

- [Home](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Archive](#)
- [Download Current Issue](#)
- [Subscribe](#)

# Commentary

---

## Contentions

### Why Perry's Conservatism May Help in a General Election

Seth Mandel | [@SethAMandel](#) 09.20.2011 - 12:45 PM



Michael Gerson writes today he is confident GOP primary voters will nominate Mitt Romney over Rick Perry because Romney seems to be the “safe” candidate at a turbulent hour in American economic history. Gerson writes that Republicans prefer to elect known quantities and are wary of nationally-untested firebrands.

“None of these historical precedents make Romney a shoo-in,” Gerson writes. “But they indicate his prospects are better than his current polling.” That’s probably true, and some polls—especially state polls—indicate Romney is still in the game. But Romney’s “safety” isn’t the advantage Gerson thinks it is, and more importantly, many writers and pundits are probably underestimating the appeal of Perry’s unapologetic conservatism to general election voters as well as Republican primary voters.

Perry does favor low taxes and is generally suspicious of heavy-handed regulation. But his record suggests he is not the absolutist he seems to be at first glance, and when he strays from such orthodoxy it is in favor of policies that are both more conservative and more palatable to the voting public.

Two of the most prominent examples of this are tort reform and Texas state housing regulations. To be sure, Perry does not get the credit for enacting one major piece of legislation, which limited mortgage borrowing to 80 percent or less of the borrower’s home value, preventing risky loans and shaky mortgages that contributed to the housing crisis. That legislation was passed under George W. Bush’s governorship. But Perry did, as *Reason* pointed out recently, resist the push to relax such laws around the country to make home ownership more available, especially to the poor. Many Republicans buckled under the pressure to expand ownership. Perry didn’t. Whose constituents fared better?

And as for tort reform, Perry has signed into law two pieces of legislation Republicans nationwide hoped—in vain—would be part of national health care reform efforts. In 2003, Texas passed a law limiting noneconomic damage payouts in medical malpractice cases, ensuring patients were still fully protected by the law while

creating a more beneficial medical environment for both patients and doctors. And earlier this year, Texas passed a loser-pays law designed to limit frivolous lawsuits. As Ryan Brannan of the Texas Public Policy Foundation [notes](#), the 2003 law has been a success, giving Texans high hopes for this year's bill as well.

Both these reforms—limiting the lawsuit free-for-all that has been so damaging to health care nationally and the housing legislation that emphasizes personal responsibility and fiscal sanity—are undeniably conservative reforms. The argument Perry is “too conservative” for the electorate begins to crumble when you look at Perry's record. His conservative ideology helped shield Texas from the post-bubble housing crisis and increased the availability of health care in his state without limiting personal freedom.

Gerson is right that Romney has a good resume—he's been an executive in the public and private sectors with some impressive successes under his belt. But Romney's lack of ideological consistency, while giving him credibility as a nimble and centrist problem-solver, faces a tough test when compared with Perry's record. Conservatives have been making the case for stability and predictability in the tax code because people need to know what the likely result of their decisions will be. For the same reasons, Perry's ideological consistency, buoyed by his state's successful approach to housing policy and medical liability, will be reassuring to many voters.

Sign up for **Commentary's**  
**FREE** daily newsletter!

Your E-Mail Address

**SUBMIT**

### Similar articles:

- **Rick Perry's Campaign Approach Is Hitting All the Right Notes**
- **Media to Rick Perry: The Truth Isn't Good Enough**
- **Perry's Fundraising Is Getting Attention**
- **Can Social Issues Give Bachmann the Edge on Perry?**
- **Does Perry's "Toughness" Give Him an Edge?**

### Popular Articles:

- **Has Obama Learned Anything?**
- **Obama Speech was "Obama Unplugged"**
- **Other Than That, Mrs. Lincoln, How Was the Play?**
- **Media Blasted for Obama Coverage**
- **Our Lack of Moral Vocabulary**

powered by **nrelate**