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"Super" Representation: The Relationship Between Elected Officials and their Constituents

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Introduction

The Commission on Presidential Nomination (Hunt Commission) was convened after the election of 1980 by the Democratic National Committee. The election of 1980 was turbulent; President Jimmy Carter defended his nomination from Senator Edward Kennedy. Seeking to make rule changes for the Democratic presidential nominating process, the Hunt Commission created a new class of delegates to the Democratic Party’s national convention: Party Leaders/Elected Officials (popularly known as superdelegates). The Commission’s intent was to involve more leaders of the Democratic Party in the decision-making. Thus, superdelegates are various party leaders and elected officials who have a vote at the Democratic National Convention. These votes are not cast based on primary or caucus results, making superdelegates dissimilar from pledged delegates who are bound to a candidate (Hunt 1982). For the remainder of this paper, the term superdelegates will only refer to those elected officials who are Governors or members of Congress. This use of the term will be described further in the Research Design section.

Superdelegates are inherently placed in a situation of publicly agreeing or disagreeing with their constituents. They are able to endorse a candidate either before or after their constituents vote for a candidate, whereas other delegates must vote at the Convention for whomever the people voted.

Because of the unique position that they are put in, superdelegates provide an insight into the relationship between elected officials and their constituents. I will use the endorsements made by superdelegates in order to study this relationship, making the following thesis paper an empirical study. The main variables I will study are seniority
and margin of victory. I hypothesize that those superdelegates with more seniority and/or a higher margin of victory will be less likely to agree with their constituents.

**Theoretical Significance**

My thesis topic has a strong theoretical significance, both to political science and the public at large.

My paper has a definite significance in the academic world. There have been few studies of the direct relationship between elected officials and constituents and any of these studies faces a real challenge: getting both sides to voice their opinions explicitly on the same issue. Without the involvement of both officials and constituents, it is near impossible to understand the effects of one group’s actions on the other. As I will be using superdelegates for my empirical cases, I have circumvented that very issue. Superdelegates endorse a candidate and constituents vote for a candidate, so I will be researching the direct relationship between the two groups. In addition, there has been no paper studying the institution of superdelegates. After seven presidential election cycles, it is past time to look closely at how superdelegates have functioned in the election cycle. Questions such as the following need to be answered: Have they served their intended purpose? Are they useful in the nominating process? With answers to these questions and others, the Democratic Party can revamp or leave alone the current system of nominating a candidate. Thus, my thesis paper is of great importance in two areas, analyzing the elected official-constituent relationship and evaluating the institution of superdelegates.

My paper is also relevant for the public at large as it is about the relationship between elected officials and constituents. The superdelegates whom I will be studying,
Governors and members of Congress, all have specific constituencies, spanning the entire country. As all Americans are subject to their representation, my paper will detail to the public whether or not these elected officials are truly representing them. Representation is important to everyone although not all Americans take an active role in their government; they are affected on a daily basis by the actions taken on their behalf. Taxes, health care, and national defense are just some examples of how elected officials make decisions on behalf of the public. Understanding the way that elected officials function is essential to the people getting what they want from the government. My research will provide insight into whether or not, how often, and under what conditions elected officials and constituents agree.

**Paper Outline**

This section acts as the outline for how I will complete the rest of my paper. In the next section I review the literature surrounding my research question. I look at the three different styles of representation: agent, trustee, and unconscious. Also, I review the literature on the relationship between officials and constituents. Finally, my literature review provides insight into the effects of the Hunt Commission.

Following my literature review is my research design. My research design outlines and defends the steps that I have taken to gather and analyze my data. I have gathered all the endorsements from superdelegates and compared them to the votes of their respective constituents.

My research design precedes my analysis and assessment section. This section provides the results of my research and explains what said results mean. I will be
analyzing five elections and then will analyze the elections together to create a universe of superdelegate involvement.

Finally, I have prepared a section of conclusions. These conclusions include that superdelegates who are junior in seniority and have had a small margin of victory are more likely to agree with their constituents than their counterparts. Along with these conclusions, I will generalize some of the trends that I have found in my data, discuss further topics of research stemming from this paper, and write about the impact of my findings.
Literature Review

There is a long history of debate over the relationship between constituents and elected officials. This debate encompasses classic representational theory—should officials act as their constituents would act, or should they act according to their own judgment. The question can also be referred to as a mandate-independence controversy (Pitkin 1967: 145). It is also important to look at how the link between the two groups has been measured and how that interplay has been seen in superdelegates.

My narrow research question fits in well with the scholarly debate that surrounds more general topics. I am researching the effects of seniority and margin of victory on the relationship between constituent and official, using superdelegates as my empirical data. By looking at whom superdelegates choose to endorse as presidential candidates and whom their constituents vote for in the nominating process, I will be able to find out if seniority and margin of victory impact the type of representation followed.

Historical Perspectives

Arguments over the correct relationship between representatives and constituents can be broken down into three main groups: trustee representation, agent representation, and unconscious representation.

To begin, it is important to note the many problems associated with choosing either side of the mandate-independent controversy. One must take into account what a representative should consider of highest interest: the desires of local constituents, the interests of the nation, or the program of a political party. Also, on both extremes there are arguments that put into question the true meaning of the word represent. With a full
mandate from the people, a representative becomes more of a servant of the people. There is no need for a representative to do anything, as his people have already decided for him. On the other hand, a fully independent representative is surely not representing his people if he never considers them before making a decision (Pitkin 1967: 144-7). Thus, it is important to understand the three types of representation outlined as merely parts of the solution to the controversy.

Trustee representation refers to the philosophy that representatives should act in their constituents’ interest, but not follow their will. A main proponent of this style of representation was Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes created the concept of the “Leviathan”, a type of body politic. The Leviathan consists of one man or an assembly of men that has a covenant with all other men. The covenant entails all men giving up their power to the Leviathan, who represents the will of all men. The Leviathan acts as he feels necessary; he is a sovereign authority (Hobbes 1651). A significant consequence of this type of representation is that a representative does as he pleases with binding consequences on those governed (Pitkin 1967: 113). Another political theorist who saw a similar purpose for representation was Edmund Burke. Burke had a firm belief that representatives should not follow the will of the masses. He believed that a natural aristocracy was created and was integral to leading the people (Burke 1770). Hannah Pitkin points out that Burke believed that “representation has nothing to do with obeying popular wishes, but means the enactment of the national good by a select elite” (1967: 170). Both Burke and Hobbes were inclined to distrust the people as decision-makers.

Superdelegates who do not endorse the same candidate as their constituents would fall into this category. This is not to say that any superdelegate who disagrees with his or
her constituents is automatically a trustee representative. Rather, the timing of the disagreement makes a large difference. If disagreement occurs after constituents have voted, a designation of trustee representation would be appropriate. These superdelegates would have shown they believe that on this “particular issue, popular opinion is unreliable and the representative’s duty is to ignore it and pursue constituency interest” (Pitkin 1967: 182).

Opposite from trustee representation is agent representation. Agent representation refers to legislators directly reflecting the desires of their constituents. This type of representation implies that a representative is “acting for someone else, hence not autonomously, not on his own initiative, but in some way dependent on his principal” (Pitkin 1967: 122; emphasis in original). John Stuart Mill espoused this theory. Mill believed that constituents should have the ultimate power in any society. He wrote that all people should not only have their voice heard, but should also participate in the government on some level. Mill also advocated proportional representation, the idea that minority groups should have representation equivalent to their size (Mill 1861). There is evidence in Mill’s writings that he believed that a regular man could be shown his true interest, even if he would be unable to do so without being told. This is the main contrast between Burke and Mill, that Mill believes that “the representative not only must do what is right, but he must tell his constituents why it is right” (Pitkin 1967: 206).

Mill’s theory is easily translated into the language of superdelegates. Agent representation can be seen when superdelegates know the desires of their constituents. This scenario takes place when a superdelegate endorses a candidate after his constituents have voted in a primary or caucus. The superdelegates who wait to see how their
constituents vote acknowledge that their power is derived from the people and, accordingly, the people’s demands should often be met. It is also possible that superdelegates can know the opinion of their constituents prior to a primary or caucus due to public opinion polling. However, these polls are not official and public opinion can change dramatically throughout a nominating season. Thus, it is still important to only consider knowledge of public opinion from official results.

As a mixture of the two types of representation previously discussed, unconscious representation occurs when legislators act according to the desires of their constituents by accident. I call it a mixture because it there is agreement with constituents as found in agent representation, but the official does not know his constituents’ desires, as is the case in trustee representation. Harold Gosnell finds this type of representation to be the most appealing. He believes this intersection of desires to be the most important aspect of representation, contending that representation is only an accurate term when the desires of constituents are served (Gosnell 1948). It is a condition of representation, in fact, that the desires of constituents are being fulfilled (Pitkin 1967: 77).

Gosnell’s model of representation will be seen frequently in my data. Unconscious representation will occur for superdelegates when they agree with their constituents but are unaware of their constituents’ preference. This can only occur when a superdelegate endorses a candidate before his or her constituents vote. As previously mentioned, the use of polls can complicate this assertion, but I maintain my previous argument that without official results public opinion cannot be truly gauged.
As has been clearly noted, the three styles of representation will be a driving force in my paper. Superdelegates can be grouped into one of the three categories outlined above, making it possible to see which style of representation befits all or a group of them. I found, due to high agreement rates, that a majority of superdelegates could be grouped into unconscious or agent representation.

**The Elected Official-Constituent Relationship**

There has been a vast quantity of research done on the link between constituent opinion and elected official action. These studies look at the different variables involved in the relationship between official and constituent.

One of the definitive studies on this relationship came from Miller and Stokes in 1963. Their study looked at the issues of social welfare, foreign policy, and civil rights to determine how closely roll call voting by members of Congress matched the opinions of their constituencies. It was concluded that members of Congress agreed with their constituents most often on civil rights issues. The other issues showed that there was a strong correlation between how members of Congress voted and what they perceived their constituents’ opinions to be. This study showed that members of Congress had a stronger correlation between their voting and their perception of constituent attitudes than their own attitudes, an example of agent representation (Miller and Stokes 1963).

Stemming from a similar line of logic was a study done by Walter Wilcox. Wilcox looked at the usage of polls by members of Congress. While the use of polls does not necessarily indicate the use of the information found in them, it was noted by Wilcox that many of the members of Congress used polls to gauge constituent opinion. Wilcox found that the members who used polls more frequently had served fewer terms in
Congress. While it is possible that this study proves that senior members do not care about their constituents’ opinions, other explanations could include senior members knowing their constituents better or junior members being more open to embracing the novelty of polls (Wilcox 1965).

Wilcox’s study is not the only to draw upon the effect of seniority among legislators. Gerald Wright wrote about the effect that term limits have on representation across state legislatures—it is only possible to reach a term limit as a senior legislator. Wright expected to find that legislators not running for re-election would be more likely than those up for re-election to stray from the opinions of their constituents. However, he found that there was no evidence that a legislator not running for re-election would be more or less likely to have a representative voting record for his or her constituency (Wright 2004). Patricia Hurley and Kim Quaile Hill focused on the election cycle of senators. They found that Senators who were up for reelection had a stronger link between voting and constituent opinion than did Senators reelected in the previous two cycles (Hurley and Quaile Hill 2003).

Although these studies show no sign of trustee representation, one done by Christian Grose stands in contrast. Grose researched the effects of valence advantages—federal outlays, name recognition, and constituent-determined competence—on how Senators represent their constituents. Grose found that when a Senator had large valence advantages, he or she strayed from the average voter in the constituency. However, when the legislator had a small advantage he or she moved closer to his or her constituents’ opinions (Grose 2007).
Grose’s study is an important descriptor for my study. As my main interest was in the effects of seniority, Grose provides a good definition for what seniority means. In addition to the valences described by Grose, I believe that seniority also leads to a feeling of comfort in office and better tactical knowledge of a constituency.

When thinking about the advantages that seniority brings, it is important to note that seniority could be a surrogate variable. Senior representatives are not the only representatives to gain the valence advantages described above. I believe that margin of victory could be another variable that leads to some of these advantages, making it another variable in the elected official-constituent relationship that will be studied.

**Hunt Commission**

As all of the styles and variables related to representation are going to be studied via superdelegates, it is important and relevant to my research to review the literature surrounding superdelegates.

In light of my contention about the importance of superdelegates, I will now discuss evidence to support it. A study by John Zaller looked at the various support-building techniques used by presidential candidates before the nominating season. He found that endorsements from political leaders were the most important predictor of success in the nominating process (Zaller 2005). Because the endorsements that Zaller wrote about occur before any constituent voting, yet they remain the best predictor of success, it follows that superdelegates may have a strong impact on constituent opinion: endorsements lead to votes. His study proves the influence that these superdelegates have, making them an important institution to study. Also, I will be exploring how strong this influence is by controlling for the time of endorsements in my study.
Other authors contend that superdelegates play a different role in the nominating process. Both Priscilla Southwell and David Price argue that superdelegates act merely to ratify the decision of voters (Southwell 2004; Price 2008). Their arguments contend that superdelegates act as agent representatives, reflecting the will of the people. In my data, superdelegates who endorse a candidate after their constituents have voted would support these arguments by Southwell and Price.

It is necessary to compare the methods used by Zaller, Southwell, and Price in order to come to a conclusion about the importance of superdelegates. Following the conclusions of Southwell and Price could derail my argument that superdelegates are an important institution to study in the elected official-constituent relationship. Zaller researches the support-building techniques used by all presidential candidates from 1980-2004. He presents data for public endorsements, fundraising, and media coverage for each candidate and finds that endorsements are the best predictor of success. Since Zaller looks at endorsements made before the nominating season begins, the influence of these endorsements on constituents can be easily seen. These points lie in direct conflict with the study done by Southwell. Her article uses mostly overall data on superdelegate endorsements, with her most persuasive evidence being from after Conventions. This method is flawed due to the fact that by the time a Convention takes place a winner has already been named, so delegates will generally vote for that candidate. The problems in Southwell’s research are compounded by David Price’s argument because it is solely based on his own opinion and experience, citing no data. Thus, I consider Zaller’s study to be the most reliable and applicable to my own research. This of course means that I
believe that the institution of superdelegates, when looked at properly, is a good source of information to study the elected official-constituent relationship.

There is yet another argument against using superdelegates to study representational theory. Susan Estrich believes that the institution of superdelegates is inherently contradictory with one of Mill’s core beliefs—proportional representation. Estrich, along with other feminists, believes that superdelegates take away from the proportional representation of the convention setting. She has stated this because of the fact that superdelegates, based on their positions, would be overwhelmingly white and male (Estrich 1981). Her point of view puts into question whether superdelegates could be considered representatives if they were not proportional representatives. In response, I think it is necessary to consider that the United States does not have proportional representation to begin with, making her argument defunct. This fact is easily noticeable by looking at the current composition of the Senate, which has seventeen women and one African-American. It follows that superdelegates can still be considered representative, especially since the ones I am studying are actually elected officials.
Research Design

My research design is for a study of the nature of the relationship between elected officials and their constituents. There are many variables in determining this relationship; I will study seniority and margin of victory. My research design includes my model and hypothesis, followed by the decisions I have made to collect and study data on superdelegates.

Model and Hypothesis

Now that the topic of my research is clear, I will present how I believe these variables impact the aforementioned relationship.

Hypothesis 1: Seniority

I hypothesize that as elected officials are re-elected and serve for a long period of time, they become less responsive to their constituents. Senior elected officials have less pressure to mollify their constituents due to the name recognition and funds that closely follow seniority. In terms of my data, my hypothesis would be proven with less agreement between constituents and senior superdelegates than between constituents and junior superdelegates.

Along with the overall agreement between superdelegates and their constituents, I will control for the timing of endorsements made by superdelegates. To understand the impact of superdelegate opinion on constituents, I will only study endorsements made before constituents have voted. On the other hand, to find the impact of constituent opinion on superdelegates, I will examine only endorsements that are made after constituents have voted.
Figure 3.1: Senior Elected Official- Constituent Relationship

The above model (Figure 3.1) shows the relationship I expect to find for senior superdelegates. I anticipate that a senior elected official’s opinion will have a strong impact on constituent opinion and constituent opinion will have a weaker impact on senior elected official opinion. These impacts will be seen when I control for the timing of a superdelegate opinion.

Below (Figure 3.2) is a display of the relationship I expect to find between junior superdelegates and their constituents. I believe that a junior superdelegate’s opinion will have a weak impact on constituent, a contrast from senior superdelegates. Similarly, I expect that constituent opinion will have a stronger impact on junior elected officials’ opinions and ultimately their decision on whom to endorse for the presidential nomination.
Hypothesis 2: Margin of Victory

My second hypothesis is closely related to my first. As I noted in a previous section, seniority could be a surrogate variable for other comforts of an elected official, such as margin of victory. Thus, I will study the impact of margin of victory on the elected official-constituent relationship. I hypothesize that margin of victory will act in the same manner as seniority, meaning that elected officials with a higher margin of victory will be less responsive to their constituents. Winning by a large margin signifies one or more of the following: strong popularity, weak opponents, and high partisanship. Any of these characteristics provides job security for a large-margin elected official, making the need to placate constituents a less pressing concern than for small-margin elected officials.
Above is a model (Figure 3.3) that describes the relationship I expect to find between large-margin elected officials and their constituents. Its design is the same as Figure 3.1, but it substitutes margin of victory for seniority. Thus, I expect to find that the opinion of a large-margin superdelegate is valued strongly by constituents when voting in a primary/caucus. Also, I believe that constituent opinion will have less of an impact on a large-margin elected official.

The next model (Figure 3.4) illustrates the relationship I anticipate for small-margin elected officials and their constituents. This relationship mirrors the junior elected official relationship in Figure 3.2, meaning that I believe small-margin superdelegate opinion will have a weak impact on constituent opinion, while constituent opinion will have a stronger impact on small-margin elected officials.
Figure 3.4: Small Margin of Victory Elected Official- Constituent Relationship

Case Selection

The cases used to determine the relationship between elected officials and their constituents will be the Democratic nominating process for the elections of 1984, 1988, 1992, 2004, and 2008. Specific to the Democratic process are superdelegates, various party leaders and elected officials who have a vote at the Democratic National Convention. These votes are not bound based on primary or caucus results. As a reminder, the term superdelegate in this paper refers only to those elected officials who are Governors or members of Congress.

The reasons that only these superdelegates are used include convenience and information availability. For starters, party leaders (e.g. Democratic National Committee members) who are superdelegates are not responsible to any set constituency. Thus,
there is no relationship between elected officials and constituents. There are other superdelegates who are elected officials besides Governors and members of Congress (e.g. large city mayors), but it is more difficult to find information on these superdelegates. Also, unlike Governors and members of Congress, these other elected officials are not superdelegates in every election, so their relationship with constituents would be difficult if not impossible to measure.

Superdelegates are able to declare their preference for a candidate based on any reason. For the most important decision voters make, that of the President, these elected officials can agree or disagree with their own constituents. This situation is unique because elected officials and constituents explicitly announce their opinions; this does not happen on other issues. Thus, superdelegates are the correct cases to study the relationship between elected officials and constituents.

The five election periods that have been selected for this study were not randomly selected. Superdelegates were introduced into the Democratic nominating process after the Democratic National Committee adopted the Hunt Commission’s findings in 1982. Thus, 1984 is the first election in which superdelegates played a role. All elections since 1984 create the entire universe of superdelegate involvement. However, I have left out the elections of 1996 and 2000 from the cases I will study. These contests will not show a true choice for superdelegates to make. In the 1996 election President Clinton was unopposed for the nomination and in 2000 Vice-President Al Gore had won about 80% of the endorsements made before the primary season began, with former Senator Bill Bradley winning the other endorsements (Zaller 2005). By taking these two elections out
of the universe, I make sure that I only include elections that have multiple candidates winning endorsements from superdelegates.

**Data**

With my cases determined, it is important to decide where I will find the needed information to test my hypotheses. This raw data will be largely gathered from news outlets and Secretary of State offices across the country. I will track down all endorsements made by superdelegates and then cross-reference those endorsements with the results of voting by their constituents in the primaries and caucuses.

Endorsements made by superdelegates are reported both by presidential campaigns and news outlets. The timing of the endorsement will be noted and recorded in relation to the state primary/ caucus and the nomination being secured by a candidate. The nomination being secured will be determined in two ways: the date at which only one candidate remains, the others having withdrawn, or the date at which one candidate has received the amount of delegates needed to gain nomination at the Convention, as reported by media outlets. Also, superdelegates who switch endorsements will be recorded to ascertain if their switch was in accordance with how their constituents voted.

Through their own government websites, news archives and the *National Journal’s Almanac of American Politics*, superdelegates’ number of terms in office and margin of victory in the most recent election will both be recorded.

Secretary of State offices along with news archives will provide primary and caucus election results for each state and congressional district. For those states that do not report congressional district data, only supplying county data, I will look to aggregate the counties that make up a district as closely as possible. The 1984 and 1988
nominating contests pose specific problems for congressional district data. There are very few states that have these data available online. It would take too much time to ask for archives to be searched in each state to find these data, so the 1984 and 1988 nominating contests will not include congressional-level data.

My data will be manipulated in various ways in order to present a numeric conclusion of my hypotheses. Both hypotheses will be looked at election by election and with all elections combined. Additionally, superdelegates will be looked at as a whole and by their respective offices.

For my first hypothesis, seniority, two groups will be made: senior officials and junior officials. Junior officials will be defined as all Governors with four years or less of service, all Senators with six years or less of service, and all Representatives with four years or less of service. Congress is an institution that has deep traditions, awarding leadership positions based on length of service. Senators and Representatives stay in office for long periods of time, making groupings for these offices complex.

For Senators, one term in office is six years, a substantial amount of time to become comfortable with constituents and the responsibilities of the office, so I consider any Senator with less than six years in office a junior official. Representatives have two-year terms, so I made the cut-off line two terms, or four years, in order to better encapsulate the feeling of comfort experienced by senior officials. Also, if the cut-off line had been two years, there would be greatly unbalanced groups. Governors have a small amount of time in office in comparison to members of Congress, with most Governors being term-limited after two four year terms. Thus, their cut-off line is at four years, or one term for almost all Governors, because once they are re-elected, the feeling
of comfort that I have discussed is in full effect. Senior officials will be all remaining superdelegates. The percentage of agreement with constituents will then be computed for each group. After that, I will split the groups up by the timing of the endorsement in comparison to constituents’ voting.

My second hypothesis will follow the same basic format. The two groups will instead consist of large margin of victory elected officials, defined as more than a twenty-point victory in the most recent election, and small margin of victory officials, defined as a twenty-point or less victory. At first, I wanted to make the cutoff point at ten points, but after collecting my data the two groups were not balanced. Then I moved the cutoff point for the two groups to a 60-40, or a twenty-point, margin of victory. This breaking point makes the two groups more balanced in terms of number of superdelegates in each group and does not take away the true meaning of winning by a small margin considering that the average margin of victory for the superdelegates studied is about thirty-five percentage points.

In any election that has a significant number of superdelegates who switch their endorsements, such as 2008, I will present each piece of data twice. The first set of data will show original endorsements and the second set will show final endorsements. In addition, any superdelegate for which an endorsement cannot be located will be treated as missing data and will not be included in any analysis.

Results of my study will not involve the reasons why superdelegates endorsed a particular candidate before or after their constituents voted. The results will not take into account personal relationships or any other superfluous information. My raw data will merely show when superdelegates endorsed a candidate, whom they endorsed, and whom
their constituents voted for. Due to these facts, the connection in the relationship between constituents and officials that my analysis shows may be affected by those aforementioned factors not studied. The trends I find could be caused by those factors rather than by differing representational relationships. Additionally, each election has the possibility to show a different relationship because the dynamics of each election vary greatly. Therefore, my results could be more compelling on a case-by-case basis rather than as an entire universe.

**Reliability and Validity**

I am confident that the data I collect will be reliable. There is little to no room for personal bias in the collection of data. All data that are available will be used for analysis purposes. Also, the sources that my data are coming from, newspapers, state officials, and government websites, are all respected and time-honored institutions. There is no doubt that the information I will be using is factual. As I have laid it out, I believe that my research design could easily be replicated with the same results, another sign of my design’s reliability.

It is imperative that my research design be a valid and appropriate measure of my research question. If my design measures something unrelated to my question, my results will be useless. My research design specifically measures the endorsements of superdelegates compared to the votes of their constituents. For superdelegates who are Governors and Senators, I am using the votes of the entire state and am using only district-wide results for Representatives. This distinction assures me that I am comparing the superdelegates with only those people who elect them to office—I am not using nationwide votes for state offices. Superdelegates are one of the only instances in which
elected officials and constituents share their opinions on something (nominating a president) explicitly, making it an excellent measure of the relationship between the two. Due to the size of all the cases of superdelegates, any outliers will not have a large effect on the outcome of my analysis.

I have now mapped out the different ways that I will research the nature of the relationship between elected officials and their constituents. Using superdelegates, I will find out how seniority and margin of victory impact the aforementioned relationship. I will utilize various sources to collect my raw data, including news archives, campaign information, state election results, and government websites. With my research design fully disclosed, I will now move into the analysis and assessment of my hypotheses.
The Nomination of 2008

The Democratic nominating process in 2008 was historic on several fronts. Major presidential candidates included a woman, an African-American, and a Latino. Besides these candidates, there were two long-serving, well-respected Senators. With the nomination of Senator John McCain by the Republican Party, it became clear that a sitting Senator would be elected President for the first time since 1960.

The Democratic nominating process of 2008 was also one of the longest in history. Candidates began announcing their intentions to run for office as early as Election Day 2006. As the primaries and caucuses were held, Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton became the front-runners. The two Senators’ race for the nomination lasted until the last contests were held on June 3. Afterwards, Senator Clinton suspended her campaign.

Overall Data

To begin looking at the data from 2008, I will present some overall data about the superdelegates. There were 303 superdelegates whom I studied from 2008, with 274 of them making endorsements. Superdelegates on average have been in office for just over eleven years and won their most recent election by almost forty percentage points.

On each graph presented in this study, there will be two numbers accompanying each bar. Inside each bar will be a decimal indicating the exact proportion of agreement between superdelegates and constituents and in parentheses underneath each bar will be the number of superdelegates involved in said proportion. It is important to view the number of superdelegates involved in each group because groups will become as small as
one superdelegate. Small numbers of superdelegates in groups are due to the massive number of large-margin and senior superdelegates, along with a high percentage of superdelegates who endorsed a candidate before their constituents voted. Thus, some data will be best understood in coordination with all other elections. I will now present the overall agreement between superdelegates and their constituents.

Figure 4.1: Overall Agreement Between Superdelegates and Constituents 2008

As can be seen on the chart, superdelegates agreed with their constituents 65% of the time. Representatives and Senators followed closely to the overall percentage while Governors agreed less often. These numbers give a baseline for when I split up the superdelegates by seniority and margin of victory.

As described earlier, I will now show the same overall data for superdelegates, using their final endorsements.
When final endorsements are used in my data, superdelegates agree with their constituents 71% of the time, an increase over original endorsements. Once again, Representatives and Senators have nearly the same percentage of agreement with their constituents as all superdelegates combined, while Governors agree less. One potential implication of Governors agreeing less often would be that they do not change their opinions based on popular opinion. Governors may want to appear strong in their convictions, as they are the leaders of their respective states.

**Hypothesis 1: Seniority**

Now that the overall data have been presented, I will begin splitting up the superdelegates based on the variable I am looking for. First, I will present the data for my hypothesis on seniority. I previously hypothesized that junior superdelegates would be more likely to agree with their constituents than senior superdelegates.
In each category of Figure 4.3, junior superdelegates agree with their constituents more often than senior superdelegates. There is a ten-point difference between all junior and all senior superdelegates. Even though these data confirm my overall hypothesis, they do not address the timing of the endorsement in relation to the voting of constituents.

**Figure 4.3: Agreement Between Junior/Senior Superdelegates and Constituents 2008**

![Bar chart showing agreement between junior and senior superdelegates and constituents in 2008.](chart)

The data from the final endorsements (Figure 4.4), though, do not support my hypothesis as clearly as the original endorsements. The final endorsements show that the same percentage of junior and senior superdelegates agreed with their constituents. Also, senior Representatives actually agreed with their constituents more often than first term Representatives.

I believe that these data do not disprove my hypothesis, but actually support the theories of Price and Southwell that I wrote about in my Literature Review section. They both believed that superdelegates merely acted as ratifiers of the nominating process.
The chart below includes endorsements made after the nomination was secured, which I believe skew the results. Specific to 2008, a large group of superdelegates made endorsements on the day and day after Senator Obama secured the nomination. The nominating process in 2008 is the only one to see a group of superdelegates act in this manner. Thus, I felt it necessary to include them in the first part of the analysis. The original endorsements shown in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 also contain endorsements made in this manner, however, the final endorsements have many more of these endorsements. The next part of this hypothesis, controlling for the timing of the endorsements, does not include those endorsements. I take them out of the analysis because they reflect not a response to constituents, but rather a response to Obama capturing the nomination, making them poor cases for my study.

**Figure 4.4: Agreement Between Junior/Senior Superdelegates and Constituents 2008: Final Endorsements**

![Graph showing agreement between Junior/Senior Superdelegates and Constituents 2008: Final Endorsements.](image-url)
The next graph that will be shown controls the timing of the superdelegate endorsement. Because I have taken out any endorsements made after the nomination was secured, the number of superdelegates being studied decreases from 274 to 235 original endorsements and 223 final endorsements.

Figure 4.5: The Timing of the Agreement Between Junior/Senior Superdelegates and Constituents 2008

Figure 4.5 shows that junior superdelegates, across the board, have more agreement with their constituents than do senior superdelegates. When looking at the “Before State” bars, indicating that an endorsement was made before the superdelegate’s constituents voted, I had expected that there would be more agreement with senior superdelegates rather than junior superdelegates. I posited that constituents knowing the endorsement of a senior superdelegate would sway their votes more strongly than a junior.
superdelegate’s endorsement. However, this is not the case. On the other hand, the “After State” bars show that junior superdelegates are more likely to agree with their constituents after knowing how they have voted. This trend is what I expected from junior superdelegates.

**Figure 4.6: The Timing of the Agreement Between Junior/Senior Superdelegates and Constituents 2008: Final Endorsements**

![Graph showing agreement between superdelegates and constituents over time.](image)

Figure 4.6 shows that the final endorsements for superdelegates follow the same trends as the original endorsements in Figure 4.5. The gaps in agreement percentage between junior and senior superdelegates closes for Representatives, but stays large between Senators and Governors.

Of all the data presented for Hypothesis 1, it is clear that junior superdelegates agree more often with their constituents. It is also clear that knowing how the constituents have voted influences junior superdelegates to endorse the same candidate.
Unexpectedly, I found that constituents agree with junior superdelegates more often than senior superdelegates when a superdelegate has endorsed a candidate prior to the constituents’ voting.

**Hypothesis 2: Margin of Victory**

Moving on from seniority, I will now review the results of splitting up the superdelegates by margin of victory. Similar to my first hypothesis, I believe that superdelegates with a smaller margin of victory will agree with their constituents more often than superdelegates with a larger margin of victory. Of note: there are now 273 superdelegates, down one because of New York Governor David Paterson’s appointment.

**Figure 4.7: Agreement Between Small/Large Margin of Victory Superdelegates and Constituents 2008**
The data presented in Figure 4.7 shows that there is no proof to support my hypothesis. With all the original endorsements from superdelegates, those with smaller margins of victory agreed with their constituents only one percentage point more often than did those superdelegates with larger margins of victory. Representatives were even and small-margin Senators were two points above large-margin Senators. Small-margin Governors did agree with their constituents more often than large-margin Governors, a point that will be looked at more closely when the endorsements are controlled for their timing. One possible reason for this disparity comes when looking at who the large-margin Governors actually are. Of the eight, only one comes from a reliable Democratic state. Five of the Governors are from states that voted for McCain in the general election and the other two are from swing states. Based on these facts, it would seem plausible that the Governors endorsed the candidate (Obama) that they believed to be more moderate and in line with the average voter in their state, not the average Democratic voter.

The next chart will examine the same hypothesis about margin of victory using the final endorsements of superdelegates.

As expected, these data in Figure 4.8 below, also do not confirm my hypothesis. The categories of all superdelegates combined, Representatives, and Senators all show a slight edge in agreement with constituents towards the larger margin of victory superdelegates, counter to my hypothesis. Once again, Governors buck the aforementioned trend, staying in line with my hypothesis.
Next I will show the graphs controlling for the timing of the endorsements made by superdelegates. As a reminder, I expected that constituents would be more likely to follow large-margin superdelegates before they have voted and I also expected small-margin superdelegates to follow their constituents after they had voted.

Figure 4.9 below has several trends that I will discuss. There is little difference when comparing the “Before State” bars for the overall data, which was not the case in my first hypothesis. This follows along the overall agreement trend from Figure 4.7 and 4.8. Yet, all of the groups of superdelegates are not even. Constituents are more likely to agree with small-margin Representatives and Governors, while they agree more often with large-margin Senators than small-margin Senators. It is possible that constituents follow their Senators’ opinions more closely than other elected officials, but this claim is
not held up in my first hypothesis. When superdelegates endorse a candidate after
knowing how their constituents voted, small-margin superdelegates agree with their
constituents more often across the board, affirming my hypothesis.

Figure 4.9: The Timing of the Agreement Between Small/Large Margin of Victory
Superdelegates and Constituents 2008

Figure 4.10 below reveals mostly the same story as did Figure 4.9. The only real
differences are that small and large-margin Representatives agree with their constituents
at about the same rate and Governors join Senators in having constituents agree more
often with large-margin superdelegates when they make endorsements before the
constituents have voted.
My second hypothesis was confirmed in some areas. After constituents have voted, small-margin superdelegates are more likely to agree with their constituents and some evidence of constituents following the endorsements of large-margin superdelegates was found. Overall, small-margin superdelegates do not agree with their constituents more often than large-margin superdelegates, which goes against my hypothesis.

One possible explanation for the lack of support for this hypothesis may come from the advantages seen in 2008 by the Democrats. The Democratic Party label had a sizable advantage over the Republican label, perhaps alleviating any pressure to agree with constituents by small-margin superdelegates. Even though they may have not won their previous election by a large margin, many
superdelegates may have correctly believed that 2008 was a friendly environment for Democrats and they would not have to worry about being re-elected.
The Nomination of 2004

The Democratic nominating process in 2004 was the shortest of the studied elections. The field of candidates was wide to open the nominating season, with notable candidates including former Governor Howard Dean, retired General Wesley Clark, Representative Dick Gephardt and Senator Joe Lieberman. The many candidates in the field, however, dropped out quickly as the contests began. Senator John Kerry became the presumptive nominee after “Super Tuesday” because that is when Senator John Edwards suspended his campaign (Archibold 2004).

Senator Kerry’s candidacy nearly fell apart before the first contests, but his campaign captured a victory in the Iowa caucus, which catapulted him to the front of the pack. The surge in poll numbers Senator Kerry received after attaining victory in Iowa has been perceived as more evidence in favor of the “slingshot theory”, also known as “momentum” (Polsby 1983: 60), which was first apparent in President Jimmy Carter’s campaign (Greenberg 2007).

Overall Data

I will now discuss the overall data from the 2004 nominating contests. In 2004, all Democratic members of Congress and all Democratic Governors served as superdelegates. Due to the brevity of the nominating season, many states did not hold nominating contests before Senator Kerry became the presumptive nominee. I do not include superdelegates in states that voted after the nomination was secured, as there was no competition, so there were only 154 superdelegates studied, 113 of whom made endorsements. The superdelegates, in 2004, had been serving in office
for an average of almost thirteen years and had won their most recent election by more than thirty-seven percentage points.

The brevity of the campaign made it difficult for many superdelegates to endorse a candidate after their constituents had voted—there were only four such examples. Thus, I will not be discussing how the timing of an endorsement impacted the agreement between superdelegates and their constituents as I have for the other election cycles. The four superdelegates who made endorsements after their constituents had voted have been separated out for use when I analyze the total involvement of superdelegates since 1984.

Having discussed the overall details of the 2004 campaign, I will now reveal the overall results of the agreement between superdelegates and their constituents.

**Figure 5.1: Overall Agreement Between Superdelegates and Constituents 2004**

As can be seen, Figure 5.1 shows that the baseline for superdelegate agreement with their constituents is 40%. Representatives have a terrible rate of agreement at 28%,
while both Senators and Governors show a much higher rate of agreement at 71% and 86%.

**Hypothesis 1: Seniority**

Now that the overall data have been revealed, I will show the data for my first hypothesis about seniority. I previously hypothesized that junior superdelegates would be more likely to agree with their constituents than senior superdelegates.

**Figure 5.2: Agreement Between Junior/Senior Superdelegates and Constituents 2004**

![Bar chart showing agreement between junior and senior superdelegates](image)

Figure 5.2 shows that overall, there is no difference between junior and senior superdelegates. Even though each separated office shows that senior superdelegates are more likely to agree with their constituents, the number of senior Representatives weighs down the overall percentage. It is clear that my hypothesis gains no support from breaking down superdelegates by office.
Representatives were quick to endorse in 2004, with many endorsing months and months before any contests were held. Even though Senators and Governors made the vast majority of their endorsements before constituents had voted, they waited longer than Representatives in making an endorsement. This is one possible explanation for the poor rate of agreement between Representatives and their constituents.

**Hypothesis 2: Margin of Victory**

Now that the data for seniority have been revealed with negative results for my hypothesis, it is time to turn the attention of 2004 to my second hypothesis concerning margin of victory. Once again, I believe that superdelegates with a smaller margin of victory will agree with their constituents more often than superdelegates with a larger margin of victory.

**Figure 5.3: Agreement Between Small/Large Margin of Victory Superdelegates and Constituents 2004**
Figure 5.3 shows that in the overall group, my hypothesis was correct. There is a definite difference in data from Hypothesis 1 and from the overall data baseline of 40% agreement. Representatives show no difference between small and large-margin superdelegates while Senators buck the trend and show more agreement for large-margin superdelegates. Governors cannot be looked at because there were zero large-margin Governors, although there was a strong agreement for the small-margin Governors.

It is difficult to discern exactly why the small margin of victory data differ from those of junior seniority, but the fact that there were no large-margin Governors is certainly a large factor.
The Nomination of 1992

The Democratic nominating process in 1992 began with a large field of candidates, but narrowed quickly. The first casualties of the campaign included Senator Tom Harkin, Senator Bob Kerrey, and former Senator Paul Tsongas. Their exits led to a showdown between Governor Bill Clinton and former Governor Jerry Brown. This showdown, however, was more of a contest between Clinton and the public than Clinton and Brown. I write this because Brown won only two contests after he became the last challenger—Connecticut and Vermont. Also, effectively ending his hopes, he finished third in the New York primary, behind the already exited former Senator from Massachusetts Paul Tsongas. Additionally, Brown did not gain any superdelegate endorsements at any point in the nominating process.

Governor Clinton faced many different challenges in his run to the nomination. His extra-marital affairs and other doubts about his candidacy were widely written about. Representatives went on record stating that Clinton may “self-destruct” and exit polls showed that forty percent of voters in New York doubted Clinton’s integrity (Apple 1992).

It was not all bad news for Clinton, though. His path to the nomination was made easier by the reluctance of other candidates to enter the contest. Many of the better-known potential candidates, such as Governor Mario Cuomo and Senator Al Gore, believed that President Bush would win re-election against any candidate because the success in the Gulf War led to high approval ratings.
Overall Data

Before discussing the outcome of superdelegate involvement in 1992, it is important to discuss the overall data from this nominating process. The nominating rules in 1992 allowed for 80% of the Democratic members of Congress and all Governors to be superdelegates. Thus, there were a total of 289 superdelegates for 1992, with only 153 making formal endorsements of a candidate.

This group of 153 consisted of 103 Representatives, thirty-two Senators, and eighteen Representatives. The larger group of superdelegates, including those not endorsing, had been in office for an average of almost twelve years and had won their most recent election by more than thirty-six points. I will now present the overall data for superdelegates in 1992.

Figure 6.1: Overall Agreement Between Superdelegates and Constituents 1992

As can be seen in Figure 6.1, there is a high rate of agreement between superdelegates and their constituents—76%. Representatives have a negligible
difference from the overall baseline, Senators have less agreement, and Governors have a very high 89% agreement rate.

**Hypothesis 1: Seniority**

Now that the overall data have been presented, I will present information on my first hypothesis. As a reminder, I previously hypothesized that junior superdelegates would be more likely to agree with their constituents than senior superdelegates.

**Figure 6.2: Agreement Between Junior/Senior Superdelegates and Constituents 1992**

It is clear that the overall agreement of junior superdelegates is lower than senior superdelegates, a contrast from what I expected. The reason for this can be traced to the senior Senators and Governors; both groups were in agreement with their constituents more often than their junior counterparts. Representatives held true to my hypothesis, though, with a higher agreement among junior Representatives and their constituents.
As the endorsements are split up based on when they were made, there is a good deal of evidence against my hypotheses. I previously stated that I expected senior superdelegates to have more agreement with their constituents when endorsements were made before constituents have voted and I expected junior superdelegates to have more agreement with their constituents when endorsements were made after constituents have voted.

Figure 6.3 shows in the overall data that the gap between junior and senior superdelegates in Figure 6.2 has closed before the state has voted. This means that junior superdelegates over-performed before their constituents voted, going against my hypothesis. Because timing is factored in, Senators and Governors actually support my hypothesis; the senior Superdelegates in that category have more agreement with their constituents. However, Representatives no longer support my hypothesis, as it appeared that they did in Figure 6.2.
The trends after the constituents have voted present a similar story to before the vote. Senior superdelegates have more agreement with their constituents, a strike against my hypothesis. In defense of my hypothesis, though, the number of superdelegates who made endorsements after their constituents voted was too small to be able to draw any definitive conclusions.

The data from 1992 indicate that my hypotheses do not hold true for this case. I believe that the hesitation in endorsing any candidate by superdelegates and the extremely high percentage of agreement by those who did endorse have contributed to my hypotheses not being correct.

**Hypothesis 2: Margin of Victory**

Now that the data for my first hypothesis have been presented as mostly contradicted, it is time to address my second hypothesis—margin of victory. As previously noted, I believe that superdelegates with a smaller margin of victory will agree with their constituents more often than superdelegates with a larger margin of victory. There is one fewer superdelegate in this study than in the first hypothesis due to the fact that Governor Howard Dean of Vermont ascended into office upon the death of his predecessor.

Figure 6.4 below shows that there is no difference in agreement between all small-margin superdelegates and all large-margin superdelegates. Representatives follow the overall trend. Small-margin Governors agree more with their constituents, at 100%, but large-margin Senators agree more often with their constituents. Together, these trends do not make a compelling argument in favor of my hypothesis, following from my first hypothesis.
Figure 6.4: Agreement Between Small/Large Margin of Victory Superdelegates and Constituents 1992

Figure 6.5: The Timing of the Agreement Between Small/Large Margin of Victory Superdelegates and Constituents 1992
The data from Figure 6.5 (above) provide more evidence against my hypotheses. There is barely a difference between small and large-margin superdelegates across the spectrum when endorsements are made before constituents have voted. Then, after states have voted, large-margin superdelegates hold the advantage, counter to what I expected.

Overall, the evidence in favor of my hypotheses does not exist. Similar to my first hypothesis about seniority, it is important to take the data as they are, but also to look for reasons beyond simple numbers. For instance, Bill Clinton’s position as a sitting Governor must have made him more likely to gain endorsements from other Governors. The lopsided amount of victories for Clinton and length of the nominating campaign contributed to the high agreement between superdelegates and their constituents. I will also bring up once again that the hesitance of superdelegates to endorse any candidate in 1992 makes the superdelegates who did endorse distinctly different from those who did not. Perhaps with more full involvement from superdelegates the trends would have changed, but the fact remains that 1992 provided a bulk of evidence not in favor of my hypotheses.
The Nomination of 1988

Five candidates won contests during the Democratic nominating process of 1988. Governor Michael Dukakis won the most, eventually outlasting Reverend Jesse Jackson to win the nomination. Other candidates who won at least one nominating contest were Senator Al Gore, Representative Dick Gephardt, and Senator Paul Simon.

On “Super Tuesday,” Dukakis, Gore, and Jackson split the contests, essentially ensuring that the contests would continue until the end of the calendar. With Jackson as the last rival, Dukakis eventually gained enough delegates to become the presumptive nominee.

Overall Data

I will now present the overall data for the 1988 nominating process. In 1988, the Democratic Party rules allowed for 80% of Democratic members of Congress and all Governors to be superdelegates. Due to time constraints, I was unable to compile congressional-level data for the contests, which were not readily available, so only Senators and Governors are included in my study. With more time in the future, it would be possible to contact all fifty Secretaries of the State offices and put in requests to their state archives in order to fully complete this study.

There were sixty-eight superdelegates whom I researched, forty-eight of whom made endorsements. These superdelegates had been in office for nearly nine years on average and were most recently elected by a more than twenty-two point margin. Now I will reveal the overall data from 1988.
Figure 7.1: Overall Agreement Between Superdelegates and Constituents 1988

Figure 7.1 reveals the baseline for agreement between superdelegates and their constituents in the nominating processes of 1988. The 77% overall agreement is high for an election, especially when considering that the two offices included have been the more likely sub-groups of superdelegates to buck trends when looking at other elections. Senators and their constituents agreed at almost the same rate as all superdelegates while Governors and their constituents agreed slightly less often at 71%.

**Hypothesis 1: Seniority**

Now that I have discussed the overall data from 1988, I will begin discussing the data in terms of my hypotheses, the first being about seniority. As a reminder, I previously hypothesized that junior superdelegates would be more likely to agree with their constituents than senior superdelegates.
The data in Figure 7.2 reveal clearly that junior superdelegates and their constituents were more likely to be in agreement than senior superdelegates. The 14% difference in overall rate of agreement between junior and senior superdelegates is a large margin, yet is less than the differences in the individual offices: 17% more agreement for junior Senators and 18% more agreement for junior Governors. These data provide evidence in favor of my hypothesis about seniority.

Figure 7.3 below splits up the endorsements made by superdelegates based on when they were made. The data show mixed evidence for my hypothesis. I expected senior superdelegates to have more agreement with their constituents when endorsements were made before constituents have voted and I expected junior superdelegates to have more agreement with their constituents when endorsements were made after constituents have voted.
The data above show that junior superdelegates were, across the board, more likely to agree with their constituents. However, after constituents have voted, senior Senators were more likely to agree with their constituents and there were no Governors who agreed with their constituents after they voted. Although the data before constituents have voted support my overarching hypothesis about junior superdelegate agreement, the timing of the endorsements is counter to my expectations.

I believe that the trends after voting has occurred are at least partially due to the large number of candidates who won contests in 1988. By the time superdelegates made endorsements, the candidates for whom their constituents had voted had already exited the campaign.
Hypothesis 2: Margin of Victory

After finding that my first hypothesis is supported by the data, I will now present data for my second hypothesis. As I have stated previously, I believe that superdelegates with a smaller margin of victory will agree with their constituents more often than superdelegates with a larger margin of victory.

Figure 7.4: Agreement Between Small/Large Margin of Victory Superdelegates and Constituents 1988

The overall group in 1988 shows little difference between small and large margin superdelegates, with a similar rate as the overall agreement for all superdelegates in Figure 7.1. Senators show no difference between small and large-margin superdelegates, but small-margin Governors were more likely to agree than their counterparts. On the whole, my hypothesis is not held up by these data.

Below, Figure 7.5 shows the trends when the timing of endorsements is taken into account. The data parallel my first hypothesis exactly. Small-margin superdelegates are more likely to agree before constituents have voted and large-
margin Senators are more likely to agree after their constituents have voted, with a lower rate of agreement. Large-margin Governors still have no agreement after constituents have voted.

**Figure 7.5: The Timing of the Agreement Between Small/Large Margin of Victory Superdelegates and Constituents 1988**

As with my first hypothesis, my overarching expectations for small-margin superdelegates to be in agreement with their constituents more often than large-margin superdelegates was met, but when the timing of endorsements was looked at, results were not as expected. I believe that the same reasons explained in Hypothesis 1 apply to the lack of support for the second part of Hypothesis 2—many candidates won contests in 1988, but dropped out before many superdelegates made endorsements. Five candidates won primaries or caucuses, yet even though Jackson won nine contests, he had no superdelegate support.
The Nomination of 1984

The Democratic nominating process in 1984 was a long, hard-fought battle among several candidates. The leading candidates were former Vice-President Walter Mondale, Senator Gary Hart, and Reverend Jesse Jackson. Hart waged an insurgency battle that saw him win more preference contests than any other candidate. Another point from the campaign was that the proportion of delegates won by Jackson was far less than the percentage of popular vote he received.

One reason for the incongruence between Hart and Jackson running strong campaigns and not turning their votes into a nomination was the use of superdelegates for the first time. In 1984, former Vice-President Mondale won a disproportional amount of superdelegates when compared to regular pledged delegates (Berman 2008). He was the insider candidate, a favorite of the party, and Hart and Jackson were both outsiders. Thus, it is clear why he was favored by party leaders and elected officials.

Overall Data

Before discussing the outcome of superdelegate involvement in 1984, it is important to discuss the overall data from this nominating process. The superdelegates from 1984 who were appropriate for this study were, once again, members of Congress and Governors. The Democratic Party rules in 1984 allowed for 60% of Congress and all Governors to be named superdelegates.

The data that follow, however, do not include Representatives. Data were not readily available for how each congressional district voted in the primaries and caucuses, thus making it far too time-consuming to study Representatives. With
more time in the future, it would be possible to contact all fifty Secretaries of the State offices and put in requests to their state archives in order to complete this study.

Thus, what is left for 1984 is a group of fifty-nine Senators and Governors, forty-two of whom made endorsements during the nominating process. These superdelegates have been in office for about seven years and were most recently re-elected by a margin of about twenty points. When including Representatives in these statistics, the averages jump to almost ten years and thirty-seven points, once again showing the large margin that Representatives are routinely elected by.

As this election has so few cases, there will be many times when the data presented may not make sense in coordination with other years or even other graphs in this section. Thus, I will point out when this is the case and carefully explain what each graph is actually saying. With no further introduction, I will now present the overall data for superdelegates in 1984.

**Figure 8.1: Overall Agreement Between Superdelegates and Constituents 1984**

![Graph showing overall agreement between superdelegates and constituents in 1984](image)
Figure 8.1 shows that the baseline for agreement between superdelegates and their constituents is 45%. When the superdelegates are broken up by office there is little difference in their percentage of agreement. This overall agreement is a far cry from the height of the 2008 or 1992 elections.

**Hypothesis 1: Seniority**

Now that the overall data have been revealed, I will show the data for my first hypothesis about seniority. I previously hypothesized that junior superdelegates would be more likely to agree with their constituents than senior superdelegates.

**Figure 8.2: Agreement Between Junior/Senior Superdelegates and Constituents 1984**

The above data show a small difference, in the favor of junior superdelegates, in the percentage of agreement between junior/senior superdelegates and their constituents. When broken up by office, it is clear that senior Senators and junior
Governors are the officials most likely to be in agreement with their constituents.

The Senators go against my hypothesis while Governors are evidence in favor of my hypothesis.

**Figure 8.3: The Timing of the Agreement Between Junior/Senior Superdelegates and Constituents 1984**

In Figure 8.3, the agreement of superdelegates and constituents is controlled for the timing of endorsements. As is immediately apparent, there were no senior superdelegates who made endorsements after their state voted and before the nomination was secured. Some superdelegates, as in previous years, endorsed a candidate as soon as the nomination was secured, but there were far fewer than 2008, making them less important to study.

Thus, the trends that were noted in Figure 8.2 are the same when controlled for time, but tell different stories. Now that we have controlled for time, it can be seen that senior Senators possibly hold more sway over opinion than their junior
counterparts, with the opposite holding true for Governors. This contention cannot be fully tested just through the data I have compiled; public opinion surveys would be needed to understand the reasons for why voters voted the way they did. Overall, however, junior superdelegates have an advantage in getting their constituents to agree with their endorsements when endorsing prior to voting.

Because there are such small numbers of superdelegates it is difficult to draw any distinct conclusions from the first hypothesis. One conclusion to be sure is that Mondale’s strength as an insider candidate and the surprising success of Hart led to the low percentage of approval between superdelegates and constituents. Also, it may be true that elected officials simply did not know what their constituents desired. Without the Internet and the twenty-four hour media cycle including many public opinion polls to help them, it must have been far more difficult to discern the opinion of constituents. This theory, though, does not explain why superdelegates did not alter their endorsements after their constituents voted, which leads me to believe that superdelegates were more likely to be trustee representatives in 1984.

**Hypothesis 2: Margin of Victory**

Now that the data for seniority have been revealed with mixed results, it is time to turn the attention of 1984 to my second hypothesis concerning margin of victory. Once again, I hypothesized that superdelegates with a smaller margin of victory would agree with their constituents more often than superdelegates with a larger margin of victory.

The graph below, Figure 8.4, depicts a strikingly similar picture to my first hypothesis. Overall, small-margin superdelegates were more likely to agree with their
constituents. However, broken down into offices, large-margin Senators and small-margin Governors were more likely to agree, just as were senior Senators and junior Governors. What is most surprising from these data is that there was no large-margin Governor who agreed with his or her constituents.

**Figure 8.4: Agreement Between Small/Large Margin of Victory Superdelegates and Constituents 1984**

The next set of data, shown in Figure 8.5, controls for the timing of endorsements made by superdelegates. Similarly once again to the first hypothesis, there were no large-margin superdelegates who made endorsements. The overall data show that small-margin superdelegates were more likely to have their constituents follow their endorsements. Senators were split evenly in that category, while large-margin Governors once again did not agree at all with their constituents.
My overall hypothesis about small-margin superdelegates being more likely to agree with their constituents was once again upheld. Senators bucked the trend throughout the entire election, perhaps indicating that their relationship with Mondale was more important than the voices of their constituents. This contention certainly calls into question whose interests Senators are most concerned with: their constituents’ or their own. As Senators are often the beneficiaries of cabinet appointments, they could have hurt their own party’s chances at winning the presidency by focusing on their own futures and endorsing Mondale, who did not fare well in the general election.
All Nominations

After analyzing all five elections independently, it is time to bring all of the elections together. This process will allow me to make generalizations about the institution of superdelegates since their inception. The nomination of 2008 was the only election for which there were a substantial number of switched endorsements, so I will only present data for original endorsements to maintain continuity between elections.

Overall Data

I will now present the overall data for the combined nominations. There were 892 superdelegates whom I researched for the five elections, 630 of whom made endorsements. These superdelegates had been in office at the time of the nominating contests for an average of more than eleven years and had won their most recent election by an average of more than thirty-five percentage points.

Figure 9.2: Overall Agreement Between Superdelegates and Constituents: All Years
Figure 9.2 provides a baseline for the agreement between superdelegates and their constituents since 1984. All of the individual offices agree at a rate that is very similar to the overall rate of 63%.

**Hypothesis 1: Seniority**

Now that I have discussed the overall data for superdelegates since 1984, I will now look at my first hypothesis about seniority. As a reminder, I previously hypothesized that junior superdelegates would be more likely to agree with their constituents than senior superdelegates.

**Figure 9.2: Agreement Between Junior/Senior Superdelegates and Constituents: All Years**

![Bar chart showing agreement rates]

Figure 9.2 reveals that there is a small difference in the rate of agreement between junior and senior superdelegates. The overall and Representative categories both show junior superdelegates in agreement with their constituents five percentage points more often than senior superdelegates. Senators have a negligible three percentage point
difference, while Governors have a large sixteen percentage point difference. These data provide support, although not overwhelming support, for my hypothesis about the importance of seniority.

Figure 9.3: The Timing of the Agreement Between Junior/Senior Superdelegates and Constituents: All Years

Figure 9.3 above addresses the timing of endorsements in relation to when constituents voted. I expected senior superdelegates to have more agreement with their constituents when endorsements were made before constituents have voted and I expected junior superdelegates to have more agreement with their constituents when endorsements were made after constituents have voted.

The data reveal mixed results for this part of my hypothesis. When endorsements were made before constituents have voted, junior Representatives, Governors, and all combined superdelegates were in agreement with their constituents more often. Compared with Figure 9.2, these groups all expanded the margin by which they agreed
when endorsements were made before constituents have voted. These groups run counter to my hypothesis. However, Senators buck that trend and both junior and senior superdelegates agree at almost the same rate. Senators provide a small bit of evidence in favor of my hypothesis, although the margin is not large.

When looking at endorsements made after constituents have voted, results are also mixed. Representatives and Governors follow my hypothesis, but Senators do not. While more senior superdelegates agreed with their constituents after they had voted, the margin was not large enough to be considered significant.

**Hypothesis 2: Margin of Victory**

After finding mixed results for my first hypothesis, I will now turn my attention to the data for my hypothesis concerning margin of victory. As I have stated previously, I expect that superdelegates with a smaller margin of victory will agree with their constituents more often than superdelegates with a larger margin of victory.

Figure 9.4 below reveals several similar trends to my hypothesis about seniority. All small-margin superdelegates and small-margin Representatives have five percentage points more agreement than their large-margin counterparts. Governors have a much wider gap than that at twenty-six percentage points, but Senators do not follow that trend. Large-margin Senators actually have more agreement with their constituents by seven percentage points over small-margin Senators. Besides the group of Senators, the rest of the data for combined elections show positive evidence for my hypothesis.
Figure 9.5 below shows how agreement between superdelegates and their constituents changes based on the timing of endorsements. The findings once again parallel those for my first hypothesis about seniority. Before constituents have voted, the trends remain the same as in Figure 9.4. In fact, the differences in rate of agreement increase for all superdelegates and Representatives. The differences tighten slightly for Senators and Governors. After constituents have voted, large-margin superdelegates are more likely to agree with their constituents, counter to what I had expected. That trend holds true for only Senators, however. Representatives are about equal in their agreement and small-margin Governors have twice as much agreement after constituents have voted. These data run almost completely counter to my expectations.
After looking at the total involvement of superdelegates, it is clear that my overarching hypotheses about junior and small-margin superdelegates agreeing with their constituents more often than senior and large-margin superdelegates are confirmed. Junior and small-margin Governors are the most likely to be in agreement with their constituents.

In terms of the original intentions of the Hunt Commission, it is clear that party leaders and elected officials have played a role in helping to select a candidate. The vast majority of superdelegates whom I studied made their endorsements prior to the voting of their constituents. This fact underscores their potential to influence the nominating contests. To fully show this influence, voters would need to be surveyed to understand the salience and importance of superdelegate endorsements. Also, external factors
including perceived likelihood of a Democrat to win the general election and length of
the nominating season greatly affected both the rates of endorsing any candidate and
being in agreement with constituents. Though the Hunt Commission believed that
superdelegates might lead to party leaders and elected officials having a type of veto
power over a candidate, that has not been the case—no elections have gone to the
Convention without a presumptive nominee.
Conclusions

As I have now revealed and analyzed all of the data that I collected, it is important to consider both the significance and limitations of my research. In this section I will briefly summarize my findings, explain their importance, and discuss their generalizability. Additionally, I will critique the choices I have made to this point and discuss future research ideas that stem from my thesis.

Summary of Findings

There was a complicated web woven from the five nominating contests I researched. It was clear that superdelegates did not act in a clear way across all five contests. Chances of winning the general election greatly affected rates of endorsements made by the superdelegates and the length of the nominating season also dictated rates of agreement.

My first hypothesis about seniority gained support from 2008, 1988, 1984, and all elections combined. My second hypothesis about margin of victory gained support from 2004, 1988, 1984, and all elections combined. Noticeably absent is the election of 1992, which did not provide support for either hypothesis. The support for my hypotheses that was garnered from these elections was not always clear and substantial. Generally though, my overarching hypotheses were supported.

As I broke down endorsements by their timing, I looked for both superdelegates and constituents to influence one another. For various reasons, there was a small set of data to analyze. No real conclusions can be drawn from these data as a result.
Importance

As I mentioned in the beginning of my project, there were several reasons that it was important to complete this research.

To begin with, understanding the relationship between elected officials and their constituents is incredibly important to democracy. Electing representatives who will serve in your best interest is a fundamental rule of democracy and thus, it is important to understand why and when certain elected officials do not represent you. By looking at agreement patterns between superdelegates and their constituents, it could be argued that senior and large-margin superdelegates are less likely to agree with their constituents, giving pause to any constituents looking to elect an official who will truly represent their interests.

In addition, since the Hunt Commission’s rules were enacted, there has not been an empirical test of how well the institution has worked. With the results of my research revealed, the Democratic Party can re-evaluate the purposes and effectiveness of superdelegates. The vast majority of superdelegates make their voices heard early in the campaign; is that what the party desires? Perhaps the Democratic Party would rather have their leaders act towards the end of the process rather than the beginning, to let constituents have their say first.

As for current political purposes, my project also holds significant value. President Obama faces daunting challenges to help America recover and prosper in the coming years. For his agenda to flourish, he will need an immense amount of political capital in Congress and political will in the country. Understanding the relationship between members of Congress and their constituents cannot be
understated for him. By utilizing public opinion polls and endorsements of his programs by certain members of Congress, President Obama can create the type of political capital and will necessary to implement groundbreaking legislation on a range of issues.

**Generalizability**

My arguments are limited in two specific areas—the first being that superdelegates only comprise Democrats and the second being that superdelegates do not necessarily fit neatly into representational theory.

I argue that superdelegates can be used to understand the relationship between elected officials and constituents. However, I only have data for one of the two major political parties, and thus, only about half of representatives. Although I cannot claim that Democrats are representative of elected officials in general, I believe that Republicans in a similar environment would behave similarly. It must be noted that there may be a distinct difference in the representational beliefs of conservatives and liberals. Perhaps, hearkening back to their traditional roots, conservatives would stay out of the process in order to make for more personal responsibility. Even so, some superdelegates ask their constituents to follow them and others wait to hear the opinions of their constituents and it is my expectation that Republicans would follow a similar path. Also, I would expect many to be affected by the same comforts of seniority and large margins of victory as Democrats. For this reason, I believe my results can be generalized to all representatives.
On the second area about representational theory, it can be noted that superdelegates are not directly representing their constituents by endorsing a candidate. As was seen in 1984 and with the spoils from the 2008 election (several Obama endorsers were nominated for Cabinet positions), sometimes superdelegates endorse based on personal interests. However, it is clear in the public comments made by superdelegates that the opinions of their constituents are taken into account in many cases. For instance, Senator Tim Johnson South Dakota switched his endorsement from Obama to Clinton in 2008 after his constituents voted for Clinton (Kennecke 2008). Further, Representative Tim Walz endorsed Obama because he overwhelmingly won the votes of his congressional district (Graham-Felson 2008). Thus, I find reason to believe that superdelegates are conscious of their roles as representatives first and foremost in the endorsement process.

Self-Critique

In looking back on the choices that I made throughout this process, there are several that I may have changed, but by and large I would have made the same decisions.

First and foremost, in the more recent elections I would have coded reasons that endorsements were made. Doing this would have allowed me to add a qualitative section to my thesis and given further insight into the thought process behind making endorsements. In addition, it may have been prudent to separate my data into more than two groups for each hypothesis. I could have set up three groups: junior, medium, and senior groups for seniority and small, medium, and
large groups for margin of victory. The impact from that change would have been to see if there were critical points in seniority or margin of victory that made superdelegates more or less likely to agree with their constituents.

**Future Research**

I have already mentioned a couple of possible outlets for my research to continue. Some additional research questions are below:

• Do Republicans follow the same trends as Democrats?
• Why do Democrats choose to endorse certain Presidential candidates?
• How much longer will the institution of superdelegates remain in its current capacity?
References


