



# Shields, Brooks on Romney's Electability, Cain's 9-9-9 Plan, Wall St. Protests

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Columnists Mark Shields and David Brooks weigh in on the week's top political news, including GOP contender Mitt Romney's foreign policy vision and electability, rival Republican candidate Herman Cain's "9-9-9" plan to overhaul the U.S. tax code, plus the Occupy Wall Street protests that are spreading beyond New York City.

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### JEFFREY BROWN:

And that brings us to the analysis of Shields and Brooks. That's syndicated columnist Mark Shields and New York Times columnist David Brooks.

Welcome.

Mark, your reaction to what we just heard? It was Gov. Romney mostly on foreign affairs and defense. What jumped out at you?

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### MARK SHIELDS:

Well, listening to that, it struck me that, if Mitt Romney is the Republican nominee or Newt Gingrich or Rick Santorum, for that matter, Michele Bachmann, we would have the first time in 70 years that neither party would have anybody at the top of the ticket who had served in military service, which is really a change.

John McCain didn't have to prove his bona fides. He didn't have to prove how tough he was.

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### JEFFREY BROWN:

Is that what you thought he was doing today?

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### MARK SHIELDS:

Sure. That's what you have to do. You have to prove that you are — can overcompensate for never having served — or at least compensate, if not overcompensate. And I thought that's exactly what he was doing.

I mean, in the course of the speech today, Gov. Romney, whose foreign policy experience prior to this has been as commander in chief of the great border wars between Rhode Island and Massachusetts...

(LAUGHTER)

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**MARK SHIELDS:**

... made the point, he said that he's going to reverse the massive defense cuts of Barack Obama's administration.

Now, much to the consternation and irritation of liberals and Democrats, Barack Obama has increased defense spending every single year, just as George Bush did. So this is kind of a swagger, braggadocio speech. He had to do it. He knows the economy is about — the race is about the economy. It's what he wants to talk about, but he has to address this.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

David, what did you hear?

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**DAVID BROOKS:**

Yes, I heard pretty much where the Republican Party is, sort of where the Democratic Party is.

I personally don't — I think we're in a very polarized stage. I don't think on foreign policy and defense, the differences are actually that real. But one of the key points is that people are wondering, will people rally around Mitt Romney? He's obviously having a great moment.

I think they will, in part because they don't like Obama, but in part because the Republican Party is not ideologically divided right now on any issue. What he said today is pretty much where most Republicans are on foreign policy. Some people want to move a little out of Afghanistan faster, some slower. But it's not too much.

On domestic policy, pretty much similar agendas, tax reform and entitlement reform. So he is about where the party is. And so it's not like we're Reagan vs. Rockefeller. It's not like there's some big ideological split. So when they get a guy like him, who seems like a good executive, who seems to project order, who seems basically mature, I think the party will rally around him, assuming there are no bumps in the road, reasonably easily, actually.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

Well, that's the question. Is the party with him now? You heard Judy ask, where is that passion? And this is a week in which we saw Chris Christie say he won't run, Sarah Palin say she won't run.

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**MARK SHIELDS:**

Well, I mean, certainly, the direction, since Gov. Christie's announcement in particular, of party leadership, of party fund-

I don't think there's any question there's been a sense of the establishment moving. But Gov. Romney has to be a little concerned. I mean, here he is. The Republican Party has a great tradition, and that is, if you have run before, we will put you at the top of the list next time. It happened with John McCain. It happened with Bob Dole, with Ronald Reagan, who ran three times.

Democrats, once and you're out. The Democrats make you a non-person if you run once and lose. You're gone. But the Republicans are quite the opposite. Here's Romney. David's right. He's put together a good campaign. He's got professional people around him. He's been good in three debates in a row. He's raised money.

He's been through it before. He won in Massachusetts, which is a tough state, which is a pretty good credential. And yet, you saw the Republican Party, the leadership of the Republican Party, senior Republicans, Henry Kissinger, Nancy Reagan, all but begging Gov. Christie to get in the race, that they were excited about him. They were like teenyboppers at a Justin Bieber concert, for goodness' sakes.

(LAUGHTER)

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**MARK SHIELDS:**

Please, Gov. Christie, run.

And Judy's question was, do you excite people? And, as of now, he doesn't. And I think that has to bother him, but I think that he took a step closer to the nomination this week.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

And we did see, of course, new attention for Herman Cain.

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**DAVID BROOKS:**

Right.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

Coming up in the polls.

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**DAVID BROOKS:**

I actually have seen Henry Kissinger at a Justin Bieber concert. He's way over the top. It's much more than Christie.

(LAUGHTER)

**DAVID BROOKS:**

Yes, I mean, it's the season. Mark has talked about this in the past. The primary cycle has its own emotional rhythm.

And in the early days, you go for the guy who gives you the thrill, whether it's Howard Dean or Herman Cain. But then, in the last week or two, you finally decide, OK, I have actually got to pick a guy who is going to be president, a man or woman who is going to be president, and I'm going to go for the more established choice.

And that's, I think, what they're going to do in the end. There is no question there is suspicion of Romney. There is no question he will never excite people. There will never be passionate support. That's probably pretty healthy, I think, in retrospect.

But people are suspicious. What does he believe in? They're suspicious about the health care issue, obviously. How could a guy we like get elected in Massachusetts? But I think at the end of the day, they will fit in with him pretty comfortably.

And the final thing to be said — and Mark alluded to this — it's amazing how much better he is, even in that interview with Judy, than he was four years ago, just much, much better. And that speaks to a process of self-assessment and self-correction, which is pretty impressive.

I can't recall seeing a candidate improve that much over four years.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

But you mentioned Herman Cain just in such passing here.

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**DAVID BROOKS:**

OK. Do you want me to talk about...

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

Yes, I do. What explains — he comes up in these polls. He's almost a tie in one poll. He's number two in another poll.

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**DAVID BROOKS:**

He's a really attractive personality. He's happy. He's funny. He's smart. He's a good personality.

You like — when the debates turn to him, you're sort of like, oh, I will listen to this. This is fun. And then he's got this 999 plan, which I happen to think is of the right size. I might have some quibbles with it on policy terms, but he says, we have got this big mess. Let's have a simple plan, 9 percent income tax, 9 percent corporate tax, 9 percent sales tax.

It's simple. It's a big change. It's of the right scope of what we need to have a pro-growth policy. So, he's got both those things going for him.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

And yet he's not taken seriously.

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**MARK SHIELDS:**

Well, we really need a tax cut for Donald Trump — 9 percent income taxes.

Herman Cain — David touched on this — there are two kinds of conservatives. There are "five minutes to midnight" conservatives, those for whom it's gloomy, it's doomed and it's going to get worse. There's enough of those already running on the Republican side.

Then there's the "five minutes to sunrise" conservative. Jack Kemp was one. Ronald Reagan was one. Things are bad, but they're going to be better, and I'm going to tell you how.

Herman Cain, very much — and he's no Jack Kemp and he's no Ronald Reagan, but he's very much in that second camp. And — but he's likable. He's appealing.

He's not electable. Let's be very blunt about this. This is a man who has never run for library board. He's never been on a general election ballot for anything. And Republicans rail and rant about Barack Obama's lack of experience, having served in the Senate for four years when he ran for president in 2008.

You're not plausible talking about somebody whose one electoral challenge prior to this one was a Republican Senate primary he lost 2-1 to Johnny Isakson.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

Another thing that got a lot of attention — and Judy asked Gov. Romney about it at the end — is these Wall Street protests.

How big a deal do you think it is?

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**DAVID BROOKS:**

I'm skeptical. There are a couple of hundred people here and there. So I'm skeptical that they will have mass rallies to the extent, say, the Tea Party is on the right.

I think they do tap into a couple real issues. Student loans is talked about a lot. And you be able to declare bankruptcy from student loans. You should be able to get out of them under — and the second thing is Wall Street.

I think you don't have to be a left-winger to be really angry at Wall Street. You don't have to be a left-winger to think the Obama administration should have broken up those banks. They're too big to manage, too big to understand, too big to fail, and they're self-contradictory in the way they have to deal with themselves.

And so there's a lot of legitimate hostility, which I think they do represent. The one part of the theme of many of the motifs of the protests which bug me is the motif that it's 99 percent pure, 1 percent evil.

That's not the problem with America. You can't solve the fiscal — the debt problem by just taxing the 1 percent. You can't fix Medicare by just taxing the 1 percent. You can't fix any of our problems by saying, oh, it's just that 1 percent.

The problem in problem after problem is a lot of us. It's all of us. And so just saying, oh, it's we're pure and we're virtuous, that evil 1 percent, that's — it's silly. It's scapegoating. And that's just a motif of theirs which is — it's just a sideshow.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

But does it have the potential to grow into a larger movement that actually impacts politics?

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**MARK SHIELDS:**

Since the crisis of 2008, every major — every reporting trip tells you two things. There are two targets of rage that American voters feel: Washington, D.C., and Wall Street.

The Tea Party addressed Washington, D.C. It didn't lay a hand on Wall Street, and nor has either party. Certainly, the Republicans haven't. The Democrats have taken limited measures. But that is sitting there. These are the people who were the architects and the engineers of the financial crisis, with their exotic, erotic, whatever they were, self-financing, and self-prospering instruments that nobody else understood.

They have made nothing. They have contributed nothing to the country. They made deals for themselves. And once they got in trouble, they turned to firefighters and nurses and waitresses and small business people to bail them out.

So is it legit? You better believe it's legit. Is it for real? Is there a tradition in this country of protests and citizen outrage leading to real changes, whether it's abolition, whether it's prohibition, whether it's civil rights, whether it's anti-war? There sure is.

I think they have touched something. I really do. And I think it's real. Whether a leader will emerge, I don't know. The Tea Party did pretty well without a leader.

Tom Gallagher, the analyst, made a very, I thought, great point. He said, if the Democrats lose in 2012, and this group is sustained, it will have an enormous influence in the Democratic Party, because they are providing — just as the Tea Party provided energy for the Republicans who were dispirited after 2008, they are providing an energy charge to — organized labor is trying to hook up to them.

The Democrats are trying to hook up to them at this point.

**JEFFREY BROWN:**

You get the last word here. There's been many calls about, where is the Tea Party of the left, right?

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**DAVID BROOKS:**

Yes. I would be careful. I think the radicalism may scare away more people than it would attract.

To be fair to the Tea Party, they made the crucial point. It's not Wall Street and Washington. The two are so intermingled. That's the problem. And that was Wall Street — that was the Tea Party's central theme, that these two people are in bed with each other, which is why we haven't really seen fundamental banking reform.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

All right.

David Brooks, Mark Shields, thanks, as always.

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**DAVID BROOKS:**

Thank you.

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**MARK SHIELDS:**

Jeffrey, thank you.

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