

# Should Giuliani Have Run This Time?

✘ Earlier this year, when former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani began sending signals that he might jump into the 2012 presidential race, there seemed to be a collective eye-roll from political pundits across both sides of the aisle. The general consensus was that Giuliani's time had come and gone. I tended to agree.

After all, Giuliani's fall during the 2008 presidential primaries was a thing of legend. He went from being the strong, early front-runner to earning only single-digit support by the time states began casting their votes. A poor campaign strategy and Giuliani's liberal stance on some social issues was largely thought to be responsible. So, if his widely praised leadership during the 9/11 attacks and his exceptional economic and security results as NYC mayor weren't enough to earn him even honorable mention by Republican voters in 2008, how could he possibly fare better in 2012? Right?

Well, I'm starting to think he might have.

As a registered Republican, I've been uneasy about the current GOP field. And if poll results are any indication, I'm not alone. The front-runner position has changed numerous times over the past few months, and most voters claim they could still change their mind on who they'll support. The Republican establishment clearly hasn't been satisfied with the selection. They tried for months to draft Mitch Daniels, Paul Ryan, and Chris Christie to no avail.

In a nutshell, the dilemma stems from differences in the perceived electability and the conservative credentials of each candidate. Most Republicans want a principled conservative in the White House, which is why they're

reluctant to support Mitt Romney who has a well-documented history of switching views on major issues to gain favor with whatever crowd he's courting. While they respect Romney for his business successes, debate skills, and electability, they recognize the need for drastic reforms and they're not sure they can rely on his commitment to pursue them. On the other hand, they largely trust the conservative purity of most of the remaining candidates, but are skeptical of their electability.

In this environment, I can't help but think Giuliani would have actually been in a pretty good position, had he made the leap. He clearly isn't a *social* conservative, but he's certainly a fiscal conservative with a pretty strong record in New York City to prove it. Sure, that record didn't help him much in 2008, but it was a different country then. The economy didn't tank until after the GOP candidate had already been settled on. When the Republicans were still battling it out, foreign policy was the key issue of the day and social issues were front and center.

That's not really the case these days. Look at how much trouble the strongest social conservatives in the GOP race are having right now. Michele Bachmann and Rick Santorum have sunk to the bottom of the polls, and Rick Perry's firm stances on social issues have done nothing to help his candidacy. Unsurprisingly, the 2012 election is about the economy, not social issues.

As we've seen with the popularity of Herman Cain and Chris Christie, GOP voters like plain talkers and bold thinkers who have no qualms in disregarding political correctness to press their agenda. I still see these qualities in Giuliani anytime he's interviewed or delivering a speech. In fact, the reason the media keeps coming to him for comment on the Occupy Wallstreet protests is because they recognize the stark contrast in styles between he and current New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg. Giuliani's criticisms of the Obama

administration over the past couple of years have been clear, concise, and at times masterful. I sometimes think he looks more presidential now than he did in 2008.

The debates have possibly been more important than any other factor in this year's campaign cycle, and as many might remember, Giuliani's a pretty decent debater with a knack for getting crowds riled up. He's also been fairly consistent on the issues. It would be hard to imagine him getting caught up in a finger-pointing contest like with Romney and Perry.

Fundraising would have surely been a challenge for Giuliani. Big donors most likely would have been hesitant to invest in his campaign, considering the outcome from three years earlier. But as we've seen from Herman Cain, a shoe-string budget with constant media appearances can go a long way toward rallying support. And with momentum, the donors who helped Giuliani in 2008 would have surely come back on board.

Most importantly, as odd as this might sound considering his 2008 performance, I think Giuliani would have been electable. He still has more name recognition than probably all GOP candidates in the race, and polls earlier this year actually showed him in the lead of all Republican candidates in the important primary state of New Hampshire... a state he barely campaigned in, in 2008. Nationally, he still polls well with independents, and at a time when the country is crying for strong leadership, he's one guy who has rarely been challenged on his credentials to lead.

There's no doubt that his biggest advantage as a candidate this time around would have been the overall weakness of the field. Yes, I've come to terms that this is indeed a lackluster field. Most voters aren't quite sold on anyone. Every candidate seems to have an Achilles heel that would certainly be used as ammunition against them during the general election. At this point, Giuliani's past marital problems and stance on abortion don't seem like any worse

obstacles than those faced by the other candidates.

In the end, it's all a moot point. The field is set. But one has to wonder if we'll look back to the presidential race a year from now and wonder why more high-profile candidates like Giuliani didn't take the plunge at such a dire time in our nation's history.