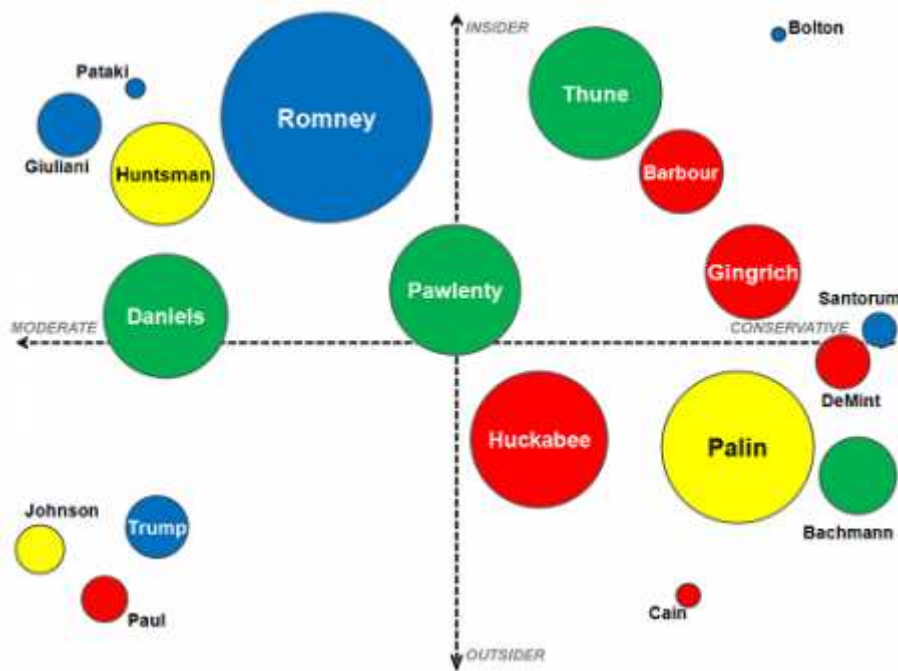


# Placing Tim Pawlenty

Posted by [Adam Sorensen](#) Tuesday, February 8, 2011 at 10:50 am  
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Nate Silver [draws up the above graphic](#) on the potential Republican presidential field and writes the following of former Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, who lands just about smack dab in the hazy middle:

I have been skeptical about Mr. Pawlenty's candidacy, in large part because his personality is not terribly dynamic and he has had some trouble creating a strong brand for himself... Still, he can be credited with a viable strategy: stay a safe distance off the lead lap, and hope for a multicar pileup ahead of him.

That Mr. Pawlenty has been among the first Republicans to build out his campaign infrastructure fits with that strategy — it would be valuable in the car-crash scenario, which implies a long, drawn-out nomination process. So does the fact that Mr. **Pawlenty could plausibly position himself as conservative or moderate, insider or outsider, as the situation dictates.**

I think this is largely right. Pawlenty governed a blueish state with a Democratic legislature while tallying a record that won him an A from the libertarian Cato Institute. His judicial nominations are well thought of in legal conservative circles. He has a pretty diverse group of intimates. And, for better or worse, he doesn't have much of an established national brand. That leaves him somewhat obscured by known quantities such as Sarah Palin or Newt Gingrich, but with freedom to adjust if the primary turns into a pile up as Silver suggests. And the insider-outsider/conservative-moderate dynamic isn't the whole picture.

One perfectly plausible scenario is that the field comes down to Romney, the presumptive favorite and fundraising monolith, against a yet-to-be-determined vessel for anti-Romney Republicans. The anti-Romney swell, were it to come, would emanate from social conservatives uncomfortable with the former Massachusetts governor's record on abortion and Mormon faith. Pawlenty has some quiet, but very real evangelical credentials. He's a convert from Catholicism, but he and his wife have attended the same church for decades. The pastor there is Leith Anderson, the president of the National Association of Evangelicals.

If Mike Huckabee and Sarah Palin don't run -- and there's a fair chance they won't -- the "not Romney" votes in early states like Iowa and South Carolina will naturally flow toward other candidates. Pawlenty's in a decent position to capture that runoff. But even here, Silver's knock that the governor is Midwestern milquetoast presents a problem. "He's a really nice guy," [says Richard Land](#) of the Southern Baptist Convention. "But he doesn't move crowds the way some others do. It's been my experience charisma is something that, you know it when you see it."

Pawlenty was [in Iowa on Monday](#) addressing just the kind of activist organization he'll need to galvanize if he hopes to capture the nomination through the "not Romney" route.

"I share my views. But I do that if it's appropriate for the occasion. I cite scripture. I also watch my tone so I don't become judgmental or condemning," Pawlenty said before the event sponsored by the Family Leader, an Iowa social conservative advocacy group.

...

"I share what I believe is applicable scripture for the moment or the occasion," Pawlenty said. "But I do it in a way that hopefully expresses a tone and an outreach that says I'm being respectful, civil, and hopefully thoughtful."

Fire and brimstone it ain't. But it's an area -- one of many -- where Pawlenty can compete.

Read more: <http://swampland.blogs.time.com/2011/02/08/placing-tim-pawlenty/#ixzz1DOGpEEE0>