

Polls & Elections

Superdelegates or *Supertrustees*? The Timing and Consistency of Superdelegate Decisions

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Do superdelegates heed public opinion in deciding whom to support in nomination contests or do they follow their own conscience? We examine both individual and environmental factors peculiar to superdelegate decision making to ascertain whether and how they integrate populist considerations into their nomination choices. Via a survey of superdelegates in the 2008 presidential nomination contest, we analyze both the timing of a superdelegate's decision as well as any change in their candidate preference. Superdelegates who prioritize constituent concerns endorse earlier but are no more or less likely to switch their candidate preference during the campaign.

Keywords: superdelegates, elite behavior, public opinion, party nominations

The past several decades of elite study have informed researchers that elected officials strive to maintain proximate distance to the policy preferences of their constituents (e.g., Miller and Stokes 1963; Clausen 1973; Kingdon 1973; Fenno 1978; Mann 1978; Herrera and Taylor 1994; Herrera 1995; Sullivan et al. 1993; Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995; Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002)—a condition Robert Weissberg (1978) termed “dyadic correspondence.” Our political system, however, is teeming with unelected political elites who have enormous policymaking or gatekeeping powers at their disposal (see, e.g., Masket 2009; Cohen et al. 2008), raising the specter that an electoral connection (Mayhew 1974) is a necessary but insufficient condition to bring about what Weissberg further terms “collective correspondence,” or the congruence between the aggregated preferences of the public and its elites, systemwide.

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However threatening this prospect sounds, several scholars have found that unelected elites can be quite responsive to public opinion. Bureaucrats, for instance, frequently integrate public input into their decision making (Storing 1976; Warwick 1981; Rohr 1986; Burke and Cleary 1989; Kerwin 1999; Goodsell 2004), perhaps even more so than elected legislators (Long 1952), although there is often disagreement about the definitional boundaries of both “responsiveness” and “public wishes” (Saltzstein 1992). Similarly, others (Barnum 1985; Link 1995; Mishler and Sheehan 1996; Flemming and Wood 1997; McGuire and Stimson 2004) suggest that justices on the Supreme Court are sensitive to shifts in public opinion, much as are those who depend on the consent of voters to enjoy the trappings of their office: “Hardly indifferent, these politicians are keen to pick up the faintest signals in their political environment. Like antelope in an open field, they cock their ears and focus their full attention on the slightest sign of danger” (Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995, 559).

But do all unelected elites exercise such sensitivity to public opinion? One can plausibly argue that judges and bureaucrats are necessarily responsive to the public out of professional necessity; executive bureaucracies are bound by the Administrative Procedures Act and other statutes to consider citizen input throughout the various stages of the decision-making process (Kerwin 1999), while the decisions of federal jurists become part of the public debate, subject to the circumvention and enforcement prerogatives of the legislative and executive branches, respectively. But what about those elites who are not so visible and can exercise a great deal of their power under the cloak of relative anonymity? Are they as responsive to public wishes? This paper focuses on a particular class of elite that received a great deal of attention in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election—Democratic Party Leaders and Elected Officials (PLEOs), more commonly known as “superdelegates.”

Since their inception resulting from a 1982 rule change, these unpledged, ex-officio delegates have attracted little attention from scholars who study presidential nominations. This has not been without good reason—most of the Democratic members of Congress, sitting governors, former presidents and vice presidents, members of the Democratic National Committee, and other former and current high-ranking party officials that are superdelegates jump onto the bandwagon of the presumptive party nominee well in advance of the convention, making them inconsequential to the outcome. Not since establishment candidate Walter Mondale bested party insurgent Gary Hart in 1984 with the help of superdelegates has this class of delegate provided any meaningful contribution to the selection of a nominee for the Democratic Party, and even this is subject to debate (Mayer 2009).

Yet in spite of their unromantic past, superdelegates are elites with incredible power at their disposal, should certain circumstances obtain. Such gatekeeping potential was evident in 2008, when a freshman senator barely two years into his term toppled a titan of Democratic Party politics, former first lady and New York senator Hillary Clinton, with superdelegates providing the votes to seal his nomination. Superdelegates were on center stage again in 2016. After strong showings in Iowa and Nevada as well as a solid win in New Hampshire, the outsider candidate and junior senator from Vermont, Bernie Sanders, was virtually tied in the pledged delegate count with Clinton, again the party’s frontrunner. Indeed Sanders was within a couple hundred delegates of Clinton as late as March and achieving notable upsets, as in Michigan. However, few astute political observers ever gave him close to even odds in the race since Clinton had chalked up an early and substantial lead in superdelegates.

The early disparity in superdelegates despite the electoral context drove almost 200,000 of his supporters to sign a petition calling on superdelegates to follow the will of the people and MoveOn.org pledged to target superdelegates that did not do so (Dickinson 2016).

In this paper, we investigate whether Democratic superdelegates condition their support for a candidate on the expressed preferences of rank-and-file party members in the electorate during a contested nomination, or whether they follow their own preferences. Simply put, do superdelegates face electoral constraint, even if they do not hold public office?

The decision-making process of superdelegates has serious ramifications from the standpoints of democratic theory and party organization. In terms of the former, if superdelegates do indeed consider the expressed preferences of primary voters and caucus-goers, then fears of unelected powerbrokers cutting deals in “smoke-filled rooms” are grossly misplaced. Such was the concern of reformers after the 1968 election, when Hubert Humphrey was nominated by Democratic delegates without competing in a single primary, prompting the creation of the McGovern-Fraser Commission, which ultimately ushered in the “reform” period of presidential nominations. From the view of party organizations, however, such congruence with the party in the electorate stands in contrast to the express purpose of superdelegates, as envisioned by the Hunt Commission that created them: to provide input from party leaders and officials serving in government to moderate the more immediate whims of the party in the electorate. Doing so, it was thought, might prevent unpopular candidacies, such as George McGovern’s in 1972, and presidencies, like Carter’s (Aldrich 2009).¹

This tension is manifest in the attitudinal differences between superdelegates and rank-and-file Democratic primary voters and caucus-goers. The latter are far more likely to view the Democratic nomination process as elite-driven and inherently undemocratic (Fridkin, Kenney, and Gershon 2011). Superdelegates, on the other hand, view their ex-officio roles more positively, as serving the best interests of the party and ultimately conforming to popular will, even if they are no more able to assess the ideological location and issue positions of rank-and-file partisans in the electorate than are pledged delegates, who are presumably closer to the people (Herrera 1994). The endorsements from superdelegates who are members of Congress, for example, become more heavily associated with national poll standing over local opinion as the campaign wears on (Hasecke, Meinke, and Scott 2013). Yet, superdelegates have also been shown to vote in line with their own preferences and maintain those to the convention floor (Southwell 2010). Beyond these insights, existing research offers little guidance by way of what to expect of superdelegates’ concerns. It is the aim of this study then to establish the degree to which populist considerations influence the endorsement choices of Democratic superdelegates.

Superdelegates’ Electoral Connection

The central hypothesis of this study is that superdelegates are sensitive to the political environments in which they operate, particularly the electoral desires of their fellow

1. For reviews of nomination politics see Norrander (1996) and Christenson and Smidt (forthcoming).

party members, even if they do not hold public office. We refer to this relationship as the Electoral Connection Hypothesis and leverage the unique nature of the 2008 nomination race to explore this hypothesis in the context of two superdelegate behaviors: (1) the timing of an endorsement and (2) whether or not to switch support.

While the final nomination vote is fascinating in its own right, the decision at the convention is largely a *fait accompli* in modern nomination campaigns, at least from the perspective of constituent concern, because it is primarily based on the tally of results from the primaries and caucuses. Indeed, many superdelegates often fall-in-line with the candidate who has the most delegates at the nomination in order to publicly signal a unified party and bolster the Party's chances in the general election. Thus there are two opportunities in which superdelegates may be seen to weigh constituent concerns relative to their own and both of these occur substantially prior to the nominating convention: deciding when, if ever, to publicly endorse a candidate, and deciding to switch support to a different candidate. Both of these opportunities were fully available and on display in the ultracompetitive 2008 nomination contest.

The election of 2008 was atypical of most nomination contests. For the first time in over 50 years, neither party was running a candidate as an incumbent, prompting a flood of entrants from each party into the race. On the Democratic side, Clinton early positioned herself as the frontrunner and seemingly inevitable nominee, raising a great deal of money and dominating in the polls (Burden 2010). Before the first caucus vote in Iowa was cast, a *New York Times*/CBS News poll of 588 superdelegates found 27% of them had pledged to support her, although the vast majority remained uncommitted.² Even after the Super Tuesday primaries on February 5, in which neither candidate delivered a fatal blow to the opposition, Clinton still clung to her lead in committed superdelegates. But as the month of February wore on, and Clinton lost ten primaries and caucuses in a row, superdelegates began migrating toward Barack Obama.

As the nomination struggle continued, warnings that superdelegates should respect the "will of voters" began to reverberate from the Obama campaign and its supporters, even though the popular vote between the two candidates remained very close: "My personal opinion is it would be a mistake and disastrous either way for the superdelegates—insiders, establishment politicians—to come along and overturn the expressed view of those pledged delegates," exclaimed Obama supporter and Massachusetts Senator John Kerry,³ even though Clinton won his state's primary in a 15-point landslide. Uncommitted superdelegates, meanwhile, either kept quiet or came out and pledged to support Obama, until, shortly before the West Virginia primary on May 13, Obama surpassed Clinton in the superdelegate tally. Narrowly trailing in superdelegates and pledged delegates, Clinton remained in the race until the last states of Montana and South Dakota had voted, and conceded the nomination shortly thereafter on June 7. This narrative of a long and competitive campaign suggests that there were multiple opportunities for superdelegates to carefully calculate when to endorse a candidate and to change their support.

2. Survey conducted October 23 to November 9, 2007. Results can be found at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/08/us/politics/08delegates.html>

3. Nagourney and Hulse (2008).

Endorsement Timing

The stiff competition between a host of candidates in the 2008 nomination, but particularly between Obama and Clinton, suggests that superdelegates may have felt tension between their own preferences and that of their constituents in deciding when to endorse a candidate, if at all. Endorsements have been shown to have a strong influence on the outcome of the election. Indeed, Cohen et al (2008) and Steger (2007) show key political endorsements to be among the most influential mechanisms of the primary election. Endorsements work directly to signal the strength of a candidate's expected delegate count. But more importantly, these public displays of support work indirectly by helping candidates build momentum over the course of the campaign. Despite their essential role in the primary, little to nothing is known about the factors that contribute to the timing of the decision to endorse, especially among superdelegates.

Superdelegates who endorse early are taking a risk. They are gambling that either their state or other elites follow suit in the caucus or primary, or that the endorsee ultimately becomes the nominee and vindicates their decision to endorse. Thus the timing of superdelegates' decisions may be strongly relevant to the Electoral Connection Hypothesis. It is possible that the period of time that elapses before making an endorsement may be a result of: (1) waiting for a "cue" from constituents, in the form of an election outcome, polls or other indicator, at which point it becomes permissible to endorse the winner, while appearing to be on the side of voters or (2) waiting for a cue from the pledged delegates, which would make the decision for them, or (3) making a totally independent decision based upon either professional aspirations, past experiences, or political beliefs.

It is not clear, however, whether each of these factors should be expected to increase or decrease the amount of time it takes for a superdelegate to make an endorsement. A *delegate* model of representation might suggest that constituent preferences act as a heuristic to simplify decision making and speed-up endorsements. Alternatively, public considerations may merely add to a number of factors in consideration, thereby increasing the difficulty of a summary evaluation and delaying endorsements. In that case, the relative autonomy felt by representatives who perceive themselves as *trustees* might lead to quicker endorsements. Complicating things further, there is good reason to expect that delegate and trustee roles are conditioned on the degree of uncertainty surrounding policy preferences and perceptions of competence (Fox and Shotts 2009), which means that there are different contexts in which we should expect politicians to behave as delegates and trustees. To that end, the research here explores the effect of delegate and trustee perceptions on the timing of endorsements in the context of a primary election.

Changing Preferences

The long campaign and increasing electoral gains of the dark-horse candidate over the frontrunner and long-shot candidates may have led many superdelegates to reconsider their initial support. Thus the second way we test the Electoral Connection Hypothesis is

to examine “switchers,” or those who changed their preference from their initial choice to the other candidate, presumably, but not necessarily, from a reassessment of the electoral environment at some point in the prolonged struggle between Obama and Clinton. It is logical to expect superdelegates who are elected officials to hew *the* electoral connection that they have become accustomed to while trying to maintain their office. It is less likely, although not implausible, that unelected superdelegates would follow this same pattern.

We evaluate the Electoral Connection Hypothesis through the lens of change in superdelegate preferences. Where we do find evidence of change, we suspect that the inclination to “go with the voters” will be stronger for superdelegates who are themselves elected officials of any sort. The logic for this hypothesis is straightforward: elected officials, if they are single-minded seekers of reelection (Mayhew 1974), are already accustomed to balancing the desires of their constituencies against their own preferences. On salient issues extra weight will be given to perceived constituent wishes. Such wishes may also imply underlying support from powerful networks of partisan elites, which have been shown to affect both state (Masket 2009) and national nominations (Cohen et al. 2008). We thus hypothesize that those who believe they should vote to nominate the candidate supported by the majority of voters in their state or district will be most likely to change if the results of their state diverge with their personal preference. The motivation for this hypothesis is best expressed by the words of one of the New York congressmen supporting Hillary Clinton: “For me, it’s really simple. My district went more than 2-to-1 for Hillary, so it’s clear I’m pretty solidly in Hillary’s camp.”⁴

In addition to a stronger electoral connection for public officeholders, superdelegates who have a “delegate” conceptualization of representation should be more likely to switch than those who view themselves as “trustees,” should their constituency be in opposition to their own preferences. Likewise, examination of polls should be positively associated with switching. However, the effect could be different, depending on when polls were consulted. Looking at polls before deciding whom to support would indicate the superdelegate tried to support the candidate that could best beat the Republicans in the fall election, therefore making a switch less likely. But examination of polls during the prolonged struggle between Clinton and Obama would indicate equivocation with one’s earlier decision whom to support, and might suggest greater responsiveness to public opinion, making a switch more likely.

Data

We are able to research the phenomena of superdelegates’ timing of decision and of preference change with the aid of a unique survey of Democratic superdelegates conducted in the fall of 2008 after the conventions. The survey data is augmented with aggregate state-level electoral and demographic data.⁵ Because the purpose of this paper

4. Public statement posted on the New York Times’ Superdelegate web page: <http://politics.nytimes.com/election-guide/2008/results/superdelegates/index.html>

5. Refer to Appendix B for details on survey design and implementation.

TABLE 1
Survey Sample Demographics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Percent or Mean</i>
Add-on	14.81%
DPL	1.23%
Elected official	23.13%
Age (in years)	59.74
Female	43.21%
Education (six point scale)	5.29
Income (six point scale)	4.77
South	21.60%
Military	21.25%
Labor	33.33%
White	79.63%
Black	10.49%
Latino	6.17%

is to glean from superdelegates insight into the various factors that contributed to their nomination decision and the timing of that decision, aggregate data alone is insufficient; though whenever possible we verified the individual level survey data on the superdelegates with that of public record.

The response rate for the survey was 20%, which gives us an n of 162, with every U.S. state and territory represented. This response rate is lower than the CPS Convention Delegate Studies of 1980 (45%), 1984 (43%), and 1988 (40%). Contrary to our study, however, these earlier studies included pledged delegates—delegates who receive far less attention from the media, are largely invisible to the public eye, exhibit less independence in decision making and thus have higher response rates. Survey response rates for elites are notoriously low, and superdelegates are *the elite of the elite* strata of the Democratic Party power structure. A place where the survey is unrepresentative of superdelegates writ large is in the low response rate from members of Congress. Representatives and senators comprise about 3% and 1% of the sample, respectively, as members of Congress tend to avoid taking surveys (Robinson 1960). This is problematic in that members of Congress represent about 33% of all superdelegates (Mayer 2009). We chose to deal with such nonrandom missing data by excluding congressional superdelegates from the analyses below. Thus any implications of this study are limited to superdelegates that are not current members of Congress.

Table 1 provides the sample demographics, with mean values for categorical variables and percentages for dummy variables. As should be expected, superdelegates are highly educated with higher incomes than the population at large. The bulk of respondents were white, with 10% black and 6% latino. A third of the sample hailed from union households, around 20% from the south and a similar number from military backgrounds. In terms of party status, only a couple of Distinguished Party Leaders (DPL) responded, while 14% reported being an Add-On member to the convention.

Our analyses surround two dependent variables—the timing of the decision and any switch in that decision. The timing of the endorsement decision is the exact day in

which the decision was announced publicly. These were culled from searches of newspaper articles and candidate websites. Though we have a fairly comprehensive collection of endorsements, it is important to note that many of the superdelegates either did not publicly endorse a candidate or did not do so until the convention. Out of a total 830 superdelegates in our study, we located the timing of endorsements from 579 of them, or about 70% of the superdelegate population.

We conceive of a switch in candidate preference as a personal choice in any direction. Although the overwhelming majority of change that took place was in Barack Obama's direction, the Electoral Connection Hypothesis is not exclusive to Clinton superdelegates. For example, it is equally plausible that private supporters of Obama felt obligated to side with the voters of their state if they went largely for Clinton. One of the weaknesses of nonsurvey data is that it is impossible to know which candidate our respondents originally preferred if they did not make that publicly known. Moreover a public announcement of change of support is less likely for lesser-known superdelegates. To that end, the survey specifically asked superdelegates to reveal whether or not they changed their minds in support of a candidate during the campaign. Importantly, this leaves open the possibility that some superdelegates who avoided public endorsement until the last primaries on June 3 still had a personal preference that they modified in response to electoral events or other stimuli, like constituent concerns.

The key independent variables for our hypothesis are garnered from two questions on the survey about superdelegates' sense of representative duty. The first question asks superdelegates to weigh the importance of supporting the Democrat supported by the voters of his/her state on a rating scale. The survey also asked respondents to directly consider a situation in which there is conflict between what an elected official feels is best and what his/her constituents want. That is, in times when the values of a delegate and a trustee are in opposition, superdelegates were asked which they believe officials should follow.

While our primary concern is the electoral connection hypothesis, and thus the relationship between the variables above, we recognize that a host of other personal and environmental factors may also contribute to the decision-making calculi of superdelegates. Their personal and professional backgrounds, political attitudes, economic evaluations, and other issues, as well as details of their participation in the nomination process may all affect their decisions. We therefore control for these factors in our models and describe them below in terms of six broad categories: party status, candidate viability, issues, ideology, demographics, and state characteristics.

Included in the models are four indicators of superdelegate party backgrounds, including whether or not they were an Add-On member to the convention, a DPL, in an elected position of some type and the number of times the superdelegate has attended a Democratic National Convention in the past. Regardless of position, there are a number of reasons why superdelegates may choose to vote strategically, that is, take into account the candidate most likely to win the nomination and/or the general election. The models below include controls for the candidate that is believed to best face the Republicans, as well as indicators of perceived state success for the two frontrunner candidates. For similar reasons we also include dummy variables for attention to general election matchup polls and nomination campaign polls.

Perceptions of issue importance and subjective evaluations of the economy are well-known factors of candidate preference. According to the survey, the key policy issues for superdelegates in the 2008 nomination campaign were the economy, health care, and the Iraq war. The models include dummies for perceiving any of these three issues as the most important issues in the campaign. Both retrospective (Key 1966; Kinder and Kieweit 1979; 1981) and prospective (Downs 1957) sociotropic evaluations of the economy are also included.

Superdelegates, though all Democrats, vary in terms of political ideology, as did the candidates, although the distribution of Democratic superdelegates on the familiar seven-point ideology scale has a heavy positive skew. In addition, the frontrunner status of both a black and a female candidate led to speculation that race and gender-based ideologies would be especially important indicators in this election. We control for general political ideology as well as symbolic sexism (Swim et al. 1995) and symbolic racism (Kinder and Sears 1981; McConahay and Hough 1976; Sears and Kinder 1971).

A standard battery of demographics control for a host of potential subgroup advantages for each candidate. For example, Southwell (2010) finds that female superdelegates were more likely to endorse Clinton, and African Americans, Obama. We include indicators of age, race, gender, religiosity, relationship status, union and military households, income and southern residence.

Finally, we acknowledge the possibility that the general makeup of a superdelegate's state may have an effect on the timing and consistency of their support. Particularly homogenous environments with obvious candidate preferences, may, for example, prompt superdelegates to follow suit. We control for the percent of blue-collar, Latino and black individuals in states.

Endorsement Timing Results

To answer the question of which factors most influence the timing of superdelegates' candidate endorsements, we utilize survival, or event history, models. "Survival" refers to the period of public indecision, and is terminated when an endorsement is made. Specifically, we employ a Cox proportional hazards model (1972).⁶ As mentioned above, we explore both the key representative duty variables associated with the Electoral Connection Hypothesis as well as the series of controls generally related to superdelegates' political beliefs, personal and professional backgrounds, and the environment in which they make their decisions.

Before turning to the results, we note that the data shows some potential for non-proportional hazards; such proportionality is a key assumption of the Cox model. In particular, proportional hazards tests on the model suggest that the demographic variables, labor household and household income, exhibit some signs of non-proportionality.⁷ In

6. Details on the Cox model are available in the Appendix.

7. We checked violations of the proportional hazards assumption graphically with Kaplan-Meier curves (see Hess 1995) and by testing for a slope in a generalized linear regression of scaled Schoenfeld residuals (1982, but see Grambsch and Therneau 1994).

order to alleviate concerns of the effect of nonproportional hazards, and because the potentially violating variables are ancillary, we show via stratification of the potentially nonproportional variables that the results are consistent. That is, we run both a fully specified Cox model as well as a stratified Cox model and present the results side by side. The stratified model does not assume the same baseline hazards for those in the different income and labor households; such is appropriate in the case of nonproportionality but prevents the estimation of coefficients for the stratified variables.

The results of the model of superdelegate endorsement timing are presented in Table 2.⁸ We report the hazard ratios from the Cox proportional hazards models, instead of the coefficients, due to the relative ease of interpretation. The hazard ratio is just the exponentiated coefficient, or the ratio of the hazards for a one-unit change in the relevant covariate, which is a more interpretable statistic. Thus, if the ratio is greater than one, there is an increase in the hazard or risk due to a one-unit increase in the covariate. Ratios less than one signal a decrease in the hazard or an increase in the chance of survival. Thus, in models of superdelegates' endorsement decisions, a ratio greater than one indicates that a positive movement in the covariate leads to a quicker decision. A ratio of less than one means that an increase in the covariate leads to a postponement of the endorsement.

Before turning to the key independent variables of the Electoral Connection Hypothesis, we begin by examining some intriguing findings in the control variables. To begin, the model explores the opportunity for a superdelegate's position within the party, or status, to affect the rate at which s/he makes a decision. Of these, being an Add-On superdelegate increases the time it takes to make a decision. Such is hardly surprising, as Add-Ons are often called to participate last minute. Thus it may be the case that the Add-Ons have the luxury of indecision because they are unsure of whether they will be a superdelegate or not.⁹

Candidate viability should also play a role in the timing of superdelegate endorsements. If candidates appear unviable, superdelegates may be reluctant to endorse their preferred candidate, for fear of wasting their support (as is the case for primary voters, see, e.g., Morton and Williams 1999). In other words, we expect that concerns of general election viability should factor into the timing of endorsements. Those who believe that their candidate has an especially good chance of winning the general election may endorse earlier, while those unsure of their preferred candidate's viability in the general election may wait. We similarly explore concerns about which candidate can win superdelegates' home states, which can better face the Republican challenger and which superdelegates pay attention to candidate polls in the primary.

Despite the reasonableness of these expectations, only the believed likelihood that Obama would win the superdelegate's home state significantly impacted the timing of the decision; Clinton's respective chances and general attention to polls were

8. We present a fully specified model in the text in order to explore a host of related hypotheses. Given the degrees of freedom, and because we are primarily interested in the trustee and delegate hypotheses, we also ran a more parsimonious Cox model with only the significant variables from Table 2 along with the trustee and delegate variables. The substantive results are unchanged suggesting model robustness.

9. It is also possible that Add-On's are lesser known and thus receive less media attention when endorsing a candidate. Out of our sample, 63 Add-Ons were found to have endorsed a candidate; 15 did not.

TABLE 2
Cox Proportional Hazard Model of Superdelegate Endorsement Timing

<i>Covariate</i>	<i>Cox Model</i>		<i>Stratified Cox Model</i>	
	<i>Hazard Ratio</i>	<i>Std. Err.</i>	<i>Hazard Ratio</i>	<i>Std. Err.</i>
<u><i>Status</i></u>				
Add-on	0.370	0.158**	0.355	0.177**
DPL	0.853	0.798	1.274	1.238
Elected official	1.114	0.396	1.190	0.552
Past attendance	1.121	0.081	1.057	0.102
<u><i>Representative Duty</i></u>				
Majority of state	1.874	0.358***	1.825	0.426***
Delegate role of representation	4.215	1.762***	13.336	8.552***
<u><i>Viability</i></u>				
Face Republicans	1.378	0.293	1.310	0.375
Obama chances in state	0.840	0.086*	0.883	0.125
Clinton chances in state	1.097	0.102	1.027	0.120
Attention to polls	0.667	0.205	0.545	0.219
Nomination polls	0.997	0.323	0.830	0.359
<u><i>Issues</i></u>				
Iraq as most important	0.459	0.250	0.219	0.161**
Economy as most important	0.391	0.172**	0.264	0.134***
Healthcare as most important	0.134	0.072***	0.117	0.083***
Retrospective sociotropic economy	3.097	1.577**	3.143	1.855*
Prospective sociotropic economy	0.800	0.162	0.889	0.208
<u><i>Ideology</i></u>				
Ideology	0.678	0.125**	0.579	0.143**
Racism	1.020	0.054	1.034	0.067
Sexism	0.746	0.131*	0.602	0.138**
<u><i>Demographics</i></u>				
Age	0.997	0.020	1.019	0.026
Female	1.681	0.584	1.219	0.528
Religiosity	1.057	0.116	1.097	0.137
Education	0.762	0.122*	0.721	0.148
Military background	2.293	1.191	1.669	1.014
Labor household	0.995	0.365	1.000	-
Black	0.899	0.478	0.523	0.317
Latino/a	6.784	5.276**	12.976	13.417**
Married/partnered	0.938	0.416	0.841	0.474
Income	1.185	0.177	0.924	-
Southern	0.756	0.374	0.747	0.462
<u><i>State Characteristics</i></u>				
State % black	0.997	0.016	0.998	0.022
State % latino	0.995	0.018	1.016	0.022
State % blue collar	0.919	0.045*	0.945	0.060
Log Likelihood	-290.872		-124.238	
LR Chi-square (df = 33)	67.970		62.980	
N	90		90	

Note: Statistical significance marked at * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

nonsignificant. Believing that Obama was likely to win their state in November pushed superdelegates to hold off on voicing their support—not an unsurprising finding perhaps, given concerns that Obama’s race and/or newcomer status would make it more difficult for him than Clinton to carry some states in the general election.

Our hypothesis that state-level demographic indicators may condition a superdelegate’s timing was not supported by our data; according to the model, superdelegates are not paying much attention to their state’s non-white racial makeup. Rather, key individual preferences play a much greater role in the timing of their decisions than any of the state-level indicators. In fact, only the percent blue-collar in a state has a significant relationship to the duration of the endorsement, and increases in this prolong the amount of time it takes superdelegates to make a decision, even controlling for the host of individual level factors in our model. Superdelegates from heavily blue-collar states may feel the need to await official union support or other signals from labor—a very important Democratic constituency—before voicing their support. Interestingly, the racial composition of the state gives superdelegates no such pause.

The timing of endorsement decisions may also be impacted by traditional predictors of vote choice, like issue concerns and evaluations of the economy. Because some issues are addressed sooner than others and some divergences between the candidates’ platforms are clearer than others, which issue the superdelegate thinks is most important may help determine the duration of the decision. Here we test the impact of three of the most important issues in the 2008 primary: the war in Iraq, the economy and healthcare. The Iraq War, despite the media attention it received, was not even marginally significant. We suspect that candidate differences on the war—Clinton voted to authorize the use of force in Iraq, while Obama (not in the Senate at the time) said he would have opposed it—were stronger predictors of candidate choice among pledged delegates and Democratic partisans than among the elected and organizational core that comprise the ranks of superdelegates.

The economy and healthcare, however, were well within the conventional bounds of statistical significance. Furthermore, the perceived importance of these issues both act, though mildly, to increase the time it takes superdelegates to voice their support. Thus, having believed that either healthcare or the economy was the most important issue led to a delay in superdelegates’ endorsements. Superdelegates’ policy orientation and perspectives made them more cautious, perhaps waiting for candidates to better elaborate their positions and how they differed from one another.

Evaluations of the economy played a role as well. Retrospective sociotropic economic evaluations were largely negative but still relevant to the timing of the endorsement. Those superdelegates that perceived the nation’s economy to have gotten better over the previous year—one might wonder who these people are—or at least less worse, took substantially less time to endorse a candidate. Contrarily, beliefs about the future state of the nation’s economy were inconsequential to endorsement timing. We can only speculate as to the cause for the lack of prospective effect here, but certainly the oft-heard comment in Democratic circles that the economy can only get better with any change in the White House (Clinton, Obama, or otherwise) may suggest a plausible explanation for the null result.

Out of the host of demographic variables, only being Latina/o and level of education have a significant impact on the timing of the endorsement, and then, only marginally.

Interestingly, the ethnicity variable poses the largest increase in risk. In other words, being a Latino/a superdelegate leads to a quicker endorsement than any other variable in the model. Holding all else equal, Latinos face a hazard six times greater than non-Latinos. This impact is only rivaled by beliefs about the duty of elected officials.

As aforementioned, we have some reasons to expect that gradations of ideology may determine the timing of the endorsement. Racially resentful individuals may feel reluctant about supporting a black candidate, but may change their minds along with candidate viability or various cues. Likewise, those that are resentful of women might be initially unwilling to support a woman. In general we might expect the most liberal members to act more quickly to show their support, relative to those of less liberal persuasion; steadfast liberals will have less reason to delay their endorsement due to the ideological conflict from more sexist or racist attitudes.

While we do not find evidence that underlying racism affects the timing of the decision, sexism did lead to a delay in the endorsement. Similarly, general political ideology also significantly impacts candidate endorsement timing: the more less liberal a superdelegate, the lengthier the evaluation period. (While most superdelegates located themselves on the liberal end of the spectrum, the seven point ideology scale led to substantial variance, such that a one point increase from liberal to more conservative decreases the hazard by about 40 percent.)

Finally, we expect from the Electoral Connection Hypothesis that superdelegates, as political representatives of a sort, may be affected by their perceived duties as representatives—and thus how they balance their own preferences with that of their community. We find that concern over the vote choices of one's fellow citizens leads to a shorter decision-making process than personal preferences alone. Both the perceived delegate role (i.e., constituent vs. personal preferences) and the preference of the majority of state variables corroborate this expectation. In fact, the perceived balance between constituent and elected preferences is one of the most powerful indicators of a decrease in the time of the endorsement. The hazard ratio is 4.22, the second largest in the model and highly significant. Superdelegates who believe that elected officials should follow their constituents at these times have a hazard about four times greater than those who believe elected officials should follow their own preferences.

To further unpack the strength of constituent concerns versus conscience over the course of the campaign, Figure 1 compares superdelegates on the constituent and conscience variables in terms of the hazard function. Here we smooth the baseline hazards for each superdelegate composition by five days with a Gaussian density function.¹⁰ Allowing only their preference on this question to differ, Figure 1 compares the hazards of those on both sides of the question. The solid line corresponds to a hazard rate for those who believe elected officials should follow their constituents (delegates), while the dashed line corresponds to the same base hazard, except that the superdelegates here prefer elected officials to follow their own conscience (trustees). The hazards are highly proportional and quite similar at times, especially at the earliest stages of the campaign. However there are substantial divergences in the hazards in late January through early March and again in late March

10. Additional details on the model specifications are available in the appendix.

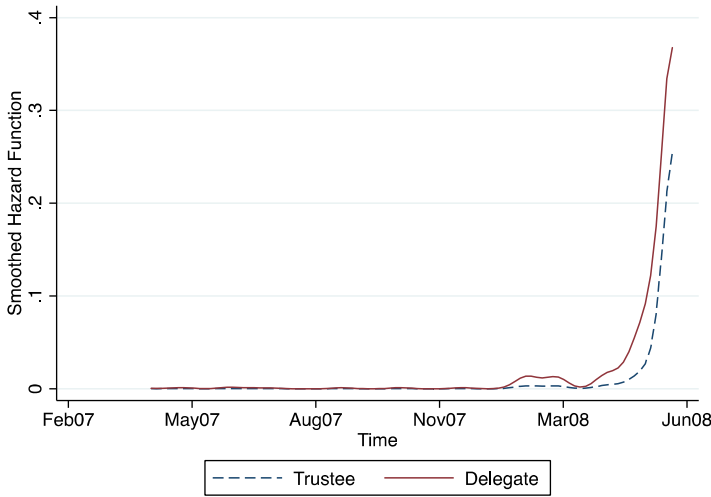


FIGURE 1. Estimated Baseline Hazard Function of Superdelegate Endorsement: Constituent Concern Shows a Higher Hazard than Personal Conscience

through to the middle of June. Thus beginning in the new year, the hazards diverge, only returning ephemerally in mid-March. The greater hazard associated with constituent concern returns in late March and remains distinct throughout the rest of the campaign.

In sum, the evidence strongly suggests that constituent concerns among superdelegates lead to quicker endorsements: those that believed public opinion in their state was important came to quicker decisions. Furthermore, those that believed that constituent preferences were more important than their own preferences, when in conflict, also arrived at their decisions sooner. Rather than complicating the decision-making, superdelegates' constituent concerns seemed to simplify it. In other words, relying on the public brought superdelegates to a decision sooner than going it alone.

Preference Change Results

In order to examine which factors contributed to a change in candidate preference among superdelegates, we estimate the probability of switching via logistic regression, where a switch in endorsement is coded 1 and remaining the same is coded 0. Positive coefficients therefore indicate a greater likelihood of switching. Table 3 displays the results of the switching model; logit coefficients, standard errors and the change in probability of switching (i.e., moving from the minimum to the maximum value of the covariate while holding all other values at their mean or mode) are listed.¹¹

11. We present a fully specified model in the text in order to explore a host of related hypotheses. Given the degrees of freedom, and because we are primarily interested in the trustee and delegate hypotheses, we also ran a more parsimonious logit model with only the significant variables from Table 3 along with the trustee and delegate variables. The substantive results are unchanged suggesting model robustness.

TABLE 3
Logit Model of Superdelegate Switching Candidate Support

<i>Covariate</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Std. Err.</i>	Δ
<u><i>Status</i></u>			
Add-on	2.199	0.940**	0.499
Elected official	-1.783	0.757**	-0.316
Past attendance	0.063	0.124	0.144
<u><i>Representative Duty</i></u>			
Majority of state	-0.074	0.306	-0.050
Delegate role of representation	-0.310	0.802	-0.067
<u><i>Viability</i></u>			
Face Republicans	0.639	0.420	0.320
Obama chances in state	-0.075	0.187	-0.067
Clinton chances in state	0.792	0.233***	0.583
Attention to polls	-0.384	0.548	-0.086
Nomination polls	-0.846	0.475*	-0.550
<u><i>Issues</i></u>			
Iraq as most important	2.726	1.149**	0.583
Economy as most important	1.265	0.836	0.267
Healthcare as most important	3.144	1.122***	0.634
Retrospective sociotropic economy	1.692	1.032	0.610
Prospective sociotropic economy	0.446	0.363	0.204
<u><i>Ideology</i></u>			
Ideology	-0.290	0.371	-0.247
Racism	-0.264	0.108**	-0.624
Sexism	0.700	0.304**	0.593
<u><i>Demographics</i></u>			
Age	0.039	0.033	0.471
Female	0.227	0.694	0.051
Religiosity	-0.343	0.205*	-0.293
Education	0.323	0.318	0.276
Military background	-0.987	0.861	-0.195
Labor household	0.654	0.633	0.150
Black	-1.808	1.104	-0.284
Latino/a	2.326	1.375*	0.514
Married/partnered	0.137	0.778	0.030
Income	0.213	0.269	0.212
Southern	3.282	1.110***	0.672
<u><i>State Characteristics</i></u>			
State % black	-0.004	0.033	-0.049
State % latino	0.005	0.032	0.056
State % blue collar	0.023	0.093	0.109
Constant	-6.161	4.445	
Log Likelihood	-56.762		
LR Chi-square (df = 32)	77.490		
N	141		

Note: Statistical significance marked at * $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$. Change in probability of switching endorsement (Δ) is calculated by moving from the minimum to the maximum value while holding all other variables at their means.

Looking first at the demographic controls, we find a significant independent effect exerted by living in the south. The former obtains from southern superdelegates disproportionately switching in Obama's direction, given his string of impressive primary victories in the region, some by decisive margins. Readers may recall Georgia Rep. John Lewis' dramatic defection to Obama, who justified his change of heart, despite long-time loyalty to the Clintons, by saying that "something is happening in America" and that he could "never, ever do anything to reverse the action" of voters in his district, who voted overwhelmingly for Obama (Zeleny and Healy 2008). The south is unique compared to other regions, in that all states of the Old Confederacy use the primary, rather than the caucus,¹² as the mode of delegate allocation. Because primaries have far greater mass participation than party caucuses, superdelegates are able to obtain a greater sense of public opinion in these political milieus. The magnitude of the change in predicted probability for this coefficient is thus not surprising.

Similarly, Latino/a superdelegates had a greater propensity to switch candidate support. It merits a mention that all candidates worked hard to cultivate the Latino vote in 2008 and that these results should not be unexpected given the dynamics of candidates' Latino support in 2008. Barreto et al. (2008) argue that beginning with Gov. Bill Richardson's candidacy Latinos were a focus early on, and may have contributed to the longevity of the Clinton campaign by throwing their electoral weight behind her. Thus once her chances at nomination faded late in the primary, we should have expected to see Latino superdelegates switch en masse to Obama.

Contrarily, those superdelegates who declared themselves to be more religious were less likely to switch. While we can only speculate as to the particular causal mechanism for the more religious here, greater religious behavior served to stabilize the preferences among the superdelegates. Such may come from a spiritual resolve or faith, allowing superdelegates to ignore more profane influences like changing national or community preferences or other political endorsements. Alternatively, religious superdelegates could have had a stronger identification with one or more of the candidates. In our sample we find that though the numbers of religious superdelegates supporting Clinton were comparable to Obama, Obama's support was much greater among those who were not religious. Here too, we find evidence of a demographic switching (most often to Obama) despite earlier contrary preferences.

Racism and sexism both played a role in decisions to switch, but in opposite directions. Racial resentment made superdelegates less likely to switch during the primary. We suspect that holding out, i.e. refusing to switch to Obama despite increasing gains in viability throughout the campaign, is the major culprit illustrated by this finding. Contrarily, relatively more sexist superdelegates had a greater probability of switching candidate preferences.

In terms of the most important issues in the election, we find evidence that the relative importance superdelegates gave to Iraq and health care positively affected their propensity to switch. Indeed, superdelegates were more likely to switch their preferences if

12. Texas uses a dual system known as the "Texas Two-Step," consisting of both a primary and a caucus. Underscoring the pattern throughout the 2008 nomination season, Clinton won the primary and Obama won the caucus.

TABLE 4
Δ in Probability of Switching Based on Candidates' Chances of Winning

<i>Candidates' chances of winning in home state (or district)</i>	<i>Clinton</i>	<i>Obama</i>
	<i>Pr(switching)</i>	<i>Pr(switching)</i>
Very Unlikely	0.075	0.372
Unlikely	0.151	0.355
Neither	0.283	0.338
Likely	0.465	0.321
Very Likely	0.658	0.305

Note: All other variables held at their means.

either issue was significant. This was not the case for those that believed the economy was most important. Such may naturally follow from the conventional understanding of the two frontrunners' owned issues: Clinton was the health care candidate, while Obama was the Iraq War candidate. In that sense, a change in the probability to switch should be the result of believing that one candidate would do a better job on the owned issue (as opposed to the issue that was owned by the entire party at that time: the economy). Alternatively, one might switch because of viability concerns after having already committed to a particular candidate based on the owned issue. More research on this point is necessary and beyond this paper, but the finding that the two issues of health care and Iraq were so important to superdelegates as to lead superdelegates to switch suggests a central role for issue associations in the nomination campaign.

Returning to the Electoral Connection Hypothesis, examination of polls *before* deciding support for a candidate had no independent effect on the probability for switching, but doing so *after* did so in the expected direction. That this *nomination poll evaluation* variable is significant may merely suggest that superdelegates were searching for the best candidate who could beat John McCain in the fall election, and that this was somewhat contingent on their primary performance. This finding offers insight into how early considerations of the general election merge into primary election candidate preferences.

In terms of viability, Table 4 displays a comparison of the predicted probabilities for switching based on how likely Obama and Clinton are to win, respectively, and holding all other variables at their mean values. We see that the probability of switching based on Obama winning a superdelegate's state or district was fairly constant at around 30%. Contrarily, believing Clinton was unlikely to win the state hovered near .1, while believing she would win the state hovered closer to .5. A very likely win for Clinton meant a 65 percent greater probability of switching preferences. To elaborate, superdelegates considerations of Obama's likelihood of winning were fairly ineffective, but those who thought Clinton was "very likely" to win were more likely to switch.¹³

13. We hold *Clinton's chances in state* at "very likely," and *Obama's likely to win* at different values to arrive at such a conclusion. For instance, consider a superdelegate living in a very likely Clinton state, but where Obama was very unlikely to win (say, Arkansas) has a 64 percent probability of switching. An identical superdelegate from a state where both candidates would obviously win (like New York) has only a 57 percent chance of switching. This probability is more understandable than the first, if superdelegates are exercising independent judgment and attempting to pick the strongest general election candidate.

It is not immediately clear from the Electoral Connection Hypothesis why superdelegates were more concerned with Clinton's viability in their state than Obama's. It may be that superdelegates that supported Clinton early on did so because of her perceived inevitability as the nominee. Or it could be that those who originally supported Clinton over Obama did so because their community showed such strong support for her. At the time, Barack Obama was relatively unknown among the public, at least until after the Iowa caucuses. As the process wore on, these early Clinton supporters may have become more convinced of Obama's inevitability as the nominee and his electability in November, and were thus more likely to switch. While this story needs more investigation, it is clearly a familiar one from the 2008 primaries.

The finding for elected officials is somewhat unexpected. Being an elected official is a strong predictor of switching, all else held constant, but the sign is in the opposite direction of what we expected to find. The effect of holding elected office makes a superdelegate *less likely* to switch, even in the presence of controls for how important it is for superdelegates to "go with the voters" of their state, as well as their personal conceptualization of themselves as a "delegate" or "trustee" of the people.

Earlier in this paper we argued that all superdelegates, regardless of whether they hold elective office, should exercise responsiveness to public opinion. But here, elected officials are less likely to switch than their unelected counterparts. Despite the conventional wisdom and previous research which suggest that the coefficient should be positive (i.e., that elected superdelegates should "fall in line" with voters and support the candidate supported by the most pledged delegates), it appears here that superdelegates did exercise independent judgment in throwing their stable weight behind a nominee, rather than relying on the influence and considerations of voters in their states to change their minds.¹⁴ Contrarily, Add-On superdelegates were more likely to switch, further suggesting that elected members were more comfortable acting as trustees in terms of the stability of their preferences than those with less formal political representation duties.

Conclusion

The results of this study offer mixed support for our research question of whether Democratic superdelegates take voter preferences into account in their major nomination decisions. In terms of the decision to switch, several variables thought to be significant predictors resulted in null findings, such as possessing a "delegate" conception of representation, and the importance of following the wishes of the majority of caucus/primary voters from one's state. A result that moves in the expected direction, however, is that superdelegates who evaluated polls during the nomination struggle were more likely to modify their preferences. But it is unclear as to what was motivating this reevaluation. It may have been that superdelegates were looking to become congruent with Democratic

14. Of course, it may also be that the elected officials in our data driving this finding are electorally secure and can afford to vote their preference, although the reelection chances of several appeared to be precarious, heading into the 2010 midterms.

primary voters nationwide, or it could well have been that superdelegates were sizing up each candidate's ability to best beat the Republicans in the fall.

The most intriguing result from the switching model is that superdelegates who were also elected officials were *less* likely to switch support for their candidate, even though we hypothesized that they would be the most sensitive to public opinion. This means that it is unelected superdelegates who are *more* likely to switch, all else being equal. In this sense, collective correspondence is alive and well.

Recent research suggests good reason not to dismiss these seemingly contrary findings. Fox and Shotts (2009) show theoretically that constituents want their representatives to act like a trustee in equilibrium, even though electoral incentives may sometimes encourage elected officials to act like delegates. In the case of nominating campaigns, there may be good reason for elected officials to ignore public opinion: 1) they may have inside knowledge, and thus their constituents should prefer that they act as trustees, and/or 2) the ideological congruence between Obama and Clinton may mitigate the desire for a delegate representation. Regardless, for advocates of populist control of government, ours should be a welcome finding. Just as other studies have shown that bureaucrats and judges can be responsive to public opinion, this study has demonstrated that unelected elites with considerable gatekeeping authority (see Masket 2009) are capable of the same.

On a normative note, Democrats critical of superdelegate independence, a position held by an overwhelming majority of party voters (Fridkin, Kenney, and Gershon 2011), must ask themselves whether the party should have superdelegates at all. Independent judgment is, after all, the stated role of a superdelegate. However, 2008 showed us that media and opinion leaders expect, even demand, for superdelegates to vote to nominate the candidate supported by the majority of pledged delegates. But if the culmination of reforms over the past forty years, leading to the all-important "invisible primary" of "organizational building, strategic maneuvering, and resource acquisition," in which candidates engage before the first caucus or primary vote is ever cast, have reduced the role of the citizen-voter to spectator status (Aldrich 2009, 33), then haggling over the role that superdelegates should play, if they should play one at all, may be akin to rearranging to deck chairs on the Titanic. Regardless, we are not able to offer uniform support for the Electoral Connection Hypothesis here—that is, that superdelegates see themselves as having a pure delegate orientation. Instead, we find that superdelegates render some independent judgment in making their nomination preferences and that this independent streak is strongest among the elected officials.

In the end, the strongest findings for the role of constituent concerns in superdelegates' nomination choice appear less consistently in determining *whom* to support and more consistently in determining *when* to support them. The timing of the endorsements was found to be both hastened and drawn-out as a result of several factors, both personal and environmental. While issues, viability, the economy and personal backgrounds all played a role, so too did more distant concerns like the importance of a state's vote choice, and, most notably, beliefs about elected officials' duty to their constituents. In fact, the delegate's perceived role of representation was the second most powerful predictor of the timing of the endorsement.

The intriguing result is that these broader concerns of others' preferences do not increase the time it takes to endorse a candidate. Rather, those who are especially focused on their constituents and/or neighbors are actually quicker to make such endorsements. It appears that instead of plaguing superdelegates with additional concerns, they help superdelegates to solidify their personal preferences and move them toward a quicker endorsement. Again, this is not to say that personal concerns do not play a major role. Personal concerns do impact the timing of the endorsements, but they do so by both decreasing and increasing the duration of the decision.

Cautious extrapolation from our results is warranted. Foremost, our data do not include members of Congress. It may well be that these superdelegates, due to their high visibility, are most susceptible to the electoral connection, and their mere absence in our models deflates any positive effect we would find concerning elected officials. Arguably, the case can be made that, had the 2008 election not gone well for the Democrats, congressional superdelegates would have shouldered more blame for any catastrophe than the odd state legislator, state party chair, or governor. In addition, the peculiarities of the 2008 nomination contest, the small number of observations, and the cross-sectional nature of this study are not conducive to a blanket generalization of superdelegate behavior in all presidential nominations. The fact that there have been only two contests in which the result between the leading candidates was close enough for superdelegates to make an influential contribution further suggests that studies of this nature may be of only marginal benefit to understanding subsequent campaigns. Nonetheless, 2008 suggests that primary campaigns are changing and this particular nomination struggle may be a uniquely suited predictor of future delegate behavior. One need look no further than the currently ongoing contests of 2016 for glimmers of evidence that ex-officio delegates may again be of deciding importance in presidential nominations.

All told, the depth of this study in garnering individual level political attitudes, opinion and demographics from superdelegates, along with the extended and ultra-competitive nomination campaign of 2008 suggest that this investigation has a great deal to tell us about an understudied elite political stratum, which is likely to garner similar attention in future nomination contests. We believe that this study captures some of the unexplored motivations and decision-making calculi that underlie their nomination preferences. Most notably, our results suggest that superdelegates see themselves and act as both trustees and delegates, but that these perceptions have different effects on the consistency of nomination preference and on the timing of the decision.

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Appendix A: Variable Coding

Add-On. Coded 1 if respondent an Add-On superdelegate, 0 otherwise.

DPL. Coded 1 if respondent a distinguished party leader, 0 otherwise.

Elected official. Coded 1 if respondent an elected official, 0 if otherwise.

QUESTION: "Do you currently hold an office to which you were publicly elected?"

Face Republicans. Importance to respondent of nominating a candidate who can beat the Republicans, from "extremely important" (=3) to "not at all important" (=0).

QUESTION: "At the convention, how important is it that superdelegates vote for the candidate that is best able to face the Republican candidate in the General Election?"

Majority of state. Importance to respondent of supporting the Democrat supported by the voters of his/her state, from "extremely important" (=3) to "not at all important" (=0).

QUESTION: "At the convention, how important is it that superdelegates vote for the Democratic candidate supported by the majority of voters in their state [or district, if a member of Congress]?"

Past attendance. Number of previous Democratic nominating conventions attended by respondent, from min=0 to max=10.

QUESTION: "Other than the 2008 Democratic National Convention, how many times have you attended a Democratic national convention as a delegate or an alternate?"

Obama chances in state. Five-point scale of respondent's assessment of Obama's chances of winning in home state [or district], from "very likely" (=2) to "very unlikely" (= -2).

QUESTION: "At the time of your decision to support one of the candidates, how likely did you believe it was that Barack Obama would win your state [or district, if a member of Congress] on November 4th?"

Clinton chances in state. Five-point scale of respondent's assessment of Clinton's chances of winning in home state [or district], from "very likely" (=2) to "very unlikely" (= -2).

QUESTION: "At the time of your decision to support one of the candidates, how likely did you believe it was that Hillary Clinton would win your state [or district, if a member of Congress] on November 4th?"

Attention to polls. Whether respondent examined polls of potential Democratic candidates versus potential Republican candidates prior to making a decision whom to support for the nomination. Coded 1 if yes, 0 if no.

QUESTION: "Before announcing your support for your chosen candidate, did you examine any polls of head-to-head match-ups of Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton versus potential Republican candidates?"

Nomination struggle poll evaluation. Whether respondent examined candidate polls during the protracted nomination ("yes, national polls;" "yes, swing state polls;" "yes, both national and swing state polls;" "no"). Dichotomized to 1 if yes, 0 if no.

QUESTION: "As the nomination process wore on, did you give any thought to changing your support for a candidate based on national or 'swing state' polls?"

Iraq as most important. Respondent views the Iraq war as the most important issue facing the country. Coded 1 if yes, 0 if no.

Economy as most important. Respondent views the economy as the most important issue facing the country. Coded 1 if yes, 0 if no.

Healthcare as most important. Respondent views healthcare as the most important issue facing the country. Coded 1 if yes, 0 if no.

QUESTION (for this and the preceding two variables): "What was the issue of greatest importance to you in the presidential election [circle only ONE issue]?"

Retrospective sociotropic economy. Respondent's retrospective evaluation of the economy, from "gotten better" (=1) to "gotten worse" (=3).

QUESTION: "Would you say that over the past year the nation's economy has gotten worse, stayed about the same, or gotten better?"

Prospective sociotropic economy. Respondent's evaluation of how the economy will fare in the future, from "get better" (=1) to "get worse" (=3).

QUESTION: "In the next year, do you expect the economy in the country as a whole to get worse, stay about the same, or get better?"

Ideology. Location on 7-point scale from “extremely liberal” (=−3) to “extremely conservative” (=3).

QUESTION: “Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?”

Delegate role of representation. Whether a respondent favors a “delegate” or “trustee” model of representation. Coded 1 if delegate, 0 if trustee.

QUESTION: “In cases of conflict between what an elected official feels is best and what his/her constituents want, do you think the official should follow his/her own conscience or follow the constituents’ desire?”

Racism. A 4-item additive symbolic racism attitudes index.

QUESTIONS: “To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement(s)?”

(1) “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for African Americans to work their way out of the lower class.”

(2) “Many other minority groups have overcome prejudice and worked their way up. African Americans should do the same without any special favors.”

(3) “Over the past few years, African Americans have gotten less than they deserve.”

(4) “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if African Americans would only try harder they could be just as well-off as whites.”

For questions 1 and 3, response options were coded “strongly agree” (=2), “somewhat agree” (=1), “somewhat disagree” (−1), and “strongly disagree” (−2), such that higher values indicate greater racial liberalism. For questions 2 and 4, response options were coded “strongly agree” (−2), “somewhat agree” (−1), “somewhat disagree” (=1), and “strongly disagree” (=2), such that higher values indicate greater racial conservatism. The four items were then summed to form a scale ranging from −8 to +8. Higher values indicate greater racial conservatism.

Sexism. Respondent’s level of symbolic sexism, from +2 to −2, such that higher values indicate greater sexism.

QUESTION: “To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement: In today’s modern workplace, women are treated the same as men. If women would work as hard as men they could have the same salaries and titles.” Ranges from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

Age. Respondent’s age, in years. Min=21, Max=84.

QUESTION: "What was the year of your birth?"

Female. Coded 1 if respondent is female, 0 otherwise.

QUESTION: "Are you male or female?"

Religiosity. How often respondent attends religious services, from "never" (=0) to "every week" (=5).

QUESTION: "Would you say you attend religious services every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never?"

Education. Respondent's highest degree of education received, from "less than high school" (=1) to "Graduate or Professional School" (=6).

QUESTION: "What is the highest level of education you have completed?"

Military background. Coded 1 if served in U.S. military, military reserves, or National Guard; 0 if no military service.

QUESTION: "Have you ever served in the U.S. military, the National Guard, or the military reserves?"

Labor household. Coded 1 if respondent from a union household, 0 otherwise.

QUESTION: "Do you or anyone else in your household belong to a labor union?"

Black. Coded 1 if respondent African-American, 0 otherwise.

QUESTION: "What racial or ethnic group best describes you?"

Latinola. Coded 1 if respondent latino/a, 0 otherwise.

QUESTION: "What racial or ethnic group best describes you?"

Married/partnered. Coded 1 if respondent is married or partnered, 0 otherwise.

QUESTION: "Are you now married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?"

Income. Annual household income on a six-category scale from low to high (<\$24,999; \$25,000 to \$49,999; \$50,000 to \$74,999; \$75,000 to \$99,999; \$100,000 to \$200,000; \$200,000 or more).

QUESTION: “What is the best estimate of your 2008 household income? [This includes the salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest income, and all other income of all persons aged 18 and over living in your household.]”

Southern. Coded 1 if respondent from one of the 11 states of the old confederacy, 0 otherwise.

State % black. Percent of respondent’s state or territory that is African-American. Source: Barone, Cohen, and Ujifusa (2006).

State % latinola. Percent of respondent’s state or territory that is latino/a. Source: Barone and Cohen.

State % blue collar. Percent of respondent’s state or territory that is blue collar. Source: Barone and Cohen.

Appendix B: Survey Design

Following the 2008 Democratic National Convention, we assembled a database of the names of the 853 superdelegates, obtained mostly through media reports and the websites of various “superdelegate watchdog” groups.¹⁵ We then set out to obtain the professional and personal mailing addresses of as many superdelegates as possible. These were gathered through public records—Federal Election Commission campaign finance filings were especially useful—a 2004 roster of Democratic National Convention committee members, some of whom were committee members in 2008,¹⁶ and even the telephone book. In all, we were able to procure addresses for 830 superdelegates.

All superdelegates in our data file were sent a standardized questionnaire with a recruitment letter, printed on university letterhead, explaining the survey as well as its intended purpose, and stressing both the need for participation and the confidentiality of the results. Included was a postage-paid envelope to return the questionnaire. For superdelegates for which we were able to obtain both a professional and a personal address, we first sent a paper questionnaire to the professional address, and only to the personal address after a nonresponse period of three weeks. For members of Congress, we mailed questionnaires to their House or Senate offices, as well as their fundraising committee addresses. All superdelegates received a follow-up questionnaire and recruitment letter if they did not respond to the first invitation.

Appendix C: Cox Model Specification

A Cox proportional hazards model (1972) posits a hazard rate, or conditional rate until time of decision t , for superdelegate j such that

15. Some state parties even publicly posted lists of their superdelegate delegations for us to cross-reference.

16. The Democratic Party was less forthcoming with a list of 2008 committee members, most likely due to the hyper-attention they received from the media.

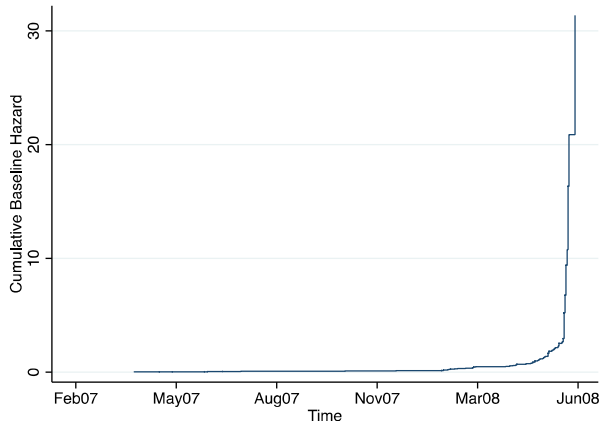


FIGURE 2. Estimated Baseline Cumulative Hazard Function

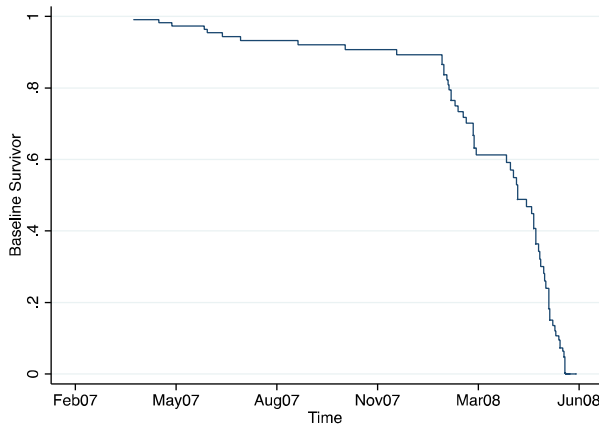


FIGURE 3. Estimated Baseline Survivor Function

$$b(t|x_j) = b_0(t) \exp(x_j B_x).$$

The Cox model is especially useful in that it does not require assumptions about the shape of the hazard rate. In other words, the baseline hazard is unparameterized (see Kalbfleisch and Prentice 2002), which allows us to move to an estimation of the impact of covariates, B_x , without assumptions about the overall distribution of the hazard, except that it is the same for all superdelegates.

Beyond the relationships of the covariates to the timing of the endorsement, it is informative to engage the resulting hazard and survivor functions from the Cox model. The survivor and hazard functions are empirically observed estimates of the endorsements evaluated with all the covariates set to zero, which give us a good idea of the raw distribution of the timing of the endorsements. Specifically, they illustrate the hazard/survivor contribution at each endorsement time. Figures 2 and 3 (in

appendix) present the estimated baseline cumulative hazard and estimated baseline survivor function for the timing of the superdelegate endorsement decisions, respectively. The estimated cumulative hazard is increasing throughout the primary season. It begins to increase at an increasing rate at the turn of the year and explodes upwards in March. Likewise, the step-like survivor function is monotonic, and, obviously, decreasing.

In Figure 1 (in text) we compare superdelegates on the constituent and conscience variables in terms of the hazard function. Consider again the failure time t_j with a baseline hazard of b_{ij} , the estimate of $b_0(t)$ is thus

$$b_0(t) = b^{-1} \sum K(t-t_j/b)b_{ij}.$$

Here we smooth the baseline hazards for each superdelegate composition by a bandwidth b of 5 days with a Gaussian density function K . Allowing only their preference on this question to differ, Figure 1 (in text) compares the hazards of those on both sides of the question.