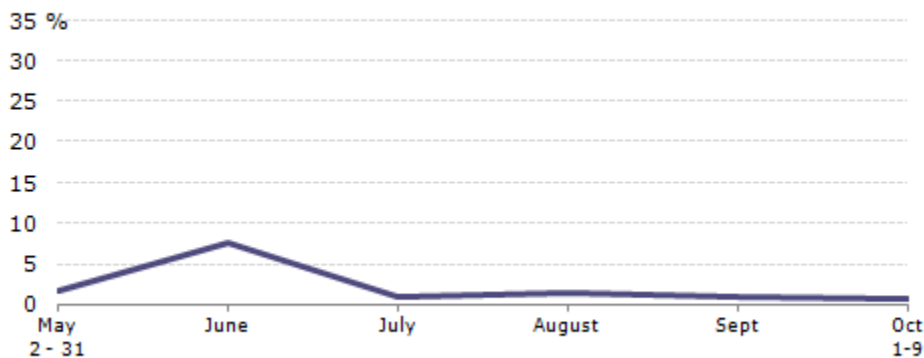
### JON HUNTSMAN

Huntsman was a primary newsmaker in 3% of all the campaign stories studied in the five months included in this report.<sup>9</sup> And about three-quarters of that coverage came in June, the month he made his candidacy official. The week of that announcement (June 20-26), he was the top campaign newsmaker among Republicans. But without showing any significant growth in the polls, he was unable to sustain coverage in the summer months.

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#### Amount of Huntsman News Coverage Over Time

*Percent of Campaign Stories*



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<sup>9</sup> Huntsman was seventh in the percentage of campaign stories in which he was a “significant” presence, mentioned in a quarter of the story. There he was present in 3% of campaign stories.



## The Media Primary

When it came to tone, Huntsman had a slightly higher amount of positive coverage (21%) than negative (17%) with a large neutral component (63%). And that narrative was very consistent. His coverage was positive in the 20 of the 23 weeks studied.

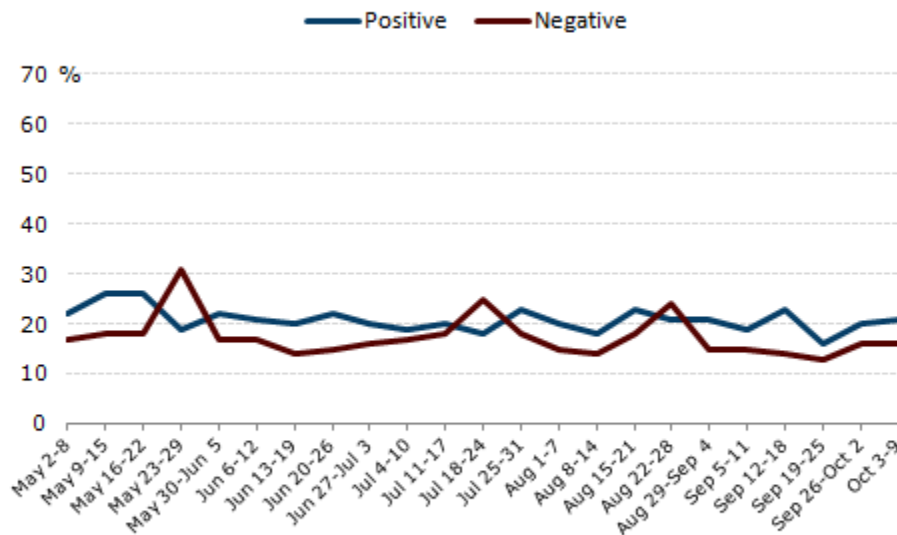
Huntsman's challenge in the media was to overcome the perception that as an ideological moderate who was Barack Obama's former ambassador to China, he was running a quixotic campaign.

One of Huntsman's worst weeks was May 23-29 (positive 19% and negative 31%) when he found himself fending off doubts about his candidacy during a campaign swing through New Hampshire. "Aside from Utah, who are you?" asked one voter quoted in an AP story that described Huntsman as the "little known former Utah governor."

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### Tone of Huntsman News Coverage Over Time

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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Huntsman generated some positive responses in the media narrative for his ideas. In early September, one columnist lauded him as the first Republican to "unveil a detailed jobs plan," even while noting that "he is polling in low single digits among primary voters."

Perhaps emblematic of those problems with GOP primary voters is the fact that the Huntsman admirer and author of the column was a deputy field advisor for Obama in 2008.

If the treatment in the news coverage of Huntsman was polite but insubstantial, the narrative in the political blogosphere was far less friendly and even more insubstantial. Huntsman finished dead last among Republicans when it came to the quantity of attention on blogs, generating only about 31,000 assertions, less than one-quarter of Palin's total.

## The Media Primary

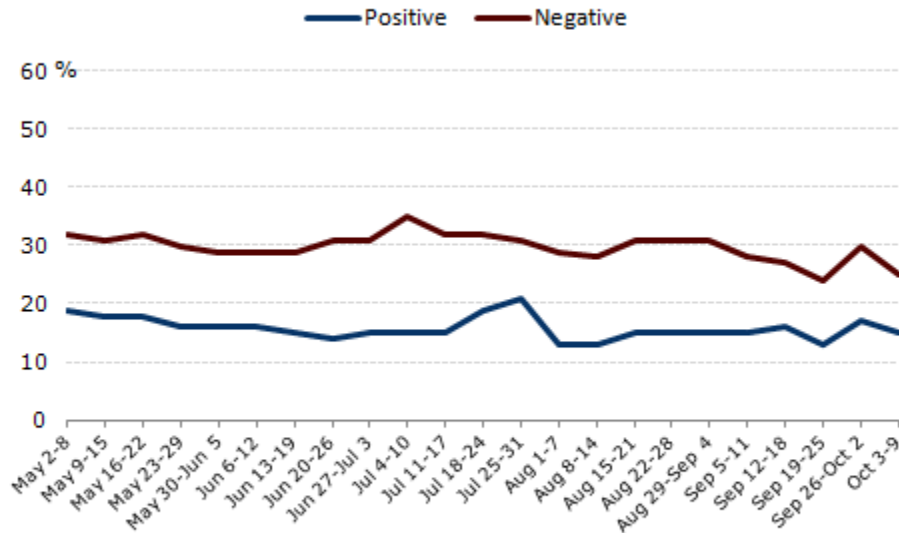
Although much of the discussion was neutral (55%), when bloggers offered opinions they were negative by a ratio of 2-to-1 (15% positive and 30% negative). That put him in the same rough neighborhood as Perry, Palin and Bachmann.

Some of that disapproval in the blogosphere, as might be expected, came from conservatives critical of his reputation for moderation, both in style and substance.

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### Tone of Huntsman Discussion in Blogs

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

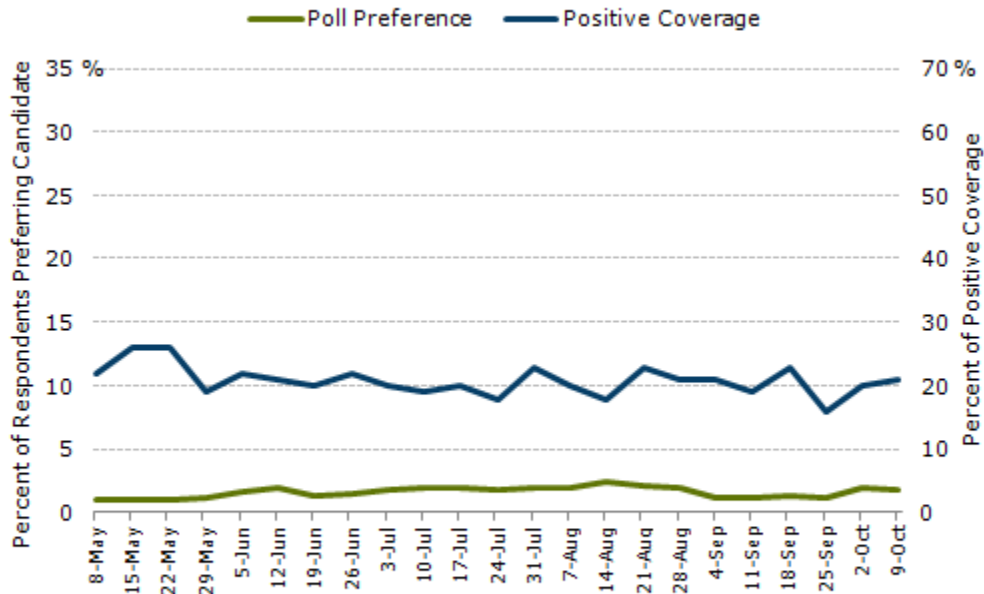
Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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“If you want a wishy-washy candidate who is going to be soft on the issues, then yeah, Huntsman is probably your guy, but I don’t think he has much shot in getting the nomination,” wrote a blogger on Carolina Politics Online July 11. “Republican primary voters [are] looking for someone who is going to fearlessly act to slash government intrusion and spending to the extreme and Huntsman is just not that guy.”

## Huntsman: Positive Coverage and Support in the Polls



**Note:** The dates shown represent the end of the sampled news week.

*Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology*

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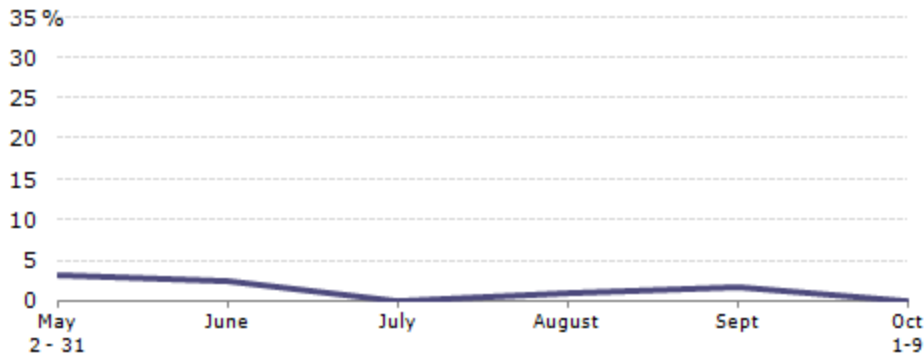
## RICK SANTORUM

Santorum was a prominent newsmaker in only 2% of all the campaign stories from May 2 through October 9. The arc of that coverage followed the same pattern as for Huntsman. He generated some press attention in the spring—May and June—but failed to stay in the headlines as his campaign showed little traction in the polls.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Santorum was ninth in the percentage of campaign stories in which he was a “significant” presence, mentioned in a quarter of the story. There he was present in 3% of campaign stories.

### Amount of Santorum News Coverage Over Time

Percent of Campaign Stories

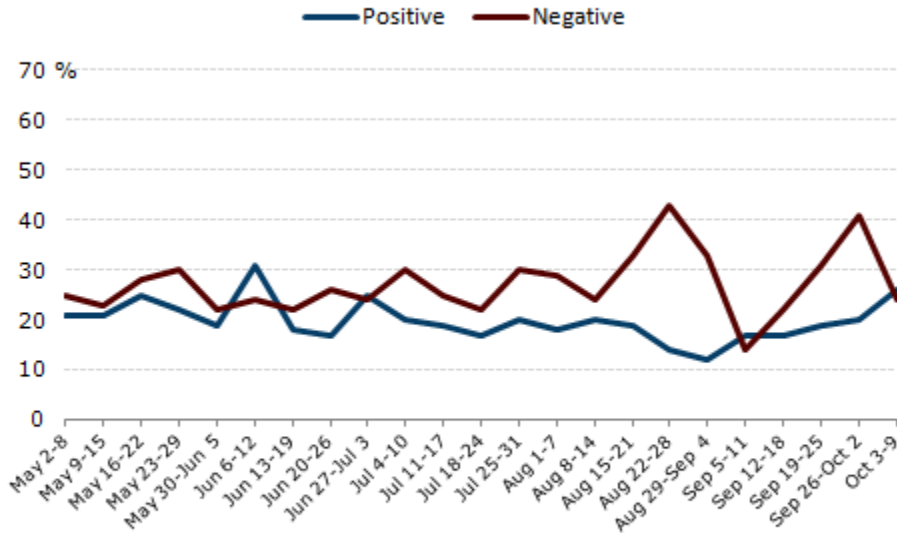


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The overall tone of Santorum's coverage was almost evenly split between positive (23%) and negative (26%), with the majority (51%) being neutral. But that average is influenced by the fact that his most positive week, when he entered the race in early June, was also the week of his heaviest coverage. Over the length of time, and in 21 of the 23 weeks studied, his coverage was mixed or more negative than positive.

### Tone of Santorum News Coverage Over Time

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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Some of the coverage the week Santorum did enter the race suggested his staunch conservatism on cultural issues would play well with GOP voters. A June 6 New York Times story stated that the “social issues are the ones that fire up the segment of the Republican primary base to which Mr. Santorum most appeals.”

Yet, very little of Santorum’s coverage indicated that he would find a path to the Republican nomination. And the poll numbers were very discouraging.

On August 30, NBC, reporting on a CNN-Opinion Research Poll that had Santorum and Huntsman both at 1%, stated that neither man “has been able to break through despite full-fledged, on-the-ground campaigning.”

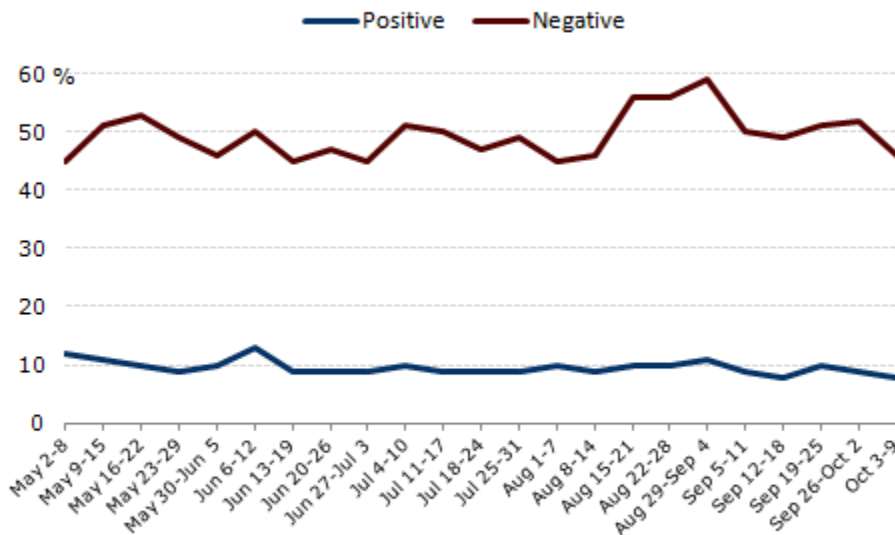
A few weeks later, a New Republic story that examined 50 hours of Fox News Channel coverage to see which Republicans were being taken the most seriously, offered this telling observation about both Gingrich and Santorum: “each [was] granted a single, respectful, prime-time interview and were otherwise mercifully left on the cutting-room floor.”

And the blogosphere was even harder on Santorum. First off, he received only minimal attention—finishing behind every Republican besides Huntsman in the number of assertions (about 35,000).

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### Tone of Santorum Discussion in Blogs

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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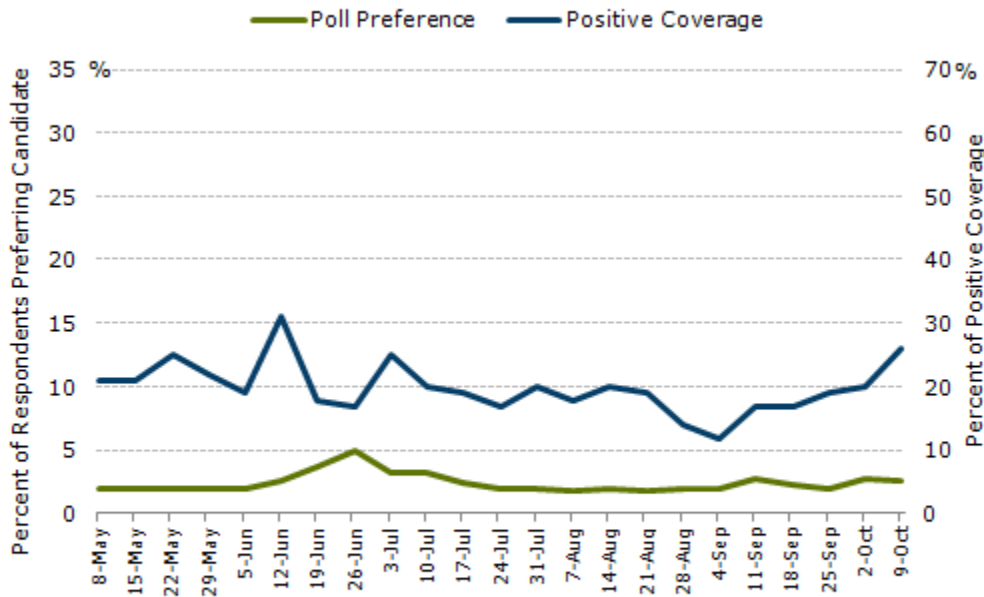
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And with the exception of Newt Gingrich, no one was treated more harshly by bloggers. Of the conversation in the blogs about his candidacy from May through October, 10% was positive while 50% was negative. Another 40% of the conversation was neutral.

And while some of that criticism came from ideological foes, even those bloggers more inclined to share Santorum’s philosophy acknowledged that he had never really gotten lift-off in the campaign. After his fourth-place finish in the Ames straw poll, the Pirate’s Cove blog sounded the death knell.

“Rick Santorum – put a fork in him, he’s done. He’s a great guy with great ideas, but, just too dull to catch fire.”

**Santorum: Positive Coverage and Support in the Polls**



**Note:** The dates shown represent the end of the sampled news week.  
 Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology  
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**BARACK OBAMA**

While Barack Obama may not have been formally campaigning for re-election, he was by far the leading newsmaker in the past five months. And the coverage of him during that period has been unrelentingly negative, worse than any of his potential Republican foes. He fared better, but only slightly, in the blogosphere.

Several factors were likely responsible for that critical tone. In many stories, Obama was the target of not only the whole roster of GOP presidential contenders. He was also being criticized in often harsh terms by Republicans in Congress. Added to that, members of his own party began criticizing him on both policy and strategy grounds, particularly as his poll numbers fell. And for much of this period, the president’s coverage reflected the biggest problem on his watch—a continual flow of bad news about the U.S. economy.

**Quantity of Obama Coverage**

From May to October, Obama generated about six times more coverage than the leading Republican newsmaker.

## The Media Primary

He was the top newsmaker in 16 of the 23 weeks examined in this study and he never registered lower than the second leading newsmaker in any of those weeks—and this is compared to all people in the news, not just other contenders for his job.

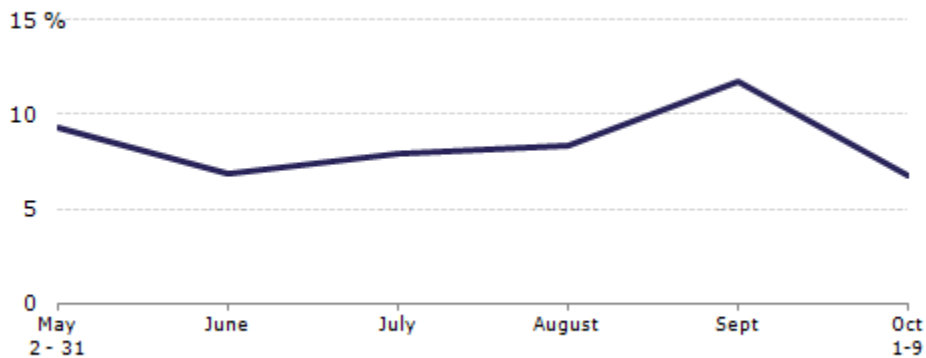
Much of the coverage of Obama stemmed from his role as the central figure in the biggest story over those months—the economy. From May 2 through Oct. 9, the economy filled one-fifth (21%) of the newshole studied by PEJ, compared with 9% for the 2012 presidential campaign. And nearly half (46%) of the stories in which Obama was the primary newsmaker in that period were directly related to the economy.

His coverage built steadily through the summer, accelerating in July, when the media turned its focus to the bruising partisan debt ceiling negotiations. It reached its high point in September, when the president unveiled his \$447 billion economic package, which triggered another Beltway battle.

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### Amount of Obama News Coverage Over Time

*Percent of All Stories*



PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

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And while he may have been unable to positively influence the tone of his coverage, Obama's actions directly affected the level of coverage. Three of his biggest weeks of media attention during these five months occurred when he embarked on his mid-August jobs tour, when he delivered his September 8 speech on job creation and when he offered a September 19 deficit reduction proposal that included raising taxes on the wealthy.

### *Tone of Obama News Media Coverage*

Several things are striking about the tone of Obama's coverage during these months. Using the computer assisted analysis, only 9% of the coverage about Obama was positive while 34% was negative. The majority of the coverage (57%) was neutral or primarily factual in nature. Even the two Republican candidates with the most unflattering narrative—Pawlenty and Gingrich—had more positive treatment at 12% and 15% positive respectively.

Overall, Obama's ratio of negative to positive coverage was nearly 4-1.

What also stands out is how static the coverage was. In the 23 weeks studied, his positive coverage ranged only between 8% and 10%.

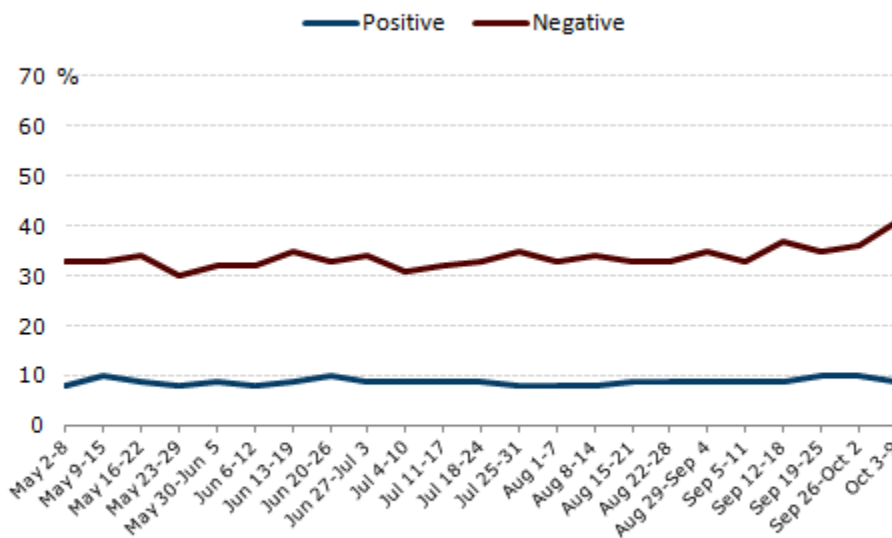
Not only did the president’s positive coverage in any given week never exceed 10%, but it also only reached 10% in four weeks during those five months.

There were a number of forces that fueled Obama’s difficult media narrative and no event or dynamic changed the tone of the president’s coverage, not even briefly.

Even the week of May 2-8, immediately after the raid that killed Osama bin Laden, Obama’s coverage was overwhelmingly negative. One reason is that many of the references to his role in the hunt for bin Laden were matched by skepticism that he would receive any long term political benefit from it. Another was that the bin Laden news was tempered with news about the nation’s economy.

### Tone of Obama News Coverage Over Time

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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“A nation surly over rising gas prices, stubbornly high unemployment and nasty partisan politics poured into the streets to wildly cheer President Barack Obama’s announcement that Osama bin Laden, the world’s most wanted man, had been killed by U.S. forces after a decade-long manhunt,” stated a May 2 AP story. “The outcome could not have come at a better time for Obama, sagging in the polls as he embarks on his re-election campaign.”

The president’s coverage was often marked by combination of bad economic news and potential opponents eager to seize on that storyline. A CBS scene-setting story about the June 13 CNN debate was an example. “On the eve of the second Republican presidential debate of the season, President Barack Obama continues to see his poll numbers on the economy slipping, and those Republicans who want to be president are on the attack this weekend.”

The economy remained a theme that hurt Obama throughout the summer, even when he tried to change the narrative. As he began his August bus tour about jobs, an Associated Press story



declared: “President Barack Obama launches a political counteroffensive this week, weighed down by a stunted economy, wilting support among some of his most ardent backers, and a daily bashing from the slew of Republicans campaigning for his job.”

**Quantity and Tone of Obama in Blogs**

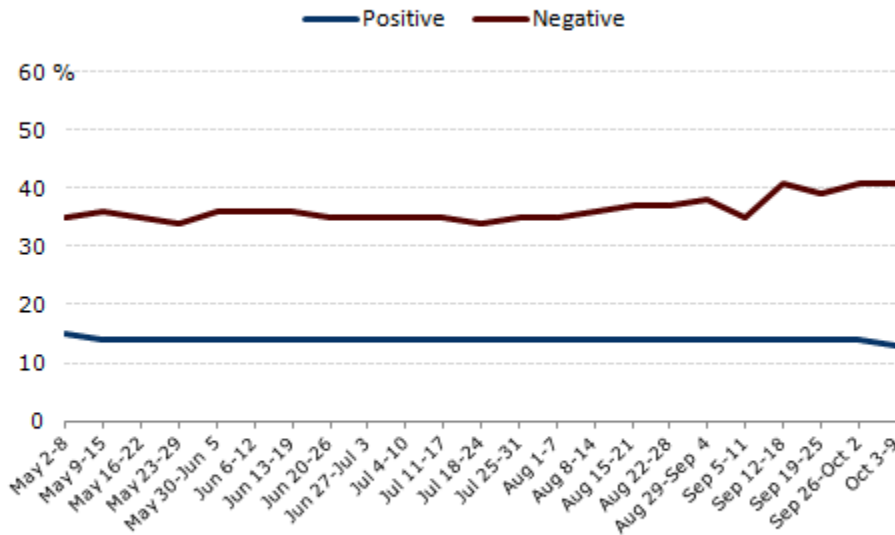
Obama did fare a little better among bloggers, but not much. In all, 14% of the conversation about him was positive and 36% was negative during these 23 weeks, while 50% was neutral.

As was the case with news coverage, Barack Obama was far and away the top newsmaker on blogs, generating almost 1.3 million assertions in the five months studied, almost 10 times the amount of any of the Republicans. And the tone was only slightly better than his news coverage.

Much of the criticism aimed at Obama by bloggers centered on the economy, such as this June 2 post on Finance Geek: “As the president works on his golf game, the economy is coming apart again. Housing is taking another leg down, job gains seem to be tailing off and a fiscal iceberg lies just ahead. Will someone sound the alarm?”

**Tone of Obama Discussion in Blogs**

Percent of Coverage



**Note:** Neutral is not included in the chart. The three categories combined add up to 100%.

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

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Obama also took heat from the left in blogs as with this September 3 post on the greenreflection site taking issue with his move to ease off environmental regulation under the headline: “Not a good week for Barack Obama, or the environment.”

“The decision to kill the EPA’s new rules on smog is making a lot of supporters angry. Michael Tomasky calls Obama A President Adrift in the Daily Beast.”

## The Media Primary

Many bloggers are staunch foes of Obama and deeply suspicious. On September 29, the New Trommeter Times site warned that the president might try to “manufacture some crisis, and “October surprise,” just before the 2012 elections,” to ensure re-election. “But I’ve got a message for Barack, you’re no George Bush,” the post continued. “You’re certainly no Ronald Reagan. The only President you can be compared to is failed, one-term President Jimmy Carter.”

## CRIMSON HEXAGON METHODOLOGY

The study, *The Media Primary: How News Media and Blogs Have Eyed the Presidential Contenders during the First Phase of the 2012 Race*, uses content analysis data from two sources. Data regarding the *quantity* of coverage is mostly derived from the Project for Excellence in Journalism's in-house coding operation. (Click [here](#) for details on how that project, also known as PEJ's News Coverage Index, is conducted.)

To arrive at the results regarding the *tone* of coverage, PEJ used computer coding software provided by Crimson Hexagon. That software is able to analyze the textual content from billions of posts on blogs, Twitter, Facebook and web-based articles from news sites. Crimson Hexagon (CH) classifies online content by identifying statistical patterns in words.

### Use of Crimson Hexagon's Technology

The technology is rooted in an algorithm created by Gary King, a professor at Harvard University's Institute for Quantitative Social Science. (Click [here](#) to view the study explaining the algorithm.)

The purpose of computer coding in general, and Crimson Hexagon specifically, is to “take as data a potentially large set of text documents, of which a small subset is hand coded into an investigator-chosen set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories. As output, the methods give approximately unbiased and statistically consistent estimates of the proportion of all documents in each category.”

### Universe

Crimson Hexagon software examines online content provided by RSS feeds of thousands of news outlets from the U.S. and around the world. This provides researchers with analysis of a much wider pool of content than conventional human coding can provide. Specifically, the monitors PEJ creates are based on more than 11,500 news web sites, several million blogs, and hundreds of millions of publicly available Twitter and Facebook posts. CH maintains a database of all stories and posts available—numbering into the billions—so texts can be investigated retroactively.

While the software collects and analyzes online content, the database includes many news sites produced by television and radio outlets. Most stations do not offer exact transcripts of their broadcasted content on their sites and RSS feeds, however, those sites often include text stories that are very similar to report that were aired. For example, even though the television programs from Fox News are not in the sample directly, content from Fox News is present through the stories published on FoxNews.com.

The universe includes content from all the major television networks along with thousands of local television and radio stations. Two notable television sources, CBS and PBS' NewsHour, do offer transcripts of their television news programs, and those texts are including in the sample.

## Monitor Creation and Training

Each individual study or query related to a set of variables is referred to as a “monitor.”

The process of creating a new monitor consists of four steps. (See below for an example of these steps in action.)

First, PEJ researchers decide what timeframe and universe of content to examine - general news stories, blogs, posts on the major social media sites Twitter and Facebook or some combination. Unless otherwise noted, PEJ only includes English-language content.

Second, the researchers enter key terms using Boolean search logic so the software can identify the universe of posts to analyze.

Next, researchers define categories appropriate to the parameters of the study. If a monitor is measuring the tone of coverage for a specific politician, for example, there would be four categories: positive, neutral, negative, and irrelevant for posts that are off-topic in some way.

If a monitor is measuring media framing or storyline, the categories would be more extensive. For example, a monitor studying the framing of coverage about the death of Osama bin Laden might include nine categories: details of the raid, global reaction, political impact, impact on terrorism, role of Pakistan, straight account of events, impact on U.S. policy, the life of bin Laden, and a category off-topic posts.

Fourth, researchers “train” the CH platform to analyze content according to specific parameters they want to study. The PEJ researchers in this role have gone through in-depth training at two different levels. They are professional content analysts fully versed in PEJ’s existing content analysis operation and methodology. They then undergo specific training on the CH platform including multiple rounds of reliability testing.

The monitor training itself is done with a random selection of posts collected by the technology. One at a time, the software displays posts and a human coder determines which category each example best fits into. In categorizing the content, PEJ staff follows coding rules created over the many years that PEJ has been content analyzing news media. If an example does not fit easily into a category, that specific post is skipped. The goal of this training is to feed the software with clear examples for every category.

For each new monitor, human coders categorize at least 250 distinct posts. Typically, each individual category includes 20 or more posts before the training is complete. To validate the training, PEJ has conducted numerous intercoder reliability tests (see below) and the training of every monitor is examined by a second coder in order to discover errors.

Once the training is complete, the software culls through and classifies the entirety of the identified online content according to the statistical word patterns derived during the training.

## How the Algorithm Works

To understand how the software recognizes and uses patterns of words to interpret texts, consider a simplified example. Imagine the study examining coverage regarding the death of Osama bin Laden that utilizes the nine categories listed above. As a result of the example stories categorized by a human coder during the training, the CH monitor might recognize that portions of a story with the words “Obama,” “poll” and “increase” near each other are likely about the political ramifications. However, a section that includes the words “Obama,” “compound” and “Navy” is likely to be about the details of the raid itself.

Unlike most human coding, CH monitors do not measure each story as a unit, but examine the entire discussion in the aggregate. To do that, the algorithm breaks up all relevant texts into subsections. Rather than the dividing each story, paragraph, sentence or word, CH treats the “assertion” as the unit of measurement. Thus, posts are divided up by the computer algorithm. If 40% of a story fits into one category, and 60% fits into another, the software will divide the text accordingly. Consequently, the results are not expressed in percent of newshole or percent of stories. Instead, the results are the percent of assertions out of the entire body of stories identified by the original Boolean search terms. We refer to the entire collection of assertions as the “conversation.”

## Testing and Validity

Extensive testing by Crimson Hexagon has demonstrated that the tool is 97% reliable, that is, in 97% of cases analyzed, the technology’s coding has been shown to match human coding. PEJ spent more than 12 months testing CH and its own tests comparing coding by humans and the software came up with similar results.

In addition to validity tests of the platform itself, PEJ conducted separate examinations of human intercoder reliability to show that the training process for complex concepts is replicable. The first test had five researchers each code the same 30 stories which resulted in an agreement of 85%.

A second test had each of the five researchers build their own separate monitors to see how the results compared. This test involved not only testing coder agreement, but also how the algorithm handles various examinations of the same content when different human trainers are working on the same subject. The five separate monitors came up with results that were within 85% of each other.

Unlike polling data, the results from the CH tool do not have a sampling margin of error since there is no sampling involved. For the algorithmic tool, reliability tested at 97% meets the highest standards of academic rigor.

## Ongoing Monitors

In some instances, PEJ uses CH to study a given period of time, and then expand the monitor for additional time going forward. In order to accomplish this, researchers first create a monitor for the original timeframe according to the method described above.

Because the tenor and content of online conversation can change over time, additional training is necessary if the timeframe gets extended. Since the specific conversation about candidates evolves all the time, the CH monitor must be trained to understand how newer posts fit into the larger categories.

In those instances, researchers conduct additional training for the monitor with a focus on posts that occurred during the new time period. For every new week that is examined, at least 25 more posts are added to the monitor's training. At that point, the monitor is run to come up with new results for the expanded time period which are added to results that were already derived in the original timeframe.

### **An Example**

Since the use of computer-aided coding is a relatively new phenomenon, it will be helpful to demonstrate how the above procedure works by following a specific example.

PEJ created a monitor to measure the tone of media coverage on news sites for Republican candidate Mitt Romney. First, we created a monitor with the following guidelines:

1. Source: "News" sources only
2. Original date range: May 2 to September 11, 2011
3. English-language content only
4. Keyword: Romney

We then created the four categories that are used for measuring tone:

1. Positive
2. Neutral
3. Negative
4. Off-topic/Irrelevant

Next, we trained the monitor by classifying documents. CH randomly selected entire posts from the time period specified, and displayed them one by one. A PEJ researcher decided if each post is a clear example of one of the four categories, and if so, assigned that post into the appropriate category. If an example post could fit into more than one category, or is not clear in its meaning, the coder skipped the post. Since the goal is to find the clearest case possible, coders will often skip many posts until they find good examples.

A story that is entirely about a poll showing Mitt Romney ahead of the Republican field—and that his lead is growing, would be a good example to put in the "positive" category. A different story that is entirely about Romney's record in Massachusetts and how many conservative voters are opposed to him would be put in the "negative" category. A post that is strictly factual, such as a story about a speech Romney gave on the economy that does not include evaluative assessments, would be put in the "neutral" category. And a post that includes the word "Romney" but is not about the candidate at all, such as a story about a different person with the same last name, would go in the "off-topic" category.

## The Media Primary

The coder trained 260 documents in all—ten more than the necessary minimum of 250. Each of the four categories had more than 20 posts in them.

At that point, the initial training was finished. For the sake of validity, PEJ has another coder check over all of our training and look for stories that they would have categorized differently. Those stories are removed from the training sample because the disagreement between coders shows that they are not clear, precise examples. In the case of the Romney monitor, there were four documents that were removed for this reason.

Finally, we “ran” the monitor. This means that the algorithm examined the word patterns derived from the monitor training, and applied those patterns every post that was captured using the initial guidelines. Since the software studies the conversation in an aggregate as opposed to individual posts or stories, the algorithm divided up the overall conversation into percentages that fit into the four categories.

For the initial monitor, the algorithm examined over 94,000 assessments from thousands of news stories and determined that 34% of the conversation was positive, 33% neutral, and 33% negative. The assessments or statements that are off-topic were excluded from the results.

In order to extend the Romney monitor beyond September 11, coders added at least 25 new posts to the training for each new week examined. This assures that any linguistic changes in the overall coverage or conversation regarding Romney in the new week are accounted for. We then run the monitor again, which now includes the original training of 260 posts plus 25 new ones, for the new week while leaving the earlier results in place.

**Top Line:**  
How News Media and Blogs Have Eyed the Presidential  
Contenders during the First Phase of the 2012 Race

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**Amount of News Coverage**

*Percentage of Stories*

**Primary Newsmaker**

	<u>Perry</u>	<u>Romney</u>	<u>Cain</u>	<u>Bachmann</u>	<u>Palin</u>	<u>Gingrich</u>	<u>Paul</u>	<u>Huntsman</u>	<u>Santorum</u>	<u>Obama</u>	<u>Pawlenty</u>
May 2-31	0.7%	8.3%	1.0%	3.1%	12.1%	21.7%	4.5%	1.7%	3.1%	9.3%	6.6%
June	2.2	16.4	0.5	12.7	11.8	9.8	0.7	7.6	2.5	6.9	3.2
July	4.4	15.8	1.8	24.6	2.6	0.0	2.6	0.9	0.0	7.9	6.1
August	32.5	9.6	0.0	8.0	4.6	0.6	0.9	1.5	0.9	8.3	4.2 <sup>1</sup>
September	33.6	15.4	6.1	8.4	3.2	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.8	11.7	
October 1-9	21.9	6.2	11.6	0.0	6.2	0.7	0.0	0.7	0.0	6.8	
<b>May 2 – October 9</b>	<b>17.5%</b>	<b>12.6%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>8.8%</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>2.7%</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>8.8%</b>	<b>4.7%<sup>2</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup>August 1 - 14

<sup>2</sup>May 2 – August 14

*A political figure must be in at least 50% of the story to be considered a primary newsmaker*

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**Significant Newsmaker**

	<u>Perry</u>	<u>Romney</u>	<u>Cain</u>	<u>Bachmann</u>	<u>Palin</u>	<u>Gingrich</u>	<u>Paul</u>	<u>Huntsman</u>	<u>Santorum</u>	<u>Pawlenty</u>
July	7.3%	26.0%	3.3%	39.0%	2.4%	3.3%	4.9%	5.7%	0.8%	11.4%
August	43.9	22.4	2.1	22.1	5.7	2.4	2.4	4.5	2.4	11.9
September	49.0	30.9	8.7	17.0	6.1	2.4	3.5	2.8	3.7	1.5
October 1-9	35.8	31.1	24.3	2.0	9.5	0.7	1.4	1.4	0.7	0
<b>May 2 – October 9</b>	<b>40.8%</b>	<b>27.7%</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>19.1%</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>4.7%</b>

*A political figure must be in at least 25% of the story to be considered a significant newsmaker*

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## Tone of News Coverage

Percentage of Coverage

	Perry			Romney			Cain		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative
May 2-8	27%	54%	18%	28%	46%	27%	21%	53%	26%
May 9-15	24	59	17	26	37	37	27	42	31
May 16-22	29	52	19	24	44	32	26	46	28
May 23-29	26	58	16	25	48	28	23	52	24
May 30-June 5	28	54	18	23	49	28	21	57	21
June 6-12	35	49	16	25	46	30	23	53	25
June 13-19	31	53	16	25	48	27	21	55	24
June 20-26	28	55	17	27	48	25	22	55	23
June 27-July 3	31	54	16	25	52	22	25	47	28
July 4-10	28	50	22	25	50	26	24	49	27
July 11-17	30	50	20	24	49	26	25	42	33
July 18-24	32	50	18	26	48	26	32	37	31
July 25-31	39	42	19	23	48	28	26	46	28
August 1-7	36	45	19	25	49	26	30	46	23
August 8-14	34	52	14	30	44	25	22	55	23
August 15-21	33	50	16	31	39	30	35	40	25
August 22-28	32	51	17	25	47	28	30	49	21
August 29-Sept 4	32	50	17	25	51	24	34	43	23
Sept 5-11	31	54	15	23	52	25	24	57	19
Sept 12-18	31	44	25	26	48	26	25	57	18
Sept 19-25	32	45	23	24	50	25	23	59	18
Sept 26-Oct 2	32	46	22	27	46	27	35	45	20
Oct 3-9	26	40	34	25	46	29	36	46	18
<b>May 2 - Oct 9</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>23%</b>

	Bachmann			Palin			Gingrich		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative
May 2-8	18%	57%	25%	30%	44%	27%	12%	60%	28%
May 9-15	22	59	19	28	43	29	13	48	38
May 16-22	27	53	21	29	44	27	14	46	41
May 23-29	25	53	22	33	43	24	13	48	39
May 30-June 5	27	49	24	27	46	27	14	51	35
June 6-12	24	54	22	26	54	20	17	36	48
June 13-19	24	54	22	29	49	22	13	48	39
June 20-26	29	49	22	29	46	25	17	49	34
June 27-July 3	24	49	27	28	46	26	11	66	23
July 4-10	26	50	24	32	42	26	11	50	39
July 11-17	22	52	26	32	43	26	15	52	33
July 18-24	24	50	26	34	37	29	13	55	32
July 25-31	23	51	25	34	40	27	13	47	40
August 1-7	25	54	21	33	40	27	14	49	37
August 8-14	29	49	22	29	47	24	12	66	22
August 15-21	61	26	14	27	63	10	13	53	35
August 22-28	35	42	22	28	43	29	14	58	28
August 29-Sept 4	23	49	28	27	48	25	11	63	26
Sept 5-11	27	51	22	39	53	9	12	70	18
Sept 12-18	20	48	32	25	44	31	16	66	18
Sept 19-25	21	49	30	29	38	33	20	63	16
Sept 26-Oct 2	20	55	25	25	46	30	23	47	30
Oct 3-9	19	56	26	41	37	22	16	62	23
<b>May 2 - Oct 9</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>35%</b>

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

Tone of News Coverage (continued)

	Paul			Huntsman			Santorum		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative
May 2-8	19%	66%	15%	22%	61%	17%	21%	53%	25%
May 9-15	21	62	17	26	57	18	21	55	23
May 16-22	26	54	20	26	56	18	25	47	28
May 23-29	17	67	16	19	50	31	22	48	30
May 30-June 5	17	67	15	22	61	17	19	59	22
June 6-12	18	67	15	21	62	17	31	45	24
June 13-19	16	69	15	20	65	14	18	60	22
June 20-26	17	67	16	22	63	15	17	57	26
June 27-July 3	18	67	16	20	64	16	25	51	24
July 4-10	21	60	19	19	64	17	20	49	30
July 11-17	23	60	17	20	62	18	19	56	25
July 18-24	18	66	16	18	57	25	17	61	22
July 25-31	22	59	19	23	59	18	20	51	30
August 1-7	22	58	20	20	65	15	18	53	29
August 8-14	15	68	17	18	69	14	20	56	24
August 15-21	20	61	19	23	59	18	19	48	33
August 22-28	18	64	17	21	55	24	14	44	43
August 29-Sept 4	21	63	17	21	64	15	12	55	33
Sept 5-11	18	66	17	19	66	15	17	69	14
Sept 12-18	25	58	17	23	63	14	17	60	22
Sept 19-25	21	64	16	16	71	13	19	50	31
Sept 26-Oct 2	23	60	17	20	64	16	20	39	41
Oct 3-9	26	58	16	21	62	16	26	50	24
<b>May 2 - Oct 9</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>26%</b>

	Obama				Pawlenty		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative		Positive	Neutral	Negative
May 2-8	8%	59%	33%		11%	61%	28%
May 9-15	10	58	33		10	65	24
May 16-22	9	57	34		13	57	29
May 23-29	8	61	30		12	60	28
May 30-June 5	9	60	32		11	63	26
June 6-12	8	60	32		13	59	28
June 13-19	9	56	35		11	58	31
June 20-26	10	58	33		11	58	32
June 27-July 3	9	57	34		11	57	32
July 4-10	9	60	31		14	52	33
July 11-17	9	59	32		12	51	37
July 18-24	9	59	33		13	56	32
July 25-31	8	56	35		13	56	30
August 1-7	8	59	33		11	60	29
August 8-14	8	57	34		11	56	32
August 15-21	9	58	33				
August 22-28	9	58	33				
August 29-Sept 4	9	57	35				
Sept 5-11	9	58	33				
Sept 12-18	9	54	37				
Sept 19-25	10	56	35				
Sept 26-Oct 2	10	54	36				
Oct 3-9	9	50	41				
<b>May 2 - Oct 9</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>May 2 – August 14</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>30%</b>

Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology

## Tone of Coverage on Blogs

Week	Perry			Romney			Cain		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative
May 2-8	20%	43%	37%	35%	31%	34%	29%	48%	23%
May 9-15	20	45	34	31	31	38	33	43	24
May 16-22	22	40	38	32	32	36	33	43	24
May 23-29	22	42	35	34	34	32	34	44	23
May 30-June 5	21	46	33	33	35	32	31	45	24
June 6-12	21	39	40	34	32	34	31	43	25
June 13-19	22	41	37	34	33	33	27	50	23
June 20-26	21	42	37	36	31	33	30	47	24
June 27-July 3	21	42	37	38	30	32	30	46	24
July 4-10	21	40	39	35	31	34	29	48	23
July 11-17	20	40	40	37	31	32	30	46	24
July 18-24	22	39	39	35	32	33	29	45	26
July 25-31	22	39	39	35	30	35	31	42	27
August 1-7	21	41	39	34	32	35	29	43	29
August 8-14	21	43	36	35	32	33	24	55	21
August 15-21	21	40	40	35	31	34	28	48	23
August 22-28	22	39	39	34	33	34	29	49	22
August 29-Sept 4	21	39	39	33	35	32	29	49	22
Sept 5-11	22	41	37	31	37	32	25	52	23
Sept 12-18	19	36	45	34	33	33	28	49	23
Sept 19-25	19	36	45	35	33	31	35	44	21
Sept 26-Oct 2	20	35	45	36	31	33	39	36	24
Oct 3-9	19	34	47	37	30	33	37	38	25
<b>May 2 - Oct 9</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>24%</b>

	Bachmann			Palin			Gingrich		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative
May 2-8	16%	38%	46%	19%	37%	44%	8%	41%	51%
May 9-15	17	39	44	19	36	45	9	38	54
May 16-22	18	40	43	19	35	46	9	35	56
May 23-29	19	40	41	19	39	42	9	36	54
May 30-June 5	20	38	42	20	39	41	9	38	53
June 6-12	20	38	43	19	36	45	9	35	57
June 13-19	17	46	37	18	36	46	8	40	53
June 20-26	19	38	42	19	33	47	9	34	57
June 27-July 3	19	36	45	18	33	48	9	35	57
July 4-10	18	34	48	19	34	47	9	32	59
July 11-17	17	34	48	19	34	47	11	34	54
July 18-24	18	34	48	19	35	46	10	37	53
July 25-31	18	35	47	19	35	46	10	32	59
August 1-7	17	37	46	19	35	46	10	32	59
August 8-14	22	37	41	18	38	44	7	48	45
August 15-21	24	32	44	19	36	46	8	38	54
August 22-28	20	34	46	18	36	45	8	38	54
August 29-Sept 4	18	34	48	19	40	41	8	39	53
Sept 5-11	19	38	43	18	41	42	7	44	48
Sept 12-18	16	38	46	18	33	49	8	43	49
Sept 19-25	17	41	43	19	34	48	11	50	40
Sept 26-Oct 2	17	39	45	18	36	46	12	40	48
Oct 3-9	17	40	43	17	39	43	13	42	44
<b>May 2 - Oct 9</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>53%</b>

*Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology*

**Tone of Coverage on Blogs (continued)**

Week	Paul			Huntsman			Santorum		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative
May 2-8	48%	38%	15%	19%	49%	32%	12%	43%	45%
May 9-15	49	36	15	18	51	31	11	38	51
May 16-22	49	36	15	18	51	32	10	37	53
May 23-29	49	35	16	16	54	30	9	42	49
May 30-June 5	48	37	15	16	55	29	10	44	46
June 6-12	49	36	15	16	55	29	13	37	50
June 13-19	46	41	13	15	56	29	9	46	45
June 20-26	47	39	14	14	55	31	9	44	47
June 27-July 3	46	40	14	15	54	31	9	46	45
July 4-10	44	41	14	15	50	35	10	39	51
July 11-17	46	40	14	15	53	32	9	41	50
July 18-24	48	37	15	19	49	32	9	44	47
July 25-31	47	38	15	21	48	31	9	41	49
August 1-7	48	37	14	13	58	29	10	44	45
August 8-14	49	38	13	13	59	28	9	45	46
August 15-21	51	35	15	15	54	31	10	34	56
August 22-28	46	37	16	15	55	31	10	33	56
August 29-Sept 4	48	37	15	15	54	31	11	31	59
Sept 5-11	48	39	14	15	57	28	9	41	50
Sept 12-18	48	37	15	16	57	27	8	43	49
Sept 19-25	46	39	15	13	63	24	10	39	51
Sept 26-Oct 2	45	37	18	17	53	30	9	38	52
Oct 3-9	47	37	16	15	61	25	8	46	46
<b>May 2 - Oct 9</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>50%</b>

Week	Obama				Pawlenty		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative		Positive	Neutral	Negative
May 2-8	15%	50%	35%		12%	50%	39%
May 9-15	14	50	36		11	49	40
May 16-22	14	51	35		13	49	38
May 23-29	14	52	34		12	50	38
May 30-June 5	14	50	36		10	51	39
June 6-12	14	50	36		11	48	41
June 13-19	14	50	36		9	52	40
June 20-26	14	51	35		10	50	40
June 27-July 3	14	51	35		11	51	38
July 4-10	14	51	35		12	49	40
July 11-17	14	51	35		11	50	39
July 18-24	14	52	34		11	49	40
July 25-31	14	51	35		10	52	39
August 1-7	14	51	35		11	52	37
August 8-14	14	50	36		9	49	42
August 15-21	14	49	37				
August 22-28	14	48	37				
August 29-Sept 4	14	48	38				
Sept 5-11	14	52	35				
Sept 12-18	14	45	41				
Sept 19-25	14	47	39				
Sept 26-Oct 2	14	45	41				
Oct 3-9	13	46	41				
<b>May 2 - Oct 9</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>May 2 – August 14</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>40%</b>

*Based on analysis conducted by PEJ using Crimson Hexagon technology*