Congressional Superdelegates in the 2008 Election: Power, Constituency, and Uncertainty

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"You've got divided constituencies in [some senators'] states, and they're going to hope this resolves itself with them not having to get in the middle of it. And if it can, then they haven't necessarily hurt themselves with their own base." --Sen. Chris Dodd (D-CT)

"Of course what my district says is important to me. But other factors are, too: electability, job performance." --Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA)

"Barack's impressive showing in our state is attractive to me." –Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)

"I don't know what I'm going to do . . ." –Rep. Jim Moran (D-VA)[1]

Members of Congress are accustomed to making decisions in the midst of uncertainty and conflicting pressures. Members' multiple goals sometimes point neatly in the direction of a single choice, but members frequently must make choices in which the potential consequences are unpredictable or in which advancing one goal threatens another goal. The process of reconciling competing considerations is a familiar one in the context of regular congressional decision making (Kingdon 1989), but we know that members of Congress also engage in other types of consequential public activity that may be outside the legislative process (e.g., Mayhew 2000). How do members of Congress make choices *outside* of the legislative arena when those choices have significant implications for their goals of reelection, power, and good public policy making?

The endorsement decisions of congressional Democratic "superdelegates" in 2008 provide an excellent opportunity to explore how members make these types of decisions. In 2008, the Democrats nominated their presidential candidate at a national convention made up of about 4000 delegates, nearly 800 of which were unpledged party leaders and elected officials—including all Democratic senators and House members. As they had been since the 1980s when the unpledged superdelegates were created, Democratic members of

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[1] Dodd quoted in Welna 2008, Berman and Moran in Hearn 2008, and Klobuchar in Nagourney and Zeleny 2008.

Congress were entirely free to choose among the presidential candidates, and they were free either to publicly endorse a candidate during the preprimary or primary seasons or to wait until the nominating convention to make a decision. As the quotations above illustrate, members faced conflicting considerations in the decision over endorsements, considerations that shifted for some members as the preprimary and primary seasons unfolded.

We argue that congressional superdelegates considered several factors in making the decision to endorse. Members faced pressures from a well-defined and electorally salient subconstituency (Bishin 2000), activist partisans. At the same time, members recognized that the identity of the presidential nominee could affect their own margins in the November elections. For members with power goals and progressive ambition, the choice to align with the Clinton or the Obama camp held the possibility of future reward—or punishment. Meanwhile, as differences in perceptions of the candidates' positions emerged, members also weighed possible consequences for their policy objectives. Members evaluated all of these factors in the broader context of a dynamic environment in which they chose not only a candidate but whether to act as "early deciders," "active players," or "late deciders" in Fenno's terms (1986, 7).

We explore these general expectations by examining the choices of Democratic House members and senators as they made the decision to endorse and, sometimes, to shift endorsements over the course of the preprimary and primary seasons during 2007 and 2008. Using both time-series and cross-sectional analysis, we test for the influence of electoral, policy, and power goals on the endorsement choices, finding evidence that all three were relevant to members' decisions. We argue that Democratic members of Congress viewed their role in the 2008 presidential election through a representational lens similar to the one that they apply to their routine legislative decision making, and that this

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case illustrates the relevance of legislative goals to behavior outside the congressional arena.

Congress and Presidential Candidate Selection: Some Background

Modern Democratic Members of Congress are far from the first congressional representatives to play a role in presidential candidate selection. Through the King Caucus practice, members of the early House and Senate controlled presidential nominations for their parties, and members were important players in the convention era. The post-McGovern-Fraser presidential selection process, by contrast, placed senators and House members in a diminished role as it elevated rank-and-file control over delegate selection. The active role that Democrats now prescribe for all Democratic senators and House members followed from post-1980 dissatisfaction with this new approach (Mayer 2009, 88-89).

Initially, Democrats provided only modest new opportunities for congressional participation. After 1980, the party allocated a portion of each state's convention delegation for "pledged party leaders and elected officials" (pledged PLEOs), allowing senators, House members, and state-level leaders to participate as part of the pledged delegation (Mayer 2009, 89).[2] 1984 was the first year of *un*pledged PLEOs, which included 3/5 of congressional Democrats (Mayer 2009, 93; Granat 1984) as "superdelegates" not formally committed to a candidate—and therefore able to exercise independent judgment. In addition to this subset of the congressional delegation, the ranks of the superdelegates also included DNC members and Democratic governors.

Responding to the new rules, the House Democratic Caucus became directly and formally involved in the process in the summer of 1983, first by hosting candidates Walter

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[2] It appears that Democrats will return superdelegates to this role for the 2012 election (Martin and Smith 2009).

Mondale and John Glenn for caucus question-and-answer sessions and then by debating

and ratifying a resolution setting out a procedure for superdelegate selection. House

Democrats ultimately selected their superdelegates from a ballot constructed by the

Democratic Steering and Policy Committee,[3] while the Senate's Democratic caucus chose its

superdelegate representation. In its rules revisions for 1988, Democrats incorporated a

greater proportion of congressional delegation—four-fifths—and the caucuses in each

chamber selected their representatives under this rule in 1988 and 1992 (Roll Call 1991).

By 1996, the unpledged PLEO or superdelegate rule had evolved into its modern form, with

all Democratic House members and senators automatically participating as free agents at

the nominating convention (Meyer 2009, 93).

Although Democrats added PLEOs, and gradually expanded their role, in order to

increase the potential for elite influence in the process, the evidence for superdelegates'

influence is mixed at best. Superdelegates (both congressional and state/DNC officials)

have exhibited little difference from other delegates in their political views and perceptions

of rank-and-file positions (Herrera 1994), and the only year in which they arguably directly

affected the identity of the nominee seems to be 1984 (Meyer 2009). Despite their limited

actual role, the superdelegates' endorsements, like those of other elites, matter for the

dynamics of the nomination process, particularly in the preprimary jockeying for position

among potential candidates (Steger 2008). The PLEO rules, therefore, provide members

with a stage for public action to affect presidential nominations. Not all members will

choose to issue a public preconvention endorsement, but for those who do, the direction and

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[3] Democratic Caucus Resolution Number 20, 14 July 1983. Thomas S. Foley Papers, Washington
State University, Box 186.

timing of the choice constitutes a deliberate effort to influence national politics outside the typical realm of routine legislative decisions.[4]

The 2008 nomination contest, with its close competition between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, brought these choices into public focus. After the first several contests, Obama's margin of pledged delegates from state contests settled in at about 150 and held near that level through the end of the primary/caucus phase in June. During that time, the campaigns stepped up their efforts to lobby the superdelegates (Hearn 2008; Hook 2008; Parnes and Hearn 2008). Congressional superdelegates found themselves facing a difficult choice. Although the superdelegates did not, in the end, reverse the outcome as determined by the delegates chosen in primaries and caucuses, House members and senators were still required to engage in a very public balancing of their electoral, policy, and power goals.

Congressional Endorsement Decisions in 2008

In this environment, Democratic senators and House members faced several choices: whether to endorse, when to endorse, and whom to endorse. These choices were extralegislative, but we argue that they activated a calculus similar to the one used by members on key legislative choices. The importance of constituency in such choices is well established in the congressional literature (e.g., Bishin 2000, Fenno 1978, Mayhew 1974), and we have good reason to expect that other goals are considered in the context of constituency constraints (Kingdon 1989). For members considering the 2008 endorsement decision, contemplating the constituency took on a clear focus. The preferences and

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[4] Mayhew's classification of member actions in the "public sphere" contains categories for both "taking stands" and "choosing presidents" (Mayhew 2000). Our treatment of member endorsements differs somewhat from Mayhew's conceptualization in that Mayhew emphasizes relatively autonomous, individual actions, such as Adam Clayton Powell's (D-NY) 1956 decision to endorse Eisenhower's reelection (Mayhew 2000, 150-151) rather than choices available to a large group of members. In our view, the superdelegate institution provides a systematic structure for members to engage in public stand-taking and president-choosing, such that the superdelegate endorsements represent a kind of institutionalized public sphere action.

reactions of an identifiable subconstituency—active Democrats in the district participating in the presidential nomination process—should have been a central consideration. In Arnold's terms, this subconstituency constituted a highly attentive public with intense preferences who were also likely part of the member's core primary constituency (Arnold 1990, 84; Fenno 1978). When the presidential nomination preferences of this attentive public fell clearly on one side, a member's endorsement decision should have been fairly straightforward.

But the decision was not this clear for many members. Some members faced divided constituencies in which a sizable attentive public was activated on both sides of the presidential nomination question. For some, the constituency question was further complicated by calculations about how the identity of the Democratic nominee might affect their own close general election races (Parnes and Hearn 2008). Many members likely also calculated the effects of their choice on objectives other than their own potential primary or general election fates. To the extent that Democrats perceived Clinton and Obama as representing not only stylistic but substantive differences, the endorsement choice had direct and significant implications for members' personal policy preferences. In a related way, Senators Clinton and Obama had built connections with their fellow legislators, and personal loyalty to one candidate—and the potential for future career advancement that comes along with it—weighed on the endorsement decision as well.

As described above, the Arnold/Kingdon model of legislative decision making posits that members will first filter their choices through constituency considerations, but conflict in that realm leaves members free to turn to other sources (Arnold 1990, 85), including policy and influence goals (Kingdon 1977, 575). We also know that conflict among constituencies and/or among multiple goals can affect not only the final choice but also

members' willingness to stake out an early public position on a developing salient issue (Box-Steffensmeier, Arnold, and Zorn 1997).

In short, in the extralegislative arena of 2008 presidential endorsements, members faced a crucial choice that mirrored certain types of legislative choices. The decision to endorse was highly visible, particularly as the contest became closer and more heated. The endorsement choice was salient to an electorally consequential subconstituency in every member's district. The choice had implications for goals beyond reelection and constituency representation. And, finally, both the decision itself and the timing of the choice were potentially consequential.

Endorsement Data

To collect the data on the endorsement and date of endorsement of the Democratic members of Congress, we sought to locate who each superdelegate supported and when the announcement of endorsement was made using primary sources (press releases) where possible and secondary sources when primary sources were unavailable. [5] We used keyword searches on Lexis and Google News in an effort to identify members of Congress whose endorsements were not otherwise announced by the superdelegate themselves. That is, for members of Congress whose endorsement was announced by the particular presidential campaigns, we attempted to verify the endorsement and its date by relying on news stories if necessary. In several cases, we were unable to find endorsement announcements by members of Congress before June 7, 2008 (see below). In these cases,

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[5] Though we occasionally refer to all superdelegates or PLEOs, our data collection and analysis is confined to those superdelegates who were members of Congress in 2007 and 2008. A useful starting point for this information was Democratic Convention Watch's delegate tracker. We did not regard this list as comprehensive or authoritative, but in virtually all cases, we were able to confirm the DemConWatch dates with other sources. The data we used has since been archived at http://demconwatch.blogspot.com/2008/01/superdelegate-list.html. For endorsements early in the preprimary season, we made use of supplementary lists at George Washington University's elections website http://ww.gwu.edu/~action/2008/cands08/endorse08el.html and at *The Hill* http://img.thehill.com/img/news/021307/endorsement.pdf .

we assumed that the superdelegate did not endorse a nominee prior to Clinton's withdrawal from the race. We included members of Congress as long as they served in Congress at any point between March 1, 2007 and June 7, 2008. When members departed or joined Congress in this time frame, the dataset reflects those entries and exits.[6]

Figure 1 shows the number of congressional PLEO endorsements over time. Lacking any commonly-agreed upon date of the "start" of the 2008 presidential campaign (Joe Biden announced his candidacy before the 2006 congressional elections; Obama and Clinton formally announced their campaigns in February 2007), we marked the beginning of our dataset as March 1, 2007.

Figure 1 Here

By that time, 24 members of Congress had endorsed Hillary Clinton and 14 members of Congress had endorsed Barack Obama.[7] Clinton slowly accumulated endorsements throughout 2007 ending the year with 76 endorsements, 43 more than Obama. As states began to have their contests, Obama began to rapidly accumulate endorsements. Obama took an early lead in pledged delegates (see Figure 2) and began to catch up with Clinton in superdelegate endorsements.

Figure 2 Here

As Obama's chances of winning the nomination improved, the number of endorsements slowed considerably. Hillary Clinton retained her lead in congressional PLEO endorsements until May 15. On June 3, 2008, Obama won enough delegates (both

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[6] For example, Tom Lantos died on February 11, 2008; he had endorsed Clinton well before that time (early 2007). He was replaced by Jackie Speier, who took her seat on April 15, 2008, and is coded as having endorsed Clinton that day.

[7] 13 members of Congress endorsed a candidate other than Obama or Clinton before March 1. Most, though not all, of these endorsements were members "endorsing" their own campaigns or the campaign of a home state colleague (e.g., Tom Carper's endorsement of Biden).

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superdelegates and pledged delegates) to win the nomination. On June 7, 2008, Clinton

endorsed Obama. In our models, we include PLEO decisions through June 7.[8]

Hypotheses

In the analysis that follows, we seek to test a series of hypotheses about competing

legislative-type factors in the extralegislative endorsement choice. We are interested in the

factors that influence members' uncertainty about endorsement—and therefore the timing

of the decision—as well as the direction of the decision. The factors potentially relevant to

uncertainty and endorsement choice include policy and personal preferences, electoral

considerations, power and career factors, and contextual changes.

Electoral Factors

We expect that members considered the effect of their endorsement decision on their

own electoral outcomes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that members recognized the

potential for the choice to become an issue in their own future nomination contests and that

the identity of the party's presidential candidate could affect the level of support members

received at the polls in November 2008. We also assume that members had a reasonably

good sense for their districts' preferences even in advance of the state's primary or caucus.

As a result, we expect that *higher levels of district support for Obama increase the*

likelihood of a member endorsing Obama. In considering members' timing calculations,

recognizing the clear frontrunner status of Clinton during 2007, we expect *members with*

very high or very low levels of district support for Obama made an endorsement sooner.

Similarly, we hypothesize that members whose own electoral circumstances were insecure

would face more difficulty in making a choice between either candidate; in other words,

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[8] Obama won enough delegates (between pledged delegates and announced superdelegates) to secure the Democratic nomination on June 3 and received 75 endorsements by congressional superdelegates (and Clinton received 1—Tim Johnson, who had promised to endorse the winner of his state's primary despite earlier endorsing Obama) between June 3 and June 7. Changing the cutoff to June 3 has no statistical or substantive effect on our analyses.

members with lower percentages of the district congressional vote in 2006 took longer to make a presidential endorsement.

District support for Obama was measured using the difference between Obama's vote share and Clinton's vote share for each superdelegate's congressional district.[9] **Table 1** shows that Obama's margin varied greatly. He won his largest margin (74%) in IL 2.

<div align="center">**Table 1 Here**</div>

Clinton won her largest margin (55%) in AR 2, which includes Little Rock. But the average margin for all superdelegate districts was less than 1 percent, which shows how competitive the contest was. In our dynamic analysis of endorsement choice, we transform the margin variable using the natural log.[10]. We assume that as the margin between Clinton and Obama increases, the effect on the decision for endorsing will succumb to diminishing returns. Transforming the variable, as opposed to including a squared term in the model, was necessary for interpretation because we interact this variable with another variable in the model (see below). The transformed variable is justified because the standard error is smaller than the linear variable, while both were statistically significant.

Power

The presidential choice had potential implications for members' political ambitions beyond reelection. For a member with political connections to one of the candidates, the outcome of the nomination contest would have an effect on the member's prospects for goals

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[9] We purchased the election data from David Leip (www.uselectionatlas.org). New Jersey, Texas and Washington all posed challenges for calculating the results by congressional district. New Jersey uses special delegate districts. We were able to map the delegate districts into congressional districts by averaging the election results for all the delegate districts within each congressional district. Texas' unique combination of caucuses and primaries makes calculating electoral results difficult. David Leip was able to calculate results for all but seven of the districts represented by Democratic PLEOs. These districts are missing data in ourour analysis. Washington's caucus system prevented the calculation of results at the congressional district level.

[10] For positive margins, the transformation is ln(district margin+1). For negative margins, the transformation is -1(ln(abs(district margin − 1))).

of higher office and/or power within Congress. We measure the links between members and the two presidential candidates by the amounts each candidate's PAC contributed to each member in the 2006 and 2008 election cycles.[11] Over these two election cycles, Obama was more aggressive in contributing to PLEOs. Obama gave contributions to 35% of PLEOs whereas Clinton gave to 14%. Obama's average contribution was $6,900 to Clinton's $6,500. The result is that the average congressional PLEO received about $1500 more from Obama than Clinton (see **Table 1**).

Intuitively, we expect that *contributions from Obama's PAC increase the likelihood of endorsing Obama and that contributions from Clinton's PAC decrease the likelihood of endorsing Obama.* For members who received contributions from either of the two candidates, we expect that the choice to endorse should have been more certain; thus, *members with contributions from either candidate's PAC should have endorsed a candidate sooner than other members.*

We also hypothesize that differences between more senior and more junior members affected timing and choice. Longer-tenured, more established MCs may face less uncertainty about the consequences of their choice for power and other goals, so we expect that *more senior members will announce endorsements sooner than more junior members.* More senior members, too, may have been more likely to choose the candidate initially seen as the frontrunner or establishment candidate—in this case, Hillary Clinton—relative to their junior colleagues. Thus, *more senior members should be less likely to endorse Obama.*

Policy and Personal Preference

The actual ideological differences between the two major 2008 Democratic candidates were not especially stark, with Barack Obama "at most marginally more liberal" than Hillary Clinton (Carroll et al. 2008). However, because of their differences on a few

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[11] Data was collected from the FEC website.

particularly salient policy issues—notably the Iraq war—liberal members may have perceived Obama to be the candidate more in line with their policy preferences. We expect, as a result, that *more liberal Democrats (as measured by first dimension DW-Nominate scores) were more likely to endorse Obama relative to more conservative Democrats.*

Race and gender were inherently factors in the Democrats' 2008 nomination process, and female and African-American members may have considered the historic opportunity to advance the presidential candidacy of a woman or an African-American. Thus, we expect that *African-American MCs were more likely to endorse Obama and female MCs were less likely to endorse Obama.* The importance of these factors should have helped to decrease members' uncertainty, so we also expect that *African-American and female MCs announced endorsements sooner than other Democrats.*

Contextual factors

When considering the uncertainty surrounding members' choices, an appropriate modeling strategy should account not only for members' goals but also for the dynamics of the campaign. In our dynamic model of endorsement choice, we include Iowa Political Market (IPM) data as a summary measure of campaign dynamics (see Forsythe et al. 1992). The IPM works by allowing investors to buy shares of a candidate. When the nomination is finalized, shares of the winning candidate can be cashed in for $1 per share whereas losing candidate shares are worth nothing. Thus, the price at any given time can be seen as reflecting the expectation of the market that a candidate will win the nomination. **Figure 3** shows the daily closing share price for Clinton and Obama.

Figure 3 Here

IPM prices are better measures of campaign dynamics than measures like accumulated delegates (**Figure 2**). IPM prices are based on expectations. Thus, they

include both information that has happened (winning contests) and information about what is expected to happen in the future. Accumulated delegate counts are only retrospective. IPM data can capture the true sense of where a candidate stands in their chances of winning. Further, IPM data has consistently outperformed traditional opinion polls in predicting election outcomes (Berg et al. 2008).

We expect, specifically, that *members become more likely to endorse Obama as Obama's IPM price increases relative to Clinton's*. As we describe below, we further account for campaign-season factors by conditioning the effect of district opinion on the timing of the delegate selection contest in each member's state.

Methods

Given the substantive interest in two questions—the amount of time it takes a member to endorse one of the presidential candidate and which candidate the congressional PLEO endorses, we adopt a modeling strategy that separates the two questions. In the first analysis, we estimate the amount of time, in days, it takes for a PLEO to endorse *either* Obama or Clinton using a Cox proportional hazards model. Such a model is appropriate, and common in political science, for questions of how long until an event occurs.

The second model, where we estimate the endorsement choice of PLEOs, the modeling choices were more complex. One of the particular needs of a modeling approach for delegate choice is creation of a dependent variable and modeling structure that allows us to consider the switches made by PLEOs as the political dynamics changed. A fully dynamic model would allow all PLEOs to switch from any state (not endorsing, endorsing Obama, endorsing Clinton, endorsing another candidate) to any other state at any time. While a model with this degree of flexibility may be the optimal approach, doing so would have introduced unneeded complexity into the interpretation of the results. Our modeling strategy ultimately exploits the dynamics of the campaign to facilitate model estimation

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and coefficient interpretation. Specifically, no PLEO moved from endorsing Clinton or

Obama to endorsing one of the other candidates; no PLEO moved from endorsing a

candidate to endorsing no candidate, and, with one exception (Tim Johnson, following the

South Dakota primary in June), no PLEO switched from endorsing Obama to Clinton (see

Table 2).

<div align="center">**Table 2 Here**</div>

Accordingly, while there are some switches from other candidates to endorsing Clinton,

almost all PLEOs either endorse Obama or they endorse Clinton and then switch to

Obama. A dependent variable that tracks whether a PLEO has endorsed Obama would,

then, capture the dynamics of the choices made by the PLEOs.

Given a dichotomous dependent variable, logit is an appropriate statistical tool. The

data for the endorsement choice model are PLEO-days from March 1, 2007 to June 7, 2008.

Because no PLEO who endorsed Obama switched to another candidate, PLEOs drop out of

the model once they have endorsed Obama.[12] The data, then, are panel data, and statistical

adjustments need to be made to acknowledge the correlations within individuals in the

dataset. Zeger, Liang, and Albert (1988; see also Zorn 2001) outline the choice, within the

class of Generalized Estimating Equations (GEEs), between subject-specific and population-

averaged models in the presence of repeated observations of the same individual; they

conclude that subject-specific models are "desirable when the response for an individual

rather than for the population is the focus--for example, in studies of growth curves" while

population averaged models are preferred when "the difference in the population-averaged

response between two groups with different risk factors is more the focus than is the

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[12] We could have left PLEOs in after endorsing Obama and included an independent variable that would equal 1 if the PLEO had endorsed Obama on the previous day, but such a variable would have been a perfect predictor and would drop the cases out of the model. Failure to include such a variable to leave the cases in would, in the terms of dynamic logit models, have conflated changing state with remaining in state and led to inaccurate coefficient estimates.

change in an individual's response" (1051). While subject-specific coefficients may be useful

here (models more commonly known as fixed effects models), the population-averaged

approach allows for cleaner interpretation of the coefficients, which can be read as ""the

average effect, across the entire population, of a one-unit shift in X_{it} on $Pr(Y_{it})$" (Zorn

2001:474-5).[13]

Results

Timing Model

The Cox proportional hazards model in Table 3 provides a picture of the factors that

affected members' uncertainty over the endorsement choice. Notably, the race and gender

of the congressional superdelegate had a substantial effect, increasing the risk of endorsing

a candidate. African-American members were at a significantly greater risk of endorsing,

with a hazard rate about 78% higher than other members, other factors held constant.

Female representatives were at a similarly heightened risk of endorsing; the hazard rate

for women is about 65% higher than that for men. Constituency factors also had a modest

influence on members' uncertainty. The hazard rate for endorsements rose by about 97%

as the absolute value of the district primary margin for Obama ranged from its lowest to

highest values. Simply stated, three factors appear to have led members to endorse either

Obama or Clinton earlier in the preprimary/primary process: race, gender, and strong

signals from the constituency. Other hypothesized factors—including the member's own

electoral security, ideology, seniority, and campaign contributions—had no statistically

significant effect on the risk of issuing an endorsement.[14]

Table 3 Here

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[13] We assume equal correlation across observations.

[14] Tests for violation of the proportional hazards assumption (based on Schoenfeld residuals) are insignificant globally and for each covariate.

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Choice Model

Popular dissections of the Democratic primary for the 2008 presidential election

differentiate between the periods before and after the Iowa caucuses. Obama's victory in

the Iowa caucuses gave him momentum and forced the Clinton campaign to turn to

negative advertising in an attempt to slow him down (Heilemann and Halperin 2010). As

Figure 3 indicates, the assessment provided by Heilemann and Halperin was shared by

the Iowa Political Markets; Obama's share price jumped markedly in the days immediately

following the Iowa caucuses (while Clinton's fell).

Though both recovered from those shocks following Clinton's victory in the New Hampshire

primaries, the post-Iowa level is clearly different from the pre-Iowa level for both

candidates. Observers appear to agree that the Iowa caucuses represented a change in the

dynamic of the contest, demonstrating Obama's viability and Clinton's vulnerability. For

that reason, we estimate separate models of endorsement decisions before and after the

Iowa caucuses.

Electoral considerations do not appear to drive endorsement decisions before the

beginning of voting in caucuses and primaries. Looking at the first column of **Table 4**,

Obama's margin in the district has no effect on endorsement decisions before the Iowa

caucuses.[15]

Table 4 Here

A member's interest in chamber power produces mixed results in the pre-Iowa model.

Chamber tenure has no effect on which candidate the PLEO endorses, but PLEOs are

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[15] The post-Iowa models include interactions with the home-state contest of the PLEO; obviously,
such an interaction is not appropriate for the pre-Iowa model. We effectively assume throughout
this paper that each Representative and Senator has a rough idea how well Obama will do in his or
her district, though the null result in the pre-Iowa models may indicate either that there is no effect,
or that members really had little certainty about how the Obama-Clinton contest would play out in
their district or state.

sensitive to the contributions they have received from PACs controlled by Senators Obama and Clinton. For every $1,000 donated to the candidate by Obama's PAC in the 2006 and 2008 elections, the PLEO is, on any given day, .001% more likely to endorse Obama. The cumulative marginal effect over the 308 days between March 1, 2007 and January 3, 2008, is .38 percent.[16] That is, all else equal, a $1,000 donation by Obama's PAC to the PLEO's warchest increases the probability of an endorsement by .38 percentage points. The effect of donations by Clinton's PAC were comparable, but reversed; the cumulative marginal effect of $1,000 in donations by her PAC was to reduce the probability of endorsing Obama by .46 percentage points, suggesting recipients of Clinton PAC money were more loyal to her presidential campaign than were recipients of Obama PAC contributions.

Women were neither more nor less likely to endorse Obama before the Iowa caucuses, while African American PLEOs were significantly more likely to endorse Obama before the Iowa caucuses. On any given day (setting all other variables at their medians), the marginal effect of being an African-American member of Congress was .03%. The cumulative marginal effect, then, for African American members of Congress was 9.24%. More liberal members of the Democratic House and Senate caucuses were also more likely to endorse Obama before the Iowa caucuses (an effect that persists after the caucuses). A one-unit change in DW-NOMINATE scores (rescaled so they range from -100 to 100) would produce a cumulative marginal effect of 0.04 percent.

Finally, turning to contextual factors, the remarkable feature is the insensitivity of PLEOs to changing contextual circumstances. Though Obama's advantage in the Iowa Political Markets varied considerably, having a very small advantage or a modest

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[16] For the pre-Iowa models, the cumulative marginal effect is calculated by taking the marginal effect from the model in **Table 4** (all other variables held at their median values), and multiplying that value, which is the marginal effect for any given day, by 308, the number of days between the start of our dataset on March 1, 2007, and the day of the Iowa caucuses on January 3, 2008.

disadvantage through most of the first half of 2007, and Clinton opening a significant advantage in August 2007 that would not close until the Iowa caucuses, the dynamic did not have a statistically significant effect on the endorsement choices of the PLEOs.

Looking at column 2 of **Table 4**, our model for PLEO endorsement after Iowa adds four additional variables. First, we add a dummy variable for whether the day is before the contest in a PLEO's state and an interaction term between the dummy variable and Obama's margin. The interaction tests if there is a difference in the effect of the district results before and after the actual results are known. Second, we add two lagged variables that capture whether the superdelegate previously endorsed Clinton or another candidate. After the Iowa caucuses, 60 superdelegates switched to Obama from another candidate (see **Table 2**). The act of switching endorsements may be different than endorsing Obama for the first time.

The lagged variables for prior endorsement show that Clinton supporters were less likely to endorse Obama on a given day. Those who had endorsed candidates other than Clinton were not different in their endorsement decisions than PLEOs who did not endorse a candidate prior to endorsing Obama. This result makes sense because other candidates dropped out of the race, thus giving the PLEOs the freedom to make another endorsement decision. The significance of the lagged Clinton endorsement, however, is important for interpreting the results of the post-Iowa model. In the analysis that follows, the effect of each factor will be examined for both PLEOs who endorsed Clinton and PLEOs who did not endorse a candidate prior to endorsing Obama.

Turning to electoral factors, we find that electoral margin only matters after the actual contest in the district.[17] **Figure 4** compares the probability of endorsing Obama on a

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[17] Since there is an interaction term, the "Obama Margin in District" coefficient represents the effect of the electoral margin after the state contest. The effect before the state contest is the combination

given day as the electoral margin changes for PLEOs who previously endorsed Clinton to PLEOs who had not endorsed any candidate. As expected, the probability of endorsing Obama increases as Obama's electoral margin increases in the district. But, electoral margin has a bigger impact on PLEOs who had not made a prior endorsement. To put this in terms of marginal effects (see **Table 5**), the cumulative marginal effect of electoral margin for switchers from Clinton is 2.61 percent, whereas the cumulative marginal effect for first time endorsers is 6.02 percent.

Figure 4 Here

The pre-contest variable reveals that for districts that are either solidly for Clinton or are close between Obama and Clinton, superdelegates are more likely to endorse Obama before the contest. Since the pre-contest variable is part of an interaction, the magnitude of the coefficient as well as its significance varies across different values of the margin variable. **Figure 5** shows how the magnitude and significance of the variable changes. Notice that for districts that are more solidly for Obama (districts where Obama wins by more than 5 percentage points), the pre-contest coefficient is insignificant. This means that there is no difference between the pre-contest endorsement calculus and the post-contest calculus for superdelegates from strong Obama districts. For superdelegates from either divided or strongly Clinton districts, there is a difference. In both cases, the superdelegate is more likely to endorse Obama before the contest than after. Once the district registers its preference at the polls, superdelegates find it harder to endorse a candidate that conflicts with the district choice.

Figure 5 Here

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of the Obama Margin variable and the interaction term. The pre-contest coefficient, -0.0328 (st. error = 0.0567), is not statistically significant.

In contrast to the pre-Iowa model, campaign contributions and race do not have a significant effect on the probability of endorsement after Iowa. Ideology, however, remains a strong influence on endorsement decisions. **Table 5** compares the cumulative marginal effect of ideology of Clinton endorsers to first time endorsers before and after the state contest. Ideology was a larger factor in endorsement decisions prior to the state contest. As state returns came in, PLEOs began to factor in the results of their own districts. As a result, other factors like ideology see a decrease in importance.

<center>**Table 5 Here**</center>

Unlike the pre-Iowa model, contextual factors mattered during the period when states were actively holding primary contests. As with ideology, the dynamics of the campaign had the largest effect on the probability of endorsing Obama prior to the state contest. Once state returns were in, PLEOs factored in the results of their own district and campaign dynamics had to compete with other factors in endorsement decisions.

As expected, ideology and campaign dynamics had less of an impact on Clinton endorsers than those who had not endorsed a candidate. Having made an endorsement, PLEOs were reluctant to switch to Obama while Clinton was still in the race. Interestingly, though, after the state contest, the difference in the cumulative effect between Clinton endorsers and first time endorsers was smaller than before the state contest. This suggests that once state returns were in, the prior endorsement carried a little less weight.

Discussion

We find that congressional superdelegates were influenced by electoral, power, and personal factors during the 2007-2008 democratic presidential primary contest. The importance of these factors, however, varied over the course of the campaign creating what we see as a three distinctly different periods: pre-season, pre-contest, and post-contest.

In the pre-season, before the Iowa caucuses, the greatest number of candidates in the race all work to establish themselves as credible candidates. Superdelegates have the opportunity to be seen as early endorsers of a campaign. It comes as little surprise to find that during this phase the power and personal factors dominate. In the choice model (**Table 4**), we find that campaign contributions are an important factor as superdelegates reward candidates who helped them by endorsing them before the primary contests begin. Ideology plays an essential role in this time period as well, as superdelegates may hope to influence the ideological position of the eventual nominee. In 2008, the candidate position on Iraq likely played a key role as more liberal superdelegates wanted to give Obama an early boost. We also see the influence of race on the decision to endorse Obama. African-American superdelegates were ready to put their support behind Obama early to help him demonstrate the viability of his candidacy. While gender does not significantly influence the decision to endorse Obama, the Cox duration model (**Table 3**) shows that women endorsed a candidate earlier than men.[18] This finding supports the general idea that personal and power factors played an important role in superdelegate decisions prior to the Iowa Caucus. In sum, this period is characterized by loyalty, personal passion, and the willingness to take a risk.

Once the Iowa Caucuses occur, superdelegates move into the second period of decision-making. The duration of this period is different for each superdelegate because it is the time from the Iowa Caucus until their state's primary contest. In this period election returns begin to come in, causing some candidates to drop out of the race and others to gain momentum. Yet the constituents of the congressional superdelegate have not yet voted. In 2008, election returns come in that give Obama a pledged delegate lead while Clinton

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[18] We confirmed that women were more likely to endorse Clinton as well by running the choice model with endorsing Clinton as the dependent variable.

maintains a superdelegate endorsement lead. This creates an uncertain environment for superdelegates, which manifests itself in the Cox model, where we see that those superdelegates from districts where the outcome between Clinton and Obama was close tend to hold off longer in making a decision.

In this period we see for the first time that contextual factors come into play. As Obama's probability of winning the nomination increased, as measured by the Iowa Political Market, superdelegates were more likely to endorse him. Ideology continues to play a role in endorsement decisions; but, interestingly, race, gender, and campaign contributions are insignificant during this period, suggesting that power and personal factors apply for early deciders only. This period is characterized by superdelegates attempting to read the political winds. We might think of them as neither risk averse nor risk acceptant. They want to endorse a candidate before their state contest, so that they can be seen as taking a risk for the winning candidate but they don't want to risk too much by endorsing a candidate before any votes are cast.

The final period comes once a superdelegate's district has voted. For the first time, electoral factors become important (in terms of whom to endorse). The increased importance of electoral factors is mirrored by a drop in the relative importance of ideology and contextual factors. In this final period, superdelegates are able to make decisions with more complete information and thus may reflect the most risk averse members.

Conclusion

Although our findings on the dynamics of congressional superdelegate choices shed light on an important component of the historic 2008 election, we argue that the patterns of superdelegate behavior have more generalizable lessons for congressional decision making. First, members face high-stakes choices over decisions that are outside the lawmaking process, and the factors that influence these choices reflect multiple, sometimes conflicting

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goals. Mayhew's work on members in the public sphere establishes that not all important choices members make are internal, legislative choices; members can create or seize opportunities to try to shape national politics (Mayhew 2000). Endorsement decisions are one among many possible forms this public-oriented action can take. The choice facing congressional superdelegates in 2008 was an unusual example in the sense that institutional rules presented a very large subset of members with a formal opportunity to engage in public-sphere action, but the choice nonetheless reflects a visible chance to shape national politics that comes with high potential costs and benefits. Although the large-n nature of the choice differentiates it somewhat from Mayhew's examples, we can learn from the large data set about the nature of these choices—in particular, that members weigh the electoral, policy, and, to a lesser extent, power implications of public extralegislative actions.

Second, whether a choice is legislative or extralegislative, members who face potentially costly choices in an uncertain environment make strategic calculations about both the timing and the direction of the choice. Our findings provide new support for a limited body of existing work showing that members will make earlier decisions on high-stakes questions when information in their decision context significantly reduces uncertainty. We also provide support for the notion that decision context shifts over the course of a lengthy decision season. Fenno suggests that early deciders, active players, and late deciders are affected by different factors and by shifting definitions of the choice (Fenno 1986). Our finding of differential effects across the nomination season shows that the changing context placed emphasis on different goals and considerations. Early deciders on the endorsement question responded to strong personal preferences for ideology or descriptive representation, and they considered power goals more strongly. Early deciders who endorsed Clinton were, in later periods, more resistant to changing their positions to

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Obama support than were those who had not endorsed one of the two main competitors. Active players who endorsed after Iowa and before their state contest responded to the rapidly changing dynamics of the national campaign, but members who held out until after their constituents had participated showed a clear tendency to follow district signals. Members, in short, responded to power, policy, and constituency factors, but the role of those factors was contingent on members' strategic decisions about timing.

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> 490.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Obama Iowa Political Market Advantage	2.103	47.084084
Woman	0.219	--
African American	0.141	--
Ideology	-42.000	15.78
Seniority	11.265	10.160
Obama PAC Contributions (in $)	2447.44	3949.17
Clinton PAC Contributions (in $)	954.06	2674.68
Obama Margin in District (percentage)	0.786	27.954
Obama Margin in District (natural log)	-0.031	3.018

For the Political Market Advantage, the mean is for one observation per day between March 1, 2007 and June 7, 2008. For all other variables, the summary statistics assume one observation per Democratic member of Congress.

Table 2: Changes in Endorsements by Congressional Superdelegates

Change in Endorsement	Before Iowa Caucuses	After Iowa, before State	After State Contest	Total
Changes to Obama				
None to Obama	33	30	59	122
Clinton to Obama	0	0	36	36
Other to Obama	0	12	12	24
Total	33	42	107	182
Changes to Clinton				
None to Clinton	77	10	10	97
Obama to Clinton	0	0	0	0
Other to Clinton	0	4	1	5
Total	77	14	11	102
Changes to Other Candidates				
None to Other	36	0	0	36
Clinton to Other	0	0	0	0
Obama to Other	0	0	0	0
Total	36	0	0	36

Cell entries indicate switches by congressional superdelegates from one endorsement to another. For example, 33 members of Congress endorsed Obama before the Iowa caucuses, all of whom had not endorsed another candidate before doing so. Between the Iowa caucuses and the state contest of the given superdelegate, 42 members endorsed Obama, 30 of whom had no previous endorsement and 12 of whom had previously endorsed another (non-Clinton) candidate.

Table 3: Cox Proportional Hazards Estimates of Time to Initial Endorsement

Variables	Time to Endorsement
Electoral Factors	
Size of Electoral Margin	0.0091[+]
	(0.0052)
Vote Share in Previous Election	0.0068
	(0.0063)
Power Factors	
Obama PAC Contributions (in $1000s)	0.0014
	(0.0238)
Clinton PAC Contributions (in $1000s)	-0.0102
	(0.0334)
Seniority	0.0111
	(0.0076)
Policy and Personal Factors	
Ideology	-0.0030
	(0.0053)
Woman	0.4982*
	(0.0052)
African-American	.5742*
	(0.2007)
Observations	192

Cell entries are Cox proportional hazard coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses
*** $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$, + $p<0.10$, two-tailed tests.

Table 4: Predictors of PLEO Endorsement of Obama, Before and After Iowa Caucuses[a]

	Before Iowa	After Iowa
Electoral Factors		
Obama Margin in District (ln transformation)	0.0601	0.0955*
	(0.1124)	(0.0385)
Before State Contest[b]	--	0.6919**
		(0.2256)
Obama District Margin*Before State Contest	--	-0.1283+
		(0.0674)
Power Factors		
Obama PAC Contributions (in $1000s)	0.3469***	0.0218
	(0.0735)	(0.0282)
Clinton PAC Contributions (in $1000s)	-0.4162+	-0.0351
	(0.2232)	(0.0381)
Seniority	-0.0058	-0.0037
	(0.0293)	(0.0092)
Policy and Personal Factors		
Ideology	-0.0387*	-0.0231***
	(0.0197)	(0.0058)
Woman	-0.1775	-0.0231
	(0.7227)	(0.2346)
African-American	2.2409**	-0.1582
	(0.7116)	(0.3015)
Contextual Factors		
Obama IPM Advantage	0.0101	0.0319***
	(0.0140)	(0.0042)
Lagged Variables		
Endorsed Clinton$_{(t-1)}$	--	-0.8366***
		(0.2329)
Endorsed Other Candidate$_{(t-1)}$	--	0.1138
		(0.2501)
Constant	-11.4434***	-7.9446***
	(1.2047)	(0.4464)
Observations	66419	29767
Number of Individuals	254	237

[a]Cell entries are population-averaged logit coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses

*** $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$, + $p<0.10$

[b] The combined beta coefficient for Obama District Margin before the state contest is -0.0328 with a standard error of 0.0567.

Table 5: Cumulative Marginal Effect of Key Variables on Endorsing Obama After the Iowa Caucus

	Before State Contest		After State Contest	
	Endorsed Clinton	No prior endorsement	Endorsed Clinton	No prior endorsement
Obama Margin	n.s.	n.s.	2.61	6.02
Ideology	-1.36	-3.14	-0.63	-1.45
IPM Advantage	1.89	4.33	0.87	2.01

The numbers in the table are the percentage change in the probability of endorsing Obama.

n.s. variable was not significant in the model

Figure 1: Superdelegate Endorsements for Obama and Clinton from March 1, 2007 to June 7, 2008
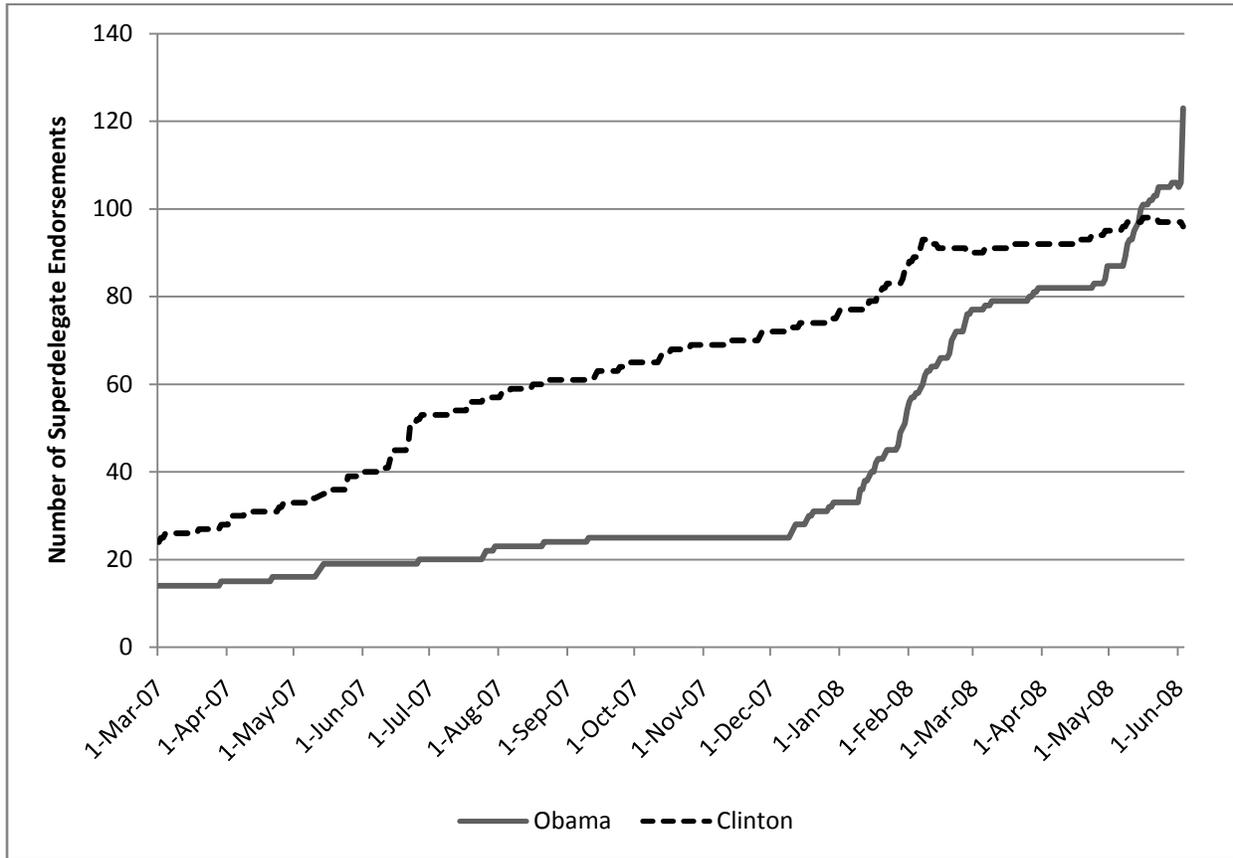
**Figure 2: Pledged Delegate Count for Obama and Clinton from January 3, 2008 to June 3, 2008**
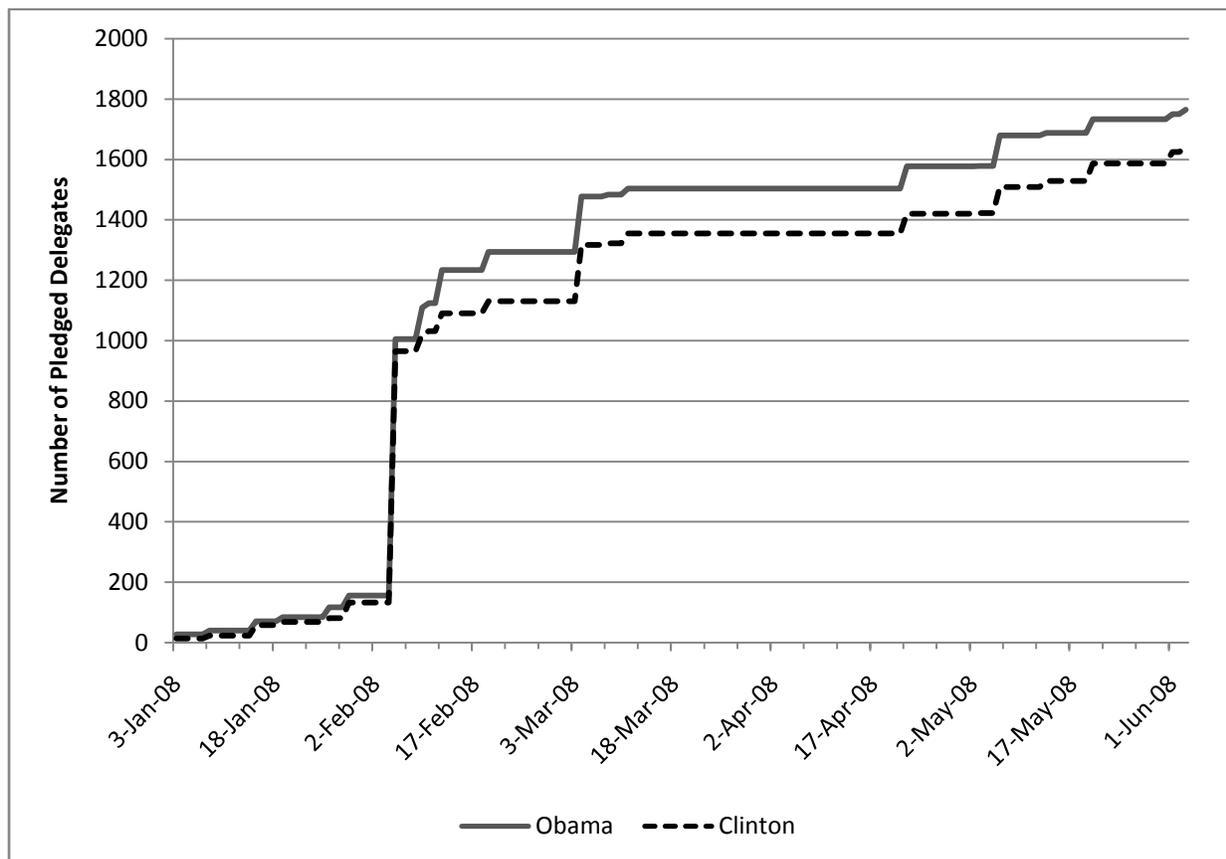
**Figure 3: Iowa Political Market Prices for Obama and Clinton from March 1, 2007 to June 7, 2008**
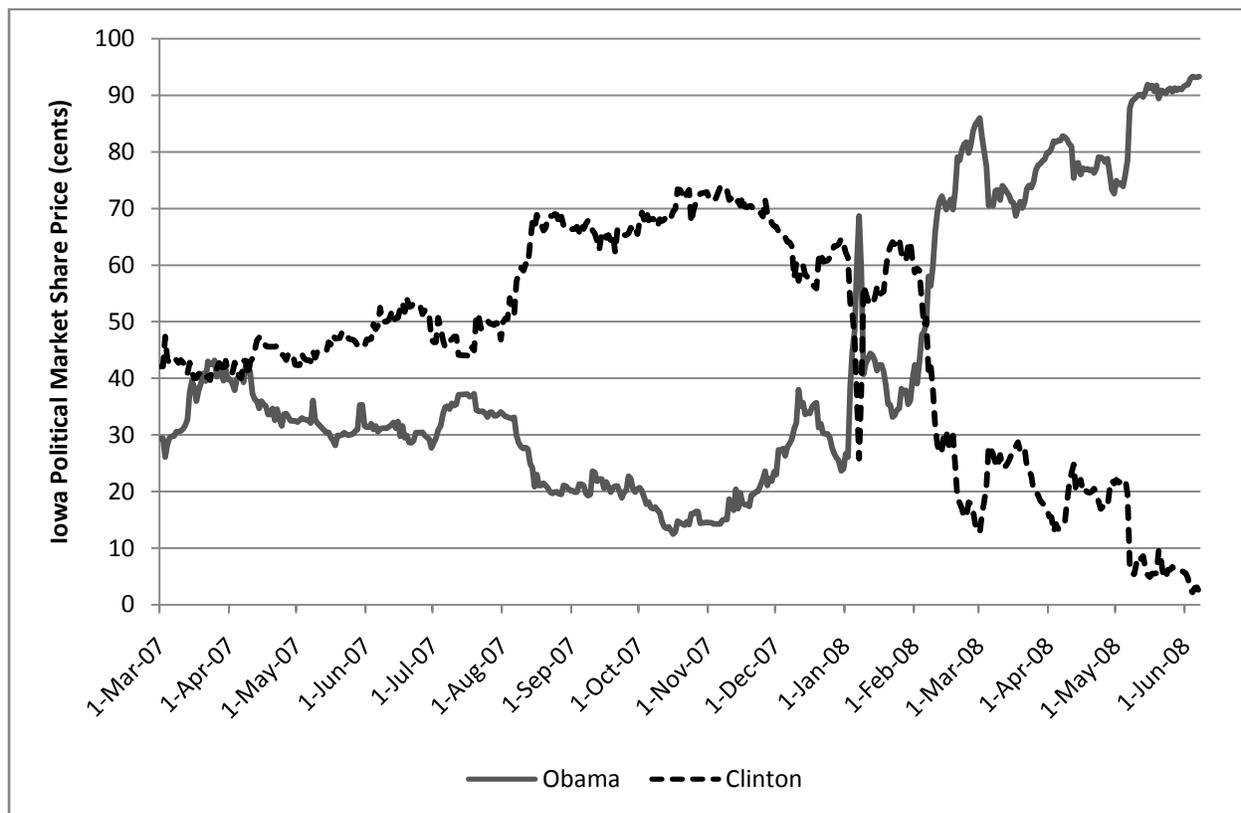
Figure 4: Probability of Endorsing Obama on a Given Day by Electoral Margin in PLEO's District
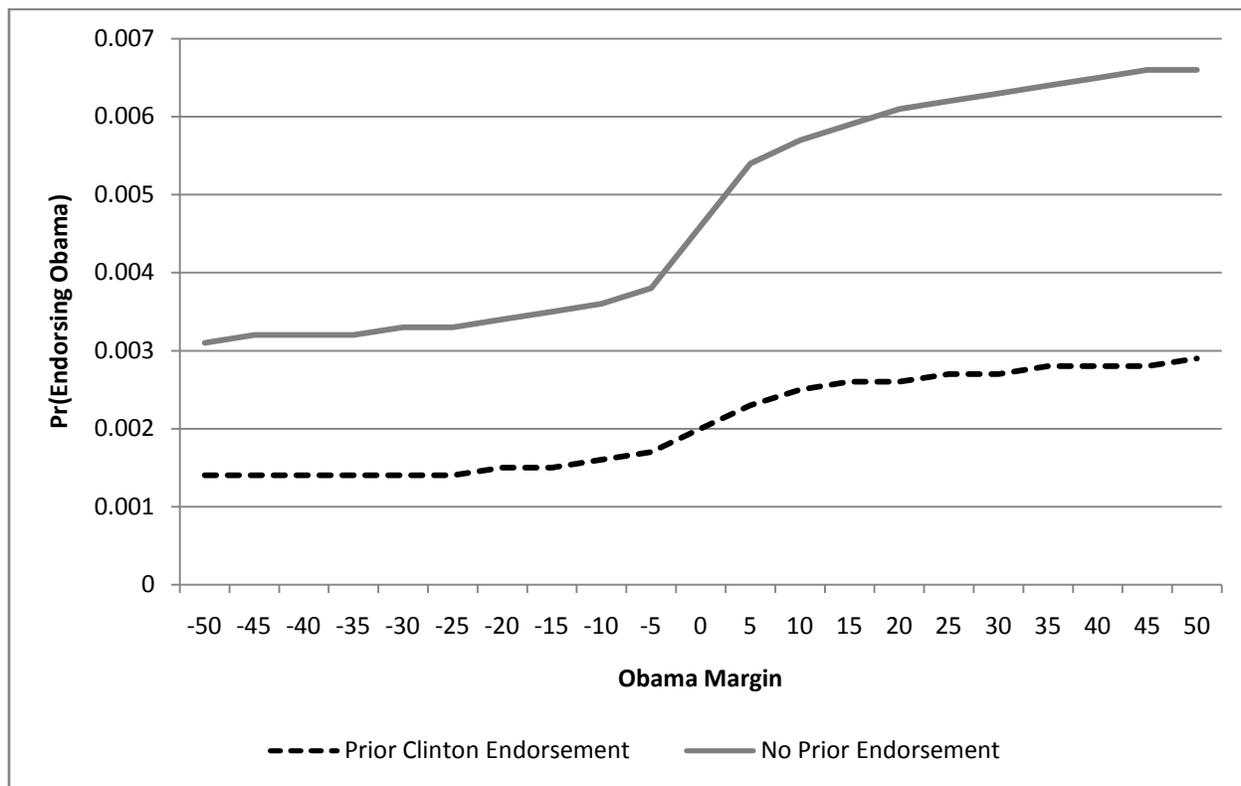
Figure 5: Beta Coefficient and 95% Confidence Intervals for Pre-Contest Dummy Variable at Different Values of Obama Margin