Candidate Choice and the Dynamics of the Presidential Nominating Process[*]

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Data from the NES "rolling cross-section" survey are used to investigate the dynamics of popular support for Gary Hart during the 1984 primary season. A model is developed that relates preferences for Hart to an interaction between two key explanatory variables: predispositions to oppose Mondale (based on respondents' preexisting social and political characteristics) and perceptions of Hart's chances of winning the nomination (based on objective campaign events and "projection"). This interactive model accounts for aggregate trends in support for Hart better than an alternative model based directly on Hart and Mondale thermometer scores—in spite of the fact that the interactive model makes no use of *any* substantive evaluations of Hart! These results are used to address recurring questions regarding the role of "momentum" in the contemporary presidential nominating process. Some standard interpretations of the way the process works are shown to be inconsistent with the data or superfluous or both.

The modern presidential nominating process is only six campaigns old. The string of political surprises generated in those six campaigns— George McGovern, Jimmy Carter, George Bush, John Anderson, Gary Hart—should be enough to make it clear that the workings of the process are still not clearly understood. On a few points, however, there is considerable agreement. That the nominating process is a dynamic process has been well recognized (e.g., by Aldrich, 1980; Bartels, 1983). That the dynamics of the process are related to public perceptions of candidate viability has been fairly clearly documented (most recently by Shanks et al., 1985). What is missing is a sophisticated understanding of where perceptions of viability come from, how they influence candidate choice, and how these individual-level behavioral processes are reflected in the aggregate-level dynamics of the nominating process. Only by developing such an understanding will those who study the dynamics of candidate choice be able to contribute in a significant way to the political, normative, and scientific debates engendered by the recent history of the presidential nominating process.

In this paper I attempt to lay some of the foundation on which a more detailed understanding of the dynamics of the nominating process might be based. My main focus is on the responses of prospective voters to campaign events—primary outcomes, delegates won, media coverage, and so on. Such a focus requires a melding of data on attitudes and perceptions from surveys with data on the campaign events to which prospective voters are supposedly responding. The data on which my analysis is based were gathered as part of the National Election Study (NES) 1984 "rolling cross-section" survey.[1] The most important feature of these data is that they provide a continuous monitoring of public reactions to campaign events throughout the 1984 primary season. Thus, they offer considerable potential for new insight into the dynamics of candidate choice in the preconvention period.

The Puzzle

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the events to be explained by my analysis. The figure shows time trends of support in the NES "rolling cross-section" for Walter Mondale and Gary Hart beginning on 11 January 1984 (the first day of the study) and ending on 19 June 1984 (two weeks after the end of the primary season). In Figure 1 and throughout my analysis, the basic unit of time is the week (Wednesday to Tuesday), and the data presented are for a total of 868 respondents (Democratic identifiers and "leaners" only).

The dynamics of the 1984 campaign are evident in broad outline in Figure 1. Walter Mondale began the season as the plurality (though not majority) choice for the Democratic nomination, while Gary Hart barely registered in the polls before the Iowa caucuses in late February. Hart's surprising victory in the New Hampshire primary precipitated a dramatic reversal in the candidates' fortunes, with Hart emerging as the front-runner and Mondale suddenly a distant second. A second, but much more gradual, reversal of fortunes began on "Super Tuesday" two weeks later and continued for the next month. During that month Mondale (who won primaries in Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, New York, and Pennsylvania) essentially regained the base of support he had enjoyed before New Hampshire, while Hart lost about half of the support he had gained after New Hampshire. The remainder of the primary season, though marked by some notable weekly fluctuations, did little to change the general positions of the two candidates: Mondale averaged a

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[1] For other analyses based on these same data, see Flanigan and Zingale (1985), Shanks et al. (1985), and Brady and Johnston (1985). The first two of these also contain more detailed discussions of the study design than I shall offer here.
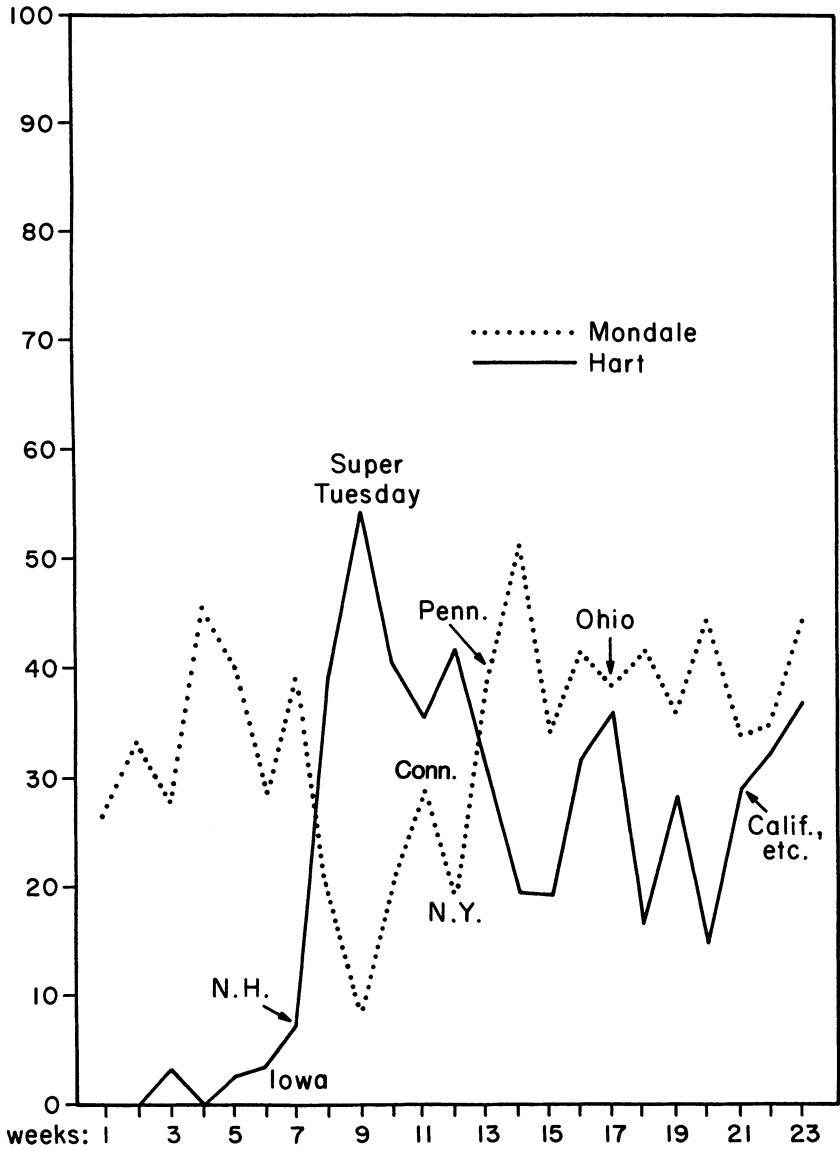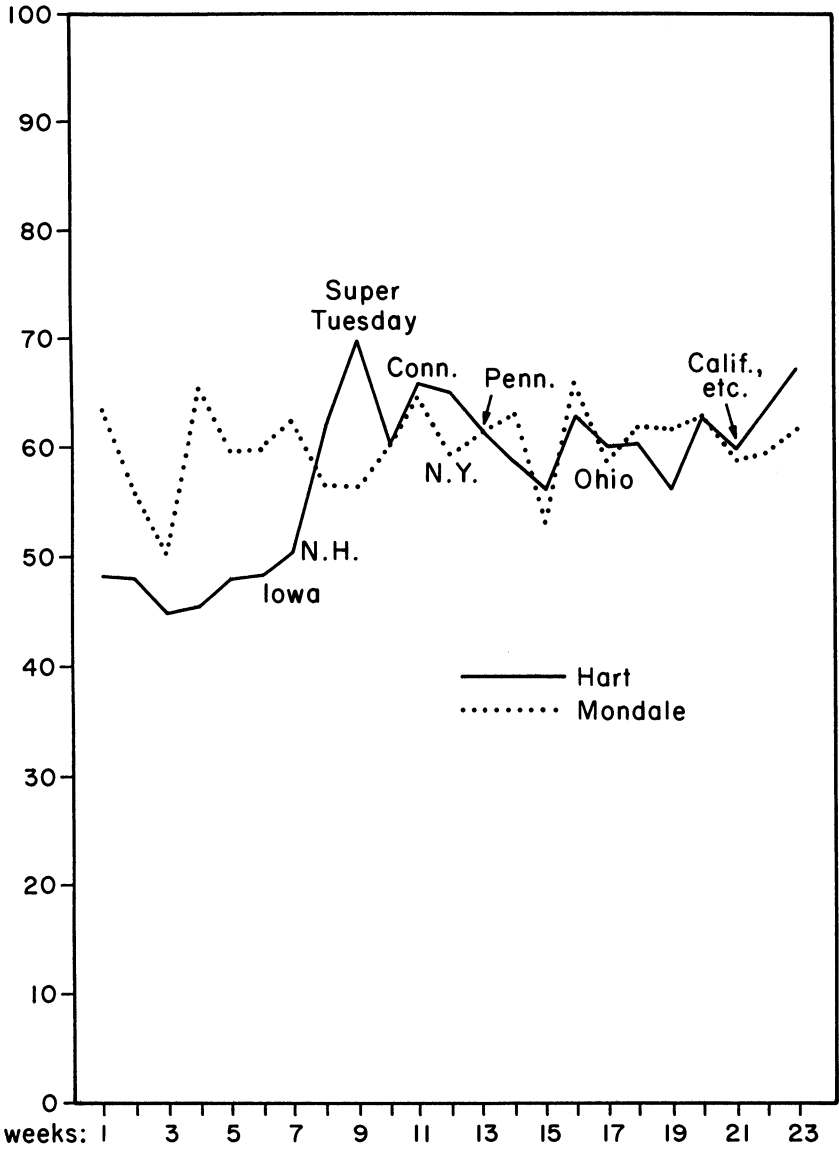
FIGURE 1. Mondale and Hart preferences.

FIGURE 2. Mondale and Hart thermometer ratings.

little more than 40 percent and Hart a little less than 30 percent of the first-choice support of Democrats nationwide.

In addition to asking respondents which one candidate they most preferred, the NES survey elicited general evaluations of every major candidate in the form of "thermometer ratings." The weekly time series of these thermometer ratings for Hart and Mondale are shown in Figure 2. A comparison with the time series of actual preferences in Figure 1 indicates some important differences. First, average thermometer ratings are considerably less volatile than preferences. Aside from Hart's 20-point increase in the two weeks after the New Hampshire primary, there are few significant movements. Moreover, after Super Tuesday Mondale's and Hart's average ratings are virtually identical, and they remain virtually identical for the remainder of the primary season.

The puzzle here is how we are to reconcile the trends in Figure 1 with those in Figure 2. The notion that preferences follow from the kind of general evaluations measured by thermometer ratings is an eminently reasonable one, but the facts refuse to cooperate. Hart led Mondale in preferences by a considerable margin during most of March, then trailed in preferences by an equally considerable margin in April and May, all without any corresponding changes in the two candidates' popularity as expressed in thermometer ratings.

In order to explore more systematically the limitations of thermometer ratings as explanatory variables, Table 1 shows the results of a logit analysis in which ratings of Hart and Mondale are used to account for whether or not respondents named Hart as their first choice for the Democratic nomination. Not surprisingly, both thermometer ratings have significant effects, and together they do a fairly good job of accounting for

TABLE 1

Hart Preferences

	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error
a (Intercept)	-4.612	(.471)
b (Hart Thermometer)	10.173	(.791)
c (Mondale Thermometer)	-5.248	(.596)

NOTE: prob{Hart Preference} = $1/(1 + \exp\{-[a + b(\text{Hart Thermometer}) + c(\text{Mondale Thermometer})]\})$.

$-2 \ln(L) = 629$; $R^2 = .38$; percentage correctly classified = 83.8.

Hart preferences. If the remaining, unexplained sources of Hart preferences were unrelated to the dynamics of the campaign, they would provide little reason for concern. However, the time trend of errors from the model suggests that they are not entirely random in this sense. Instead, the actual and fitted levels of support for Hart, shown in Figure 3, reveal some systematic divergences. In particular, respondents were significantly less likely than expected (on the basis of thermometer scores) to name Hart as their first choice in the seven weeks before the New Hampshire primary, and significantly *more* likely than expected to prefer Hart in the six weeks after New Hampshire. Given the timing of these errors, it seems likely that they reflect a systematic misspecification of respondents' reactions to the events of the campaign. In order to account for the dynamics of candidate choice, we have to go beyond general evaluations of the sort provided by thermometer scores.[2]

Predispositions toward Mondale

The analysis presented here is based on two key variables. The first, described in this section, is intended to tap the underlying political predispositions most likely to condition prospective voters' reactions to the events of the primary campaign. The second, described in the following section, is intended to tap their perceptions of the changing political dynamics of the campaign, as measured by their estimates of Hart's chances of winning the Democratic nomination. The remainder of the analysis addresses the role of these two key variables in accounting for the changing patterns of preferences evident in Figure 1 and explores the implications of the main analysis for some questions of theoretical and historical interest to students of the modern presidential nominating process.

For present purposes a satisfactory baseline measure of political predispositions must have three qualities. First, it must be a relatively broad-gauged measure, tapping a fairly wide range of social and political characteristics. Second, it must be of some obvious relevance to the specific sorts of political choices which it is used to help explain. And third, it must reflect genuine predispositions—dispositions existing before the specific events of interest and persisting essentially unchanged throughout the course of those events.

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[2] The most comprehensive analysis so far of these data, by Shanks et al. (1985), noted some divergences between thermometer scores and preferences—and attributed most of those divergences to differing perceptions of viability—but then proceeded with thermometer ratings as the dependent variables on the grounds that "most of the variation in 'preference' . . . can be explained by affective evaluations alone." My own view is that the variation in preferences *not* explained by thermometer scores offers us a crucial foothold for understanding the dynamics of the nominating process.
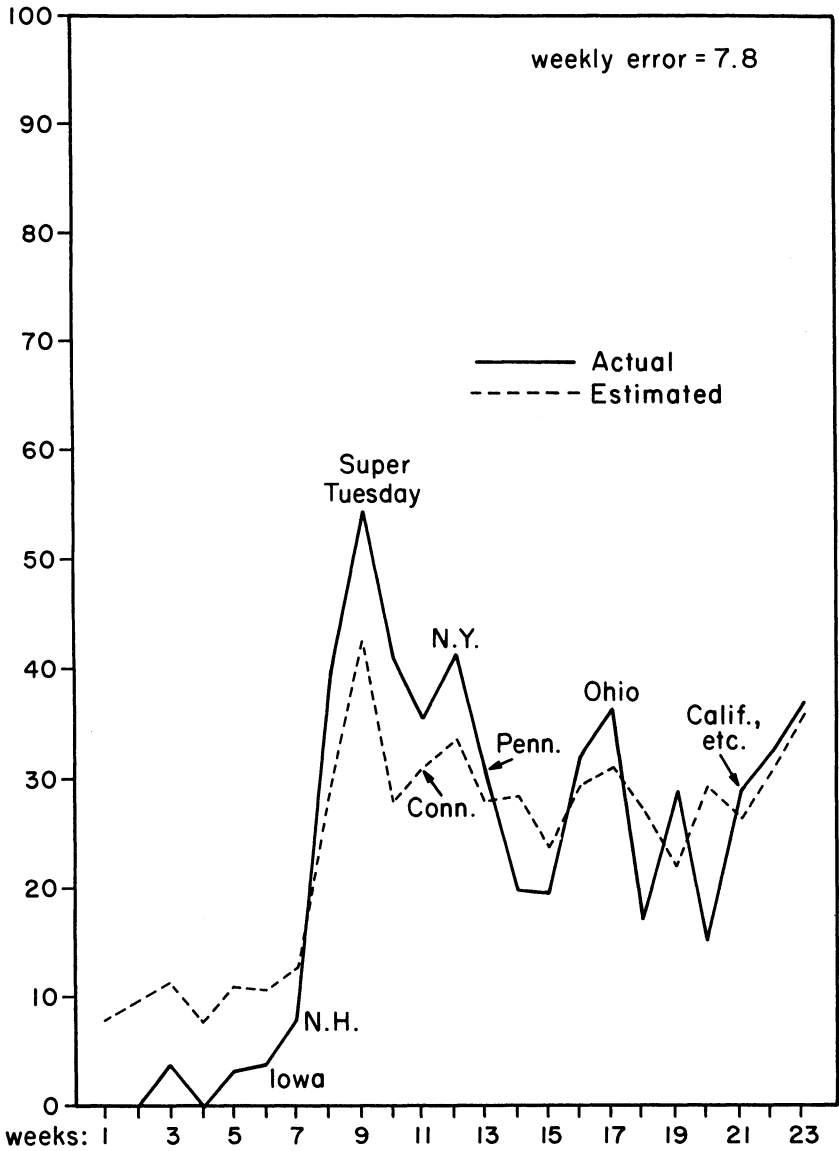
FIGURE 3. Actual and estimated Hart preferences (based on Hart and Mondale thermometers).

The 1984 NES survey contains a wide variety of items of obvious relevance, including measures of demographic characteristics, political attitudes, issue positions, and perceptions of well-known political figures. The problem is how to construct, from this wide variety of items, a summary measure that is general, relevant, and persisting. My approach to this problem is to begin with the basic decision facing Democrats at the beginning of the 1984 campaign: the decision whether or not to support Walter Mondale. Viewing Mondale as a "default" choice for Democrats makes considerable sense, given his dominance in the early polls and corresponding status as the clear front-runner.[3] If Mondale had not been the obvious default candidate, the choice facing Democrats (and perhaps the result of the nominating process itself) would have been different, but that possibility is not explored here.

Once we frame the choice facing Democrats in 1984 in this way, it seems clear that the next step is to look for social and political characteristics that seem to have predisposed respondents to react toward Mondale more or less favorably. The thermometer ratings discussed above provide the most convenient summary measure of attitudes toward Mondale, in part because they obviously reflect *general* evaluations and in part because they appear from the comparison between Figures 1 and 2 to be less sensitive than preferences to transitory campaign events.

Table 2 shows the results of regressing respondents' Mondale thermometer scores on relevant demographic and political variables. The sources of support for Mondale evident from these results clearly reflect his political identity as the traditional liberal New Deal Democrat par excellence. They also tap several of the most general dimensions of cleavage in the contemporary Democratic party. Taking these aspects one by one:

Liberalism. The issue positions related to favorable evaluations of Mondale involved increased government spending for jobs, food stamps, and the environment, cuts in defense spending, and increased efforts to get along with Russia. The total potential difference in thermometer scores due to positions on these issues is about 24 points.[4]

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[3] Some of the atmosphere of "inevitability" surrounding Mondale's campaign at the beginning of 1984 has no doubt faded from memory in the light of subsequent events. A useful bit of perspective may be provided by recalling the lead paragraph of Hedrick Smith's *New York Times* campaign story on *the morning of the New Hampshire primary:* "With Senator John Glenn continuing to fade and no new challenger emerging strongly, Walter F. Mondale now holds the most commanding lead ever recorded this early in a Presidential nomination campaign by a nonincumbent, according to the latest New York Times/CBS News Poll."

[4] Using issue proximity scores to account for thermometer ratings, Shanks et al. (1985) found "some issue-related effects" for Mondale and "*no* apparent contribution" for Hart

Traditionalism. Mondale received more favorable evaluations from older respondents, from those who had lived most of their lives in the same place, from those who were pessimistic about their future financial situations, and from frequent churchgoers than from those in the opposite categories. The total potential difference in thermometer scores due to these factors is about 22 points.

New Deal. Attachments to any of several New Deal interest groups predisposed respondents to rate Mondale favorably. Poor people, blacks, the highly educated, Jews, Roman Catholics, and union members and their families all tended to provide Mondale with disproportionate support. The total potential difference in thermometer scores due to these group attachments is about 18 points.

Partisanship. Strong Democrats evaluated Mondale about six points more favorably than did weak Democrats, who in turn were about two points more favorable than independent "leaners."

Combining all of these factors, it is possible to construct a latent Mondale evaluation for each respondent on the basis of his or her demographic and political characteristics. Of course, the point in doing so is not to predict thermometer scores per se but to have a summary measure of predispositions toward Mondale to use in explaining respondents' reactions not only to Mondale but to the events of the campaign more generally.

It is particularly important that the "predispositions" reflected in such a measure can reasonably be thought of as existing prior to the events of the campaign. Demographic characteristics are obviously fixed, and the political characteristics included in Table 2, though changeable, show little evidence of systematic change during the course of the primary season. The relationships between these characteristics, on the one hand, and evaluations of Mondale, on the other, also appear to be quite stable throughout the primary season.[5] Thus, it seems to make some sense to treat respondents' predispositions toward Mondale, as estimated from the relationship in Table 2, as permanent characteristics through which the changing events of the campaign season were filtered.

(pp. 26–29). They were led "to dismiss issue and ideological proximity as factors in the 1984 contest between Mondale and Hart" (p. 37). While the difference here may be one of interpretation, my analysis suggests that respondents' own issue positions did have important effects on the predispositions they brought to the campaign—and thus on their reactions to campaign events.

[5] Adding a linear or quadratic time trend or a full set of weekly dummies to the list of variables included in Table 2 leaves the results almost wholly unchanged. Separate estimates for the early and late phases of the primary season are also sufficiently similar to suggest that the relationships of interest are essentially stable.

TABLE 2

Mondale Predispositions
(Regression of Mondale Thermometer Scores on
Demographic and Political Characteristics)

	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error
Intercept	.448	(.026)
Liberalism		
Cut government spending	− .066	(.033)
Spending on the environment	.040	(.024)
Spending on government jobs	.025	(.022)
Spending on food stamps	.028	(.021)
Cooperate with Russia	.041	(.023)
Increase defense spending	− .038	(.024)
Traditionalism		
Age (in years)	.0016	(.00048)
Residential mobility	− .052	(.022)
Financial pessimism	.039	(.026)
Church attendance	.031	(.022)
New Deal		
Education (in years)	.0033	(.0034)
Jewish	.058	(.040)
Black	.028	(.022)
Union family	.024	(.016)
Catholic	.012	(.016)
Income (in $1000s)	− .0007	(.0005)
Partisanship		
Strong Democrat	.056	(.017)
Independent Democrat	− .021	(.017)

NOTE: Standard error of estimate = .200; R^2 = .12.

Perceptions of Hart's Chances

The emphasis of the news media on candidates' primary victories and defeats, gains or losses of momentum, and ultimate chances of nomination—the "horse race"—has been noted repeatedly by observers of the nominating process (e.g., Patterson, 1980; Robinson and Sheehan, 1983; Robinson and Clancey, 1985). But even in the light of this well-known emphasis, the general public's apparent interest in the candidates'

electoral prospects is remarkable. To give just one example: of 583 Democrats in the 1984 NES survey who were asked to rate Hart's chances (those who were interviewed in the four months after the New Hampshire primary and who recognized Hart's name), exactly *two* refused to do so. (By contrast, eight refused to rate him on the thermometer scale, and 149 refused to guess where he stood on the issue of cutting government spending and services.)

Perceptions of the candidates' chances are not only salient to the public; they also play an important role in political scientists' attempts to account for the dynamics of the nominating process (e.g., Bartels, 1985; Shanks et al., 1985). Nevertheless, the connection between perceptions and actual campaign events has always been assumed rather than demonstrated. The design of the 1984 NES study makes it possible to bridge this gap by relating survey respondents' perceptions of chances directly to temporal variations in primary outcomes, media coverage, and so on.

In order to capture the effects of such "objective" campaign events on public perceptions of Hart's chances, I have constructed three contextual variables measuring aspects of Hart's political situation in each week of the campaign:

Mondale's Probability of Nomination. An estimate of Mondale's probability of being nominated, based on a Bayesian updating scheme applied to weekly delegate counts.

Cumulative Hart Primary Vote. Hart's share of the total primary vote, with performance each week weighted by the amount of newspaper coverage given to that week's results and gradually discounted over time.

Weekly Change in Primary Outcomes. Changes from the previous week in Mondale's share of primaries won, weighted by newspaper coverage and by individual factors measuring media exposure and attention.

Each of these variables is described in more detail in Appendix 1. Their effects on perceptions of Hart's chances are shown in Table 3. All of the effects are in the expected direction: Hart's perceived chances improve when Mondale's objective probability of being nominated based on the delegate count goes down, when Hart's share of the cumulative primary vote goes up, and when Mondale does worse than he did in the previous week. The effects are also substantial in magnitude. For example, a 30 percent increase in Hart's share of the primary vote in the two weeks after New Hampshire led to an increase of almost 25 percent in his perceived chances; and a 20 percent drop in Mondale's objective probability of being nominated produced an additional 8 percent increase in Hart's perceived chances during the same two-week period. In addition,

TABLE 3

Perceptions of Hart's Chances

	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error
a (Intercept)	.567	(.088)
b (Mondale's Probability)	− .728	(.107)
c (Cumulative Hart Vote)	1.467	(.166)
d (Weekly Change)	− 1.248	(.525)
e (Mondale Predisposition)	− .751	(.092)

NOTE: (Perceived Hart Chances) = [*a* + *b*(Mondale's Probability) + *c*(Cumulative Hart Vote) + *d*(Weekly Change)][1 + *e*(Mondale Predisposition)].
Standard error of estimate = .157; R^2 = .32.

Hart's perceived chances increased by up to 10 percent in New Hampshire (and again in Connecticut) due to his ability to outperform expectations based on the previous week's results. Thus, the total effect of the New Hampshire outcome on perceptions of Hart's chances is on the order of 40 or 45 percentage points.

While the effects of campaign events on perceptions of Hart's chances of being nominated are certainly powerful, a substantial body of evidence also suggests that subjective factors may play a key role in explaining *differences* in perceptions among similarly situated observers. Most notably, the notion of "projection" or "wishful thinking" suggests that, in politics as elsewhere, people often tend to see what they *want* to see. In the present context the most obvious result would be that observers favorably inclined toward a candidate would tend to overrate his chances of being nominated, while observers unfavorably inclined toward the candidate would tend to underrate his chances. An analysis of expectations and preferences in previous presidential nominating campaigns has documented strong and consistent projection effects of just this sort (Bartels, 1985). The parameter estimate for Mondale predispositions in Table 3 indicates that the same phenomenon was at work in 1984. For any given "objective" set of campaign circumstances, respondents with extreme anti-Mondale predispositions rated Hart's chances almost 75 percent more favorably than did respondents with extreme pro-Mondale predispositions. (Thus, the estimated effects of campaign events described above actually understate the true effects for anti-Mondale respondents and overstate the effects for pro-Mondale respondents.)

The time series of actual perceptions of Hart's chances and of estimated perceptions based on the parameter estimates in Table 3 are shown

in Figure 4. Although there is substantial variation unaccounted for at the individual level, the pattern of aggregate change over time is well captured by the model. The average weekly error is less than 3 percentage points, and even much of this appears to be due to small (and random-looking) fluctuations in actual perceptions during the last eight weeks of the primary season. The general trend lines of actual and estimated perceptions are certainly sufficiently similar to suggest that the campaign events included in the model were important determinants of public perceptions of Hart's chances of winning the nomination.

A Fundamental Interaction

Having gone to some length to introduce my key explanatory variables—predispositions toward Mondale and perceptions of Hart's chances—I turn in this section to the problem of how to use those variables to account for the dynamics of the 1984 campaign and particularly for changes over time in preferences for Hart as the Democratic nominee. The puzzle noted above—that aggregate-level changes over time in preferences do not simply parallel aggregate-level changes over time in thermometer ratings of the two candidates—suggests that some thought is required about how prospective voters actually decide which candidate to vote for.

Most models of the voting decision aspire to considerable generality. Perhaps as a result, they tend to be relatively simple in their structure (e.g., additive, symmetric across candidates, and with invariant parameters) and to abstract as much as possible from the specific political context in which any particular voting decision is actually made. In contrast, my intention here is to offer a less-general model of the voting decision, inapplicable to many other campaign contexts but tailored to reflect the central political circumstances of the 1984 campaign.[6]

At the beginning of the 1984 primary season, the question facing prospective voters was whether or not to support the obvious front-runner, Walter Mondale. Those who were most predisposed to support Mondale (on the basis of issue preferences, group attachments, social situations, and partisanship) would do so without undue soul-searching. On the other hand, a fair number of Democrats who were lukewarm (or worse) about Mondale's candidacy may at least have entertained the possibility of supporting a different candidate. Their problem was to decide which alternative, if any, to turn to.

Having framed the problem in this way, we may ask ourselves what a prospective voter with an eye out for an alternative to Mondale would

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[6] I am grateful to Christopher Achen for providing the story line on which this section is based.
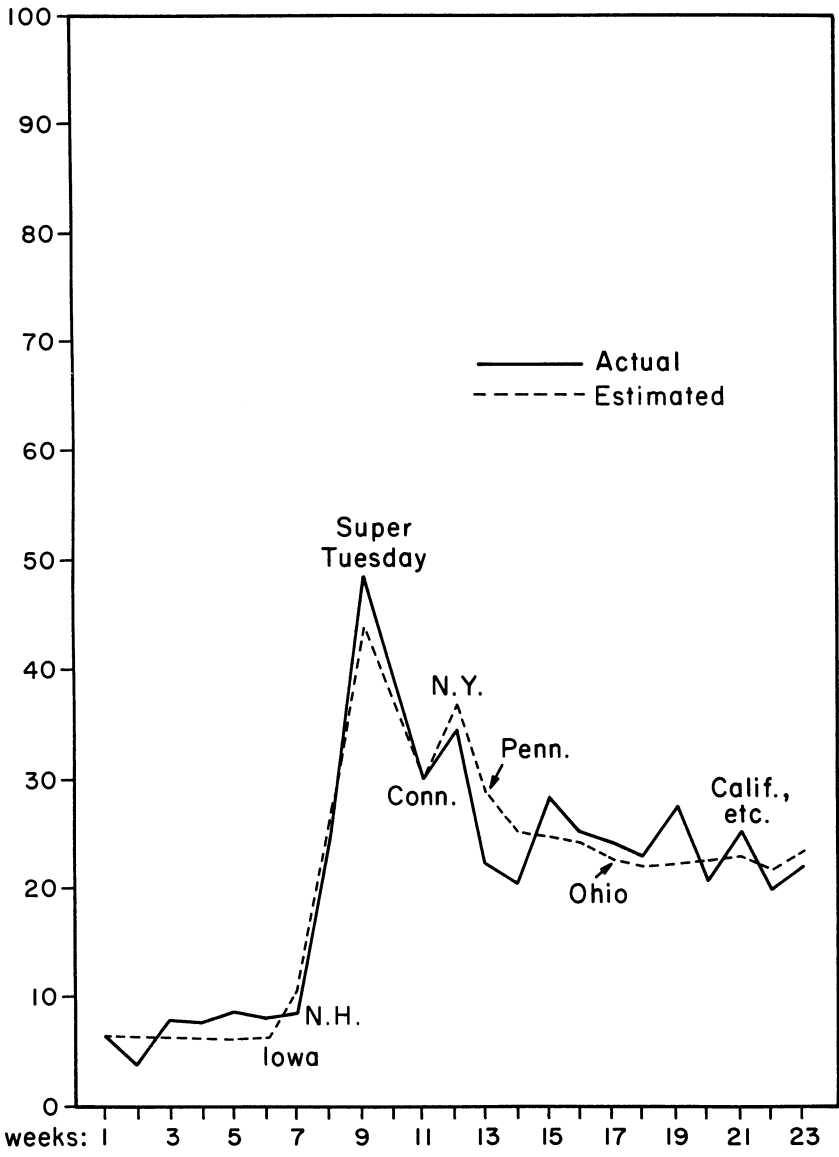
FIGURE 4. Actual and estimated perceptions of Hart's chances of being nominated.

have been likely to know about the other candidates in the race. At the beginning of the campaign, the best answer is probably "very little." But Hart's second-place finish in Iowa, followed by his dramatic upset victory in New Hampshire, changed that. By the end of February our prospective voter was quite likely to know at least one thing about at least one challenger: that Gary Hart was out there, an alternative to Mondale with, it appeared, significant popular support. Significant popular support at least suggested that, as a gesture of opposition to Mondale, a vote for Hart would not be "wasted." More positively, it may even have provided indirect (but entirely respectable) evidence that Hart was a genuine improvement over Mondale on substantive political grounds. In the absence of direct evidence to the contrary, why not believe that 37,000 New Hampshire Democrats knew what they were doing?

These considerations suggest that Hart should not have been a very attractive alternative in the period before the Iowa caucuses, when his chances of winning the nomination were, by anyone's calculations, vanishingly small. The reported preferences of survey respondents during this period support the point nicely: of 188 respondents interviewed before Iowa, only three named Hart as their first choice. As is clear from Figure 3, this proportion is noticeably smaller than would have been expected even on the basis of Hart's generally mediocre thermometer ratings during the same period. But after New Hampshire, when Hart was *the* obvious alternative to Mondale, just the reverse was true: Hart attracted even more support than would have been expected on the basis of thermometer ratings.

Here, it seems, is the beginning of a solution to our puzzle. Political predispositions to support a challenger (or, in my story, to oppose a front-runner) are necessary but not sufficient to generate actual support. The other necessary ingredient of support is some perception that the challenger has a genuine chance to win. *That* is what Hart lacked before Iowa, and what he gained in New Hampshire.

This way of putting the problem suggests that the respondents most likely to support Hart—at any point in the primary season—would be those who *both* had some reason to be dissatisfied with Mondale as the nominee *and* believed that Hart had a good chance to defeat him. Thus, we are led naturally to focus on the *interaction* between political predispositions and strategic considerations, and more specifically on the *product* of (possibly latent) political discontent with Mondale and perceptions of Hart as a viable alternative:

(1 − Mondale Predisposition) · (Perception of Hart's Chances).

TABLE 4

Hart Preferences

	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error
a (Intercept)	-3.109	(.222)
b (Predisposition • Chances Interaction)	19.609	(1.898)

NOTE: prob{Hart Preference} = $1/(1 + \exp\{-[a + b(1 - \text{Mondale Predisposition}) \cdot (\text{Estimated Hart Chances})]\})$.
$-2 \ln(L) = 821$; $R^2 = .14$; percentage correctly classified = 77.4.

This product would take the value zero if respondents had no substantive reason at all to desert Mondale (i.e., if their Mondale Predisposition was 1.0), *or* if they believed that Hart had no chance to win. It would take larger values for respondents who were less enthusiastic about Mondale *and* who believed that Hart had some chance to win, up to a maximum value of 1.0.

Results from a logistic model relating actual support for Hart to the interaction between Mondale predispositions and perception of Hart's chances are shown in Table 4. The parameter estimate for the interaction term is very large and fairly precise, making it clear that the product of latent dissatisfaction with Mondale and a belief that Hart is a viable alternative had a powerful effect on respondents' probabilities of supporting Hart at any point in the campaign. (The predicted probability of supporting Hart is less than 5 percent when the interaction term takes its minimum value of zero and well over 99 percent when it takes its maximum value of 1.0.)

It is not surprising that this model accounts for individual-level behavior less accurately than the alternative model based on actual Mondale and Hart thermometer scores (shown in Table 1). What is surprising is the ability of the model to account for changes over the course of the campaign in aggregate levels of support for Hart. The actual and estimated time series of Hart support are compared in Figure 5. Not only does the model capture the main dynamics of Hart's performance, but it does so better than the alternative model based on Mondale and Hart thermometer ratings (shown in Figure 3). This in spite of the fact that the model includes only two parameters and makes no use at all of any information about the respondents' attitudes toward Hart as a political entity![7]

[7] In order to avoid slipping evaluations of Hart into the model through a back door, I have not used respondents' actual perceptions of Hart's chances in the calculations in Table 4.
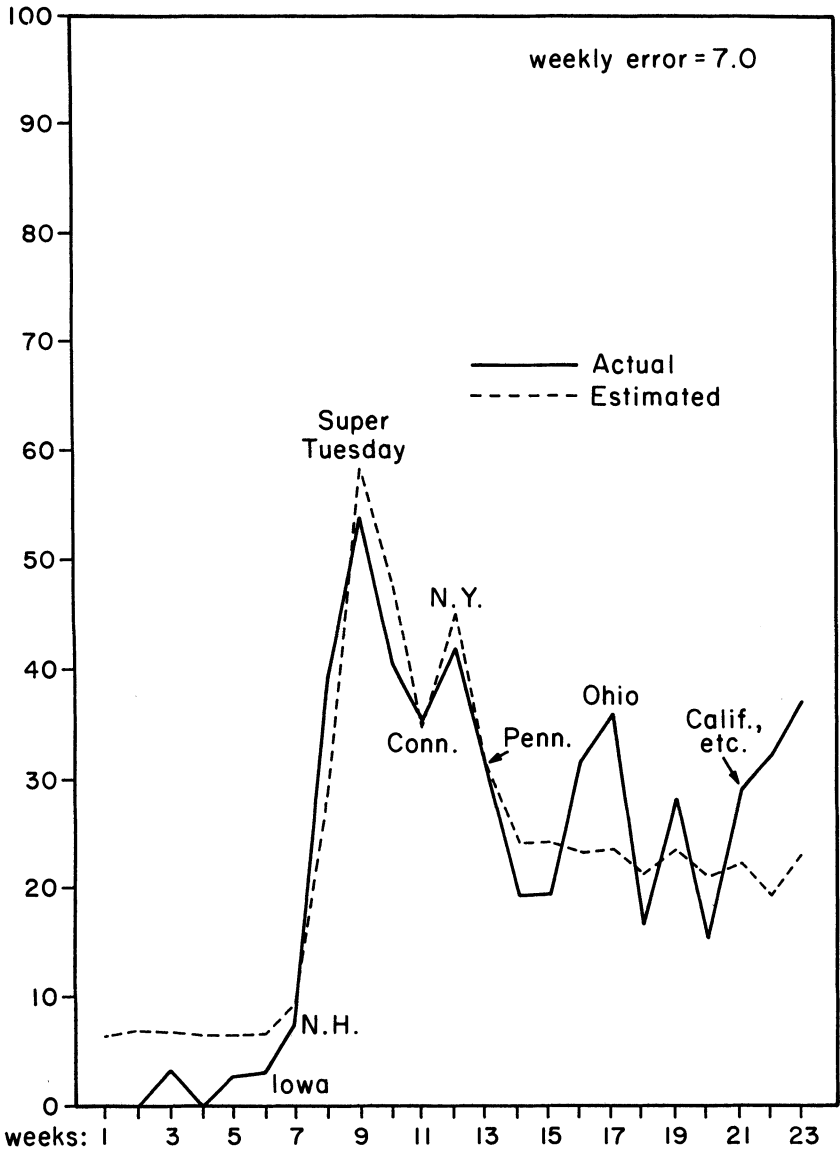
FIGURE 5. Actual and estimated Hart preferences (based on interaction between anti-Mondale predispositions and estimated perceptions of Hart's chances).

Here we have arrived at a solution of sorts to the puzzle posed above. Thermometer scores alone are insufficient to account for aggregate trends in support for Hart because they fail to reflect the way in which survey respondents combine political predispositions and perceptions of viability in arriving at a candidate choice. Moreover, in 1984, thermometer scores seemed to work least well when the dynamics of candidate choice were most interesting: when Hart was struggling to avoid being "winnowed out" of the race before Iowa and again when he was being launched into prominence after New Hampshire. The interactive model proposed here seems to work better. And to the extent that it is consistent with the data, it provides some interesting insights into the nature and role of momentum in the nominating process.

The Political Character of Momentum

Having developed a simple model of candidate choice capable of accounting for the broad dynamics of the 1984 campaign, I attempt in this section to interpret the implications of that model for public debates about the nature of momentum and its role in our current system of nominating candidates for the presidency. It turns out that, although it is hard to pin down exactly what momentum *is,* we can draw some interesting conclusions about what it is *not*—or at least about what it *was* not for Gary Hart in 1984. It will be convenient to organize those conclusions around three possibilities—each a caricature of sorts, but each based upon a significant strand of the existing descriptive or normative literature on the modern nominating process.

The Better Mousetrap

Advocates of the modern nominating process claim that one of its main attractions is its openness to relatively unknown contenders whose ideas, convictions, or personal qualities are "right for the times." George McGovern in 1972, Jimmy Carter in 1976, and Gary Hart in 1984 are all sometimes described in this way, although for somewhat different reasons. What do the results outlined above have to say about Hart in this light? What aspect of his political personality captured the imagination of the Democratic party?

To answer these questions we need only recall the individual elements of the model on which Table 4 and Figure 5 are based. First, there

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Instead I have used *estimated* perceptions from the model in Table 3; these estimates are based only on objective (aggregate-level) indicators and on individual Mondale predispositions. Thus, even here the model rules out any role for Hart except as the most successful of the available alternatives to Mondale.

is the respondent's latent predisposition toward Mondale. Not much of Hart to capture the imagination there. Second, there is the respondent's estimate of Hart's chances, based on objective campaign events (primaries and delegates won) and on the respondent's own eagerness to believe that someone other than Mondale has a chance to win (Mondale predisposition again). When both dissatisfaction with Mondale and a belief that Hart might win were present to some extent, the respondent's probability of supporting Hart increased—not because of his record, not because of his "new ideas," but simply because he showed signs of being a viable alternative to Mondale. The only way to describe Hart's own role in this little drama is to say that he was a political cipher who happened to get lucky.

This is not to say that Hart's own character and actions were irrelevant. On the contrary, it is quite probably possible to find concrete political perceptions of Hart that help to explain his support at the individual level. Figure 5 merely suggests that such perceptions are *not necessary* to account for the aggregate-level dynamics of the Hart phenomenon. Then again, to describe Hart as "lucky" is to ignore the aspects of his political character that made it possible for him, rather than some other alternative, to emerge from the pack in Iowa and New Hampshire. This is an important lacuna, and one that can only be addressed in detail with studies of caucus and primary participants in those states. Nevertheless, it is striking that we can account for the reactions of Democrats in the nation as a whole without supposing that they knew or cared anything about *why Hart* emerged rather than some other candidate.

The Bandwagon Phenomenon

The conclusion that Hart's success may have had little to do with his own political and personal qualities suggests an alternative view, usually proffered by critics of the existing nominating process. In this view the candidate with momentum plays essentially the same role as a moderately hot new rock star—but with the difference that he may become president. The point is that, once the bandwagon begins to roll, people are supposed to be swept away by the excitement, the new face, the surprising victories, the television interviews, the magazine covers, all more or less in disregard of their own political instincts.

In the face of this characterization, an important question to ask is whether momentum in a nominating campaign operates at the psychological level of a tulip fad. More precisely, how (if at all) do people's responses to the events of the campaign correspond to their preexisting political identities? The answer to that question generated by my analysis is shown in Figure 6. The figure is based on the same model as Figure 5,
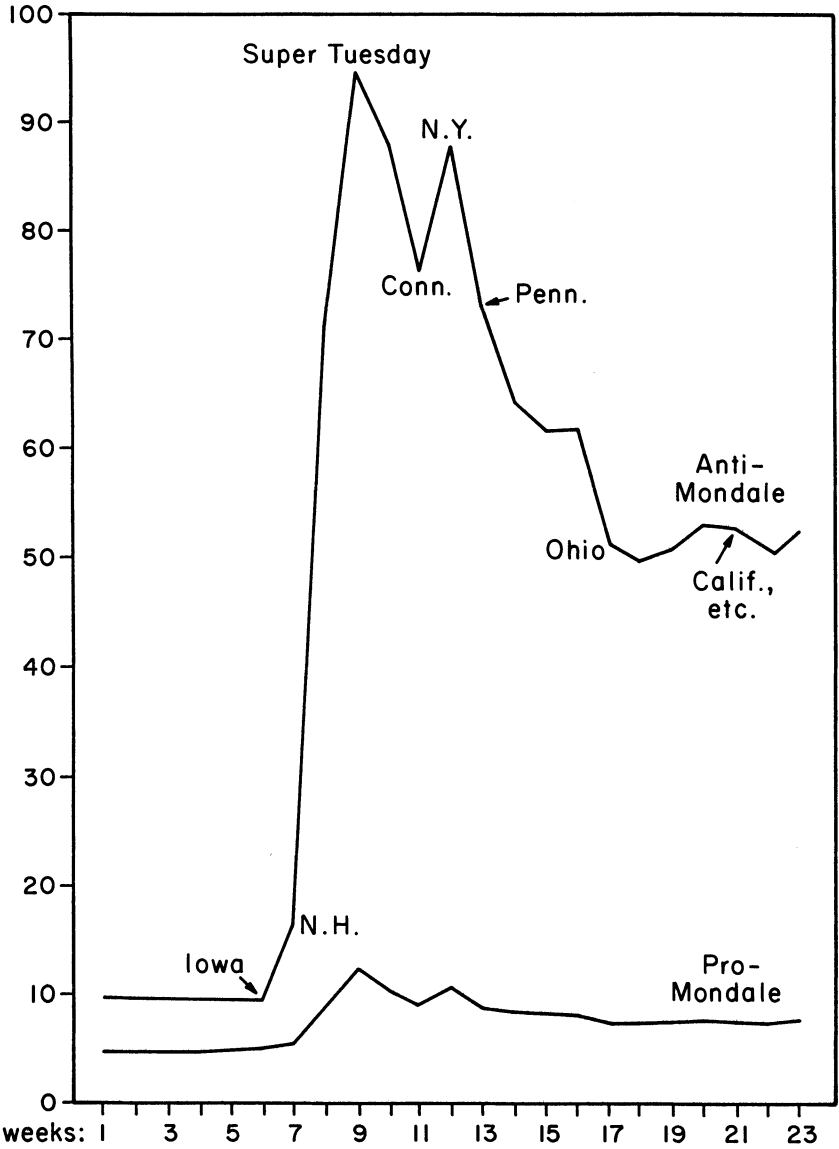
FIGURE 6. Estimated Hart preferences for extreme pro-Mondale and anti-Mondale predispositions.

but shows separate time trends of Hart preferences for respondents with two extreme political predispositions. The anti-Mondale trend line is for the respondent in the NES sample with the *lowest* Mondale predisposition (corresponding to a fitted Mondale thermometer score of about 40); the pro-Mondale trend line is for the respondent with the *highest* Mondale predisposition (corresponding to a fitted Mondale thermometer score of about 80).

The point, of course, is that the Hart contagion appears from these trend lines to have been quite selective in its spread through the population. Respondents predisposed to look for an alternative to Mondale certainly found one in the three weeks between the Iowa caucuses and Super Tuesday; estimated Hart preferences for the anti-Mondale extreme jumped during this three-week period from about 10 percent before Iowa (when Hart was one of several minor candidates scrambling to avoid elimination) to well over 90 percent just before Super Tuesday (by which time Hart had become the only viable alternative to Mondale). At the same time, respondents predisposed to support Mondale reacted quite calmly to the Hart bandwagon: estimated Hart preferences for the pro-Mondale extreme started out at about 5 percent before Iowa and never reached as much as 15 percent at the height of Hart's fortunes. Although there is some room here for a momentum effect independent of real political content, it seems clear that no apolitical bandwagon hypothesis can account for the broad patterns of response to Hart's emergence.

Unwasted Votes

The results in Figure 6 appear to rule out pure excitement as a satisfactory explanation for the dynamics of Hart's support. People appear to have reacted to Hart's candidacy in ways that make considerable sense, given the flow of campaign events and their own underlying political predispositions. At the same time, we have seen that it is possible to account for the dynamics of Hart's support without relying on any concrete perceptions concerning his political or personal qualities. In an effort to resolve this seeming paradox, I turn now to a third approach, one based on the concept of *strategic voting*. The notion of strategic voting is an invention of rational-choice theorists, designed to account for the fact that voters seem to avoid "wasting" their votes on candidates who obviously have no chance to win. The logic of the concept is that voters attempt to maximize their favorable impact upon the outcome of the election, if necessary by voting for a second-best candidate in order to forestall the election of a less-attractive alternative. There are two notable problems with the concept of strategic voting: (1) the difficulty of explaining why anyone who calculated the (infinitesimal) probability of

swinging an election would then bother to vote at all and (2) the fact that no one has been able to describe convincingly how the calculations necessary to vote strategically ought actually to be made in an election as complicated as a state primary. In the spirit of the theory, I shall ignore these embarrassments and ask what the concept of strategic voting, taken as a working hypothesis, has to contribute to an explanation of the dynamics of Hart's support.

The beauty of the strategic voting hypothesis is that it fits the broad outline of the facts so far described: it explains why anti-Mondale respondents switched their support to Hart (because he quickly became the one challenger on whom a vote would not be "wasted"); it also explains why pro-Mondale respondents remained unmoved (because Mondale never fell so far behind that a vote for him would be "wasted"). Unfortunately, the beauty of the hypothesis begins to fade when we focus our attention on the pattern of support for Hart after Super Tuesday. It is clear from Figure 6 that even those respondents least inclined to support Mondale began to abandon Hart in large numbers once his momentum began to ebb. And *they had no "strategic" rationale for doing so.*

To see this it is necessary to think for a moment about how the logic of strategic voting applies to a two-candidate race. If your favorite candidate is ahead, it is obvious that you should vote for him. But even if your favorite candidate is losing, you have nothing to gain by voting for his opponent; doing so would simply make the unhappy outcome (infinitesimally) more likely. Only if there is a third candidate waiting in the wings, a white knight capable of challenging your least-favorite candidate, does it make sense to consider abandoning your favorite. But for anti-Mondale Democrats after Super Tuesday, there was no white knight other than Hart himself. In spite of his stumbles, he was still their best—practically their only—hope. Thus, the rapid evaporation of Hart's support after Super Tuesday is simply inconsistent with any simple notion of strategic voting.[8]

Some Other Possibilities

Having argued that all of the characterizations so far considered are inconsistent with the available data, I turn now to some further alternatives. Since it does not yet seem possible to offer much in the way of

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[8] I am grateful to Paul Janaskie for this insight. It is also worth noting that the decline in support for Hart among anti-Mondale voters was about evenly split between those who moved to Mondale, on the one hand, and those who moved to other candidates or "no preference," on the other. Once again, there appears to be little strategic rationale for this pattern of preference changes.

convincing positive support for any of these possibilities, I simply outline them briefly here.

Learning from Election Returns. In an environment characterized by low information, it is perfectly rational for respondents to take cues from the preferences of others, as expressed in opinion polls and primary votes.[9] By this logic Hart's early successes provided solid reasons for anti-Mondale respondents to support Hart—not because they planned to vote strategically, but simply because (in the absence of information to the contrary) they could believe that he was an attractive alternative to Mondale. When Hart's fortunes began to decline after Super Tuesday, he became, by the same logic, a less-attractive alternative. This hypothesis accounts for the importance of predispositions (respondents satisfied with Mondale would have little reason to interpret the results from Iowa and New Hampshire as evidence that Hart was a superior alternative, while respondents dissatisfied with Mondale would have every reason to do so), for the importance of perceptions of Hart's chances (widespread public support as a salient indicator of quality), and for Hart's eventual decline (failing support leading to revised estimates of quality).

Coming Together. An alternative explanation of Hart's decline (suitable for pairing with any viable explanation of his original emergence) is that even those Democrats predisposed to dislike Mondale decided to coalesce behind him once it was clear that he would be the party's nominee.[10] Super Tuesday seems a little early for them to have come to such a conclusion; moreover, many of those who abandoned Hart did *not* move to Mondale. Nevertheless, the idea of a conscious effort to heal intraparty wounds does appear to offer some explanatory leverage in the later stages of the campaign.

Electability. Here is another form of strategic voting, based not on the desire to avoid wasting a primary vote but on the desire to select the most-formidable Democratic opponent for Ronald Reagan in the general election. Leaving aside once again the irrationality of behaving as though one's own vote would decide the nomination, any explanation based on electability would require a large element of wishful thinking (to account for the observed differences in reactions to Hart between those with pro-Mondale predispositions and those with anti-Mondale predispositions), or a belief that anti-Mondale respondents were more eager to defeat Reagan than were pro-Mondale respondents (which

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[9] For an interesting mathematical model, largely but not entirely consistent with this view, see McKelvey and Ordeshook (1982).

[10] I owe this suggestion to J. Merrill Shanks.

seems unlikely). The 1984 NES survey included ratings of the electability of each of the major Democratic contenders, so that it is possible to find out whether electability and support for Hart at least moved together. Even if they did, however, it would be hard to know whether perceptions of electability were the cause or the effect of support.

Combinations and Permutations. Even if none of the characterizations canvassed here can account for *all* the facts of interest, it is possible that judicious mixtures of two or more could work better. For example, we might suppose that Hart was simply a cipher for anti-Mondale voters to unite behind early in the campaign, but that the focusing of attention on his name, age, and (lack of) new ideas in the middle stages of the campaign were responsible for his eventual decline. Additional possibilities of this sort are left to the imagination of the reader.

A Typology of Primary Campaigns

The interactive model outlined above is grounded in the specific political context of the 1984 Democratic campaign. It is not intended to serve as a general model of presidential nominating campaigns. Having said that, I shall attempt in this section to sketch where it might fit in a more general model—a model that could also accommodate the dynamics of other recent nominating campaigns.

The key political fact captured in the interactive model is that Mondale entered the 1984 campaign as a well-known front-runner, Hart as a relatively unknown challenger. Thus, I argue, public reactions to Hart were conditioned by predispositions toward Mondale, as well as by short-term fluctuations in perceptions of Hart's own chances of being nominated. In the absence of extensive substantive information about Hart's political identity, people made use of the one clear fact available to them: that Hart was a more or less viable alternative to Mondale.

Looking back over other recent nominating campaigns, we find that the one that seems to match this pattern most closely is the Republican campaign of 1980. There, too, a well-known front-runner (Ronald Reagan) was challenged by a new face (George Bush). Like Hart, Bush's most salient political characteristic during his rise to prominence was that he might beat the front-runner. Thus, it would not be surprising to find that reactions to Bush in 1980, like reactions to Hart in 1984, involved some combination of perceptions of viability and predispositions to oppose the front-runner.

Another similarity between the Hart and the Bush campaigns is that, in the end, both fell short. Although the results were by no means inevitable, both Mondale in 1984 and Reagan in 1980 turned out to have

sufficient political capital to withstand their challengers' momentum. The one candidate who did succeed in parlaying momentum like Bush's and Hart's into a nomination was Jimmy Carter in 1976. Why did Carter succeed where Hart and Bush failed? The question is complicated, and a variety of answers are possible. But the one of particular relevance here has to do with an important difference in the structure of the choice faced by prospective primary voters. Carter was not challenging a well-entrenched front-runner. The two candidates who might have played that role—Hubert Humphrey and Edward Kennedy—sat out the 1976 campaign. As a result Carter benefited not from momentum constrained by political predispositions but from momentum virtually unconstrained. As Patterson put it in the course of a similar argument (1980, p. 128), "Carter's approval by other voters, his apparent command of the nominating race, and his lack of liabilities made him the natural choice of an electorate attuned to the race and devoid of strong preferences."

Having considered nominating campaigns with one well-known candidate (the Democrats in 1984, the Republicans in 1980) and with no well-known candidates (the Democrats in 1976), we can complete this typology by considering a pair of campaigns in which two well-known candidates competed for their party's nomination. Reagan's challenge of Gerald Ford in 1976 and Kennedy's challenge of Carter in 1980 pitted candidates with clear political identities. While both Reagan and Kennedy benefited from disenchantment with their party's incumbent, both also were subjects of political evaluation (even of "strong preferences") in their own right. Thus, the model presented above, in which the challenger is treated as a political cipher, is clearly inappropriate for these campaigns. What would be required, instead, is a model in which momentum based on primary results is constrained by substantive political reactions to both of the candidates in the race.

Conclusion: Survey Research and the Nominating Process

Academic studies of public opinion and voting behavior in presidential primaries have begun to pile up (Beniger, 1976; Shanks and Palmquist, 1981; Bartels, 1983, 1985; Brady, 1984; and others). But these analyses have so far had little impact on the more central concerns of political scientists, politicians, and journalists studying candidate behavior and strategy (e.g., Schram, 1977; Brams, 1978) or electoral procedures and party reform (e.g., Democratic Party, 1970; Polsby, 1983). Even the few studies that have attempted to synthesize these various concerns (Aldrich, 1980; Marshall, 1981) have for the most part failed to draw sharp logical connections between public opinion and electoral behavior, on the one hand, and the nominating process as a political institution, on the other.

In part this is simply because many of the institutional questions of central concern have not been sufficiently well formulated for empirical evidence of any sort to be directly relevant. In part it is because detailed survey data have become available only in the last few years. But more frequently, the problem is that analysts of public opinion and voting behavior have failed to frame their research in ways that might suggest answers to the relevant questions.

Two such failings seem to me to be of critical importance. First, survey analysts have begun to compile a list of useful explanatory variables ("issues," "personality," "momentum") without giving careful thought to how prospective voters might actually *use* these considerations to arrive at candidate choices. What matters when, and how? Do perceptions of the candidates' stands on specific "issues" form before or after more general evaluations? Is "personality" a matter of white teeth, or of sizing up a candidate's background and character? Does the public react to "momentum" throughout a primary season, or only when a previously unknown candidate bursts dramatically onto the scene? Without answers to these sorts of questions, no statistical analysis purporting to summarize the determinants of candidate choice is likely to have much impact on fundamental debates about theory or policy—nor does it deserve to.

The second important failing of survey-based studies is that no one has yet done much to explore their specific implications for understanding the results of the presidential nominating process. Doing so requires explicit attention to the interactions between public opinion and primary voting, between primary voting and delegate selection, and so on. It also requires some sensitivity to the role of electoral institutions, candidate strategies, and political history in conditioning the behavior of survey respondents in any particular campaign.

A few analysts have begun to remedy these failings. For example, Keeter and Zukin (1984) have described primary voters' (generally low) levels of information and interest with a view toward criticizing the existing nominating process. Brady and Johnston (1985) have gone further in describing what and when prospective voters learn and in exploring the normative and institutional implications of their results. (They have also introduced a welcome comparative perspective by juxtaposing the American nominating process and the elite-dominated Canadian convention system.)

The present work represents another attempt to forge tighter links between the study of public opinion during the primary season and the study of the presidential nominating process as a political institution. It, too, falls well short of providing definitive answers to the important ques-

tions identified above. But it does provide some more of the groundwork upon which later, more successful efforts may eventually build.

First, it begins to exploit the wealth of contextual data tied to the temporal variation in the "rolling cross-section" survey. Most notably, primary results, delegate counts, and media coverage are used to account systematically for survey respondents' perceptions about the candidates' chances of being nominated. Second, it provides a model of how prospective voters in certain identifiable political settings might combine predispositions and perceptions of viability in arriving at a candidate choice. The model goes some way toward reflecting the specific political context of the 1984 campaign, particularly in its asymmetric treatment of Mondale and Hart. And finally, the empirical results of the analysis shed at least some reflected light on the ongoing debate about the nature of "momentum" in the nominating process.

Obviously, much remains to be done. But in time, survey research may actually help to alleviate our quadrennial sense of surprise at the way we nominate candidates for the presidency.

Manuscript submitted 10 September 1985
Final manuscript received 21 January 1986

APPENDIX 1
Objective Measures of Chances

This appendix provides details regarding the construction of the three objective indicators used to account for shared perceptions of Hart's chances of winning the nomination. Weekly data for these three indicators are provided in Table A1.

1. Mondale's Probability of Nomination. Based on a Bayesian updating scheme applied to weekly delegate tallies published by *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Reports.* Primary victories contribute to Mondale's probability of being nominated in three ways: by increasing the proportion of delegates he is expected to win in future primaries, by increasing the confidence with which these expectations are held, and by decreasing the proportion of the remaining delegates he needs in order to win a convention majority. For further explanation, including details of the calculations, see Bartels (1983, pp. 110–21).

2. Cumulative Hart Primary Vote. Reflects Hart's share of the total vote cast in all previous primaries (and in the Iowa caucuses), with two adjustments. First, Hart's percentage in each state is weighted not by the number of votes cast in the state, but by the average proportion of the front page of the *New York Times, Washington Post, Houston Chronicle,* and *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* devoted to coverage of the campaign in the subsequent week. I am grateful to C. Lawrence Evans for collecting the newspaper coverage data. To avoid home-state biases, I have dropped the *New York Times* from the average for the weeks before and after the New York and Connecticut primaries, the *Houston Chronicle* for the week of the Texas caucuses, and the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* for the weeks before and after the New York primary. When there is more than one primary in a single week, Hart's vote share is the average of his vote share in each state, with each state weighted by the number of delegates at stake. Second, to reflect the fact that primary victories and

TABLE A1

Objective Indicators of Hart's Chances

Week	Mondale's Nomination Probability	Cumulative Hart Primary Vote	Weekly Change in Primary Outcome
1	.810*	.100*	0
2	.810*	.100*	0
3	.810*	.100*	0
4	.810*	.100*	0
5	.810*	.100*	0
6	.810*	.100*	0
7	.783	.165	.047
8	.722	.293	− .152
9	.581	.447	0
10	.639	.410	.056
11	.758	.393	.070
12	.733	.422	− .134
13	.807	.410	.059
14	.904	.405	.010
15	.931	.405	0
16	.931	.405	0
17	.958	.382	0
18	.985	.381	− .028
19	.996	.391	− .011
20	.998	.401	0
21	.998	.401	0
22	1.000	.339	.026
23	1.000	.339	0

NOTE: *Subjective starting values.

defeats gradually fade from memory, previous results are discounted by 10 percent each week (so that, e.g., Mondale's victory in the Iowa caucuses loses half its effect by the time of the Pennsylvania primary seven weeks later).

3. Weekly Change in Primary Outcomes. A measure of Mondale's performance, in terms of primary victories, *relative to* his performance in the last week's primaries. As with the cumulative vote share, primaries in the same week are weighted by the number of delegates at stake. The resulting change in Mondale's share of primaries won (ranging from − 1 if he won everything last week and lost everything this week to + 1 if he lost everything last week and won everything this week) is then weighted by the amount of newspaper coverage in the current week. This measure is intended to reflect the fact that the media often set expectations on the basis of previous results and then penalize candidates who fail to meet those expectations. For example, Hart won more primaries and more primary votes than Mondale on Super Tuesday but suffered a noticeable drop in perceptions of his chances of winning the nomination. His problem was that a split in his favor on Super Tuesday was a comedown from his easy victories in the previous two weeks (and a much-noticed comedown because there was more coverage of the campaign in the week after Super

Tuesday than in any other week of the primary season). Because the measure is designed to capture the effects of media coverage, the changes shown in Table A1 are weighted by the product of two additional factors for each individual survey respondent: the respondent's exposure to the news media (coded to vary from zero to one) and the respondent's attention to coverage of the campaign (also coded to vary from zero to one).

APPENDIX 2
Perceptions of Chances

Respondents' perceptions of each candidate's chances of winning the nomination were measured using items of the following form:

> Now let's talk about who is likely to win the *Democratic nomination for President.* We will be using a scale which runs from 0 to 100, where 0 represents chance for the nomination, 50 represents *an even chance,* and 100 represents *certain* victory. Using this 0 to 100 scale, what do you think *Walter Mondale's* chances are of winning the nomination?

Responses to these questions resist interpretation as probability estimates in any literal sense. For example, some respondents assigned a total probability of 400 percent to the six candidates they were asked about (Mondale, Glenn, Cranston, Jackson, Kennedy, and Hart); the average respondent assigned a total probability of more than 200 percent. These peculiarities may simply be due to the well-documented fact that untrained respondents have difficulty assigning coherent probabilities to uncertain events. On the other hand, they may be due to the use of the phrase "even chance" in the question, which seems to suggest that a candidate with one chance in six (an "even chance" relative to each of the other candidates) should be assigned a "probability" of 50.

In order to approximate more closely a genuine probability measure, I rescaled the raw "chances" reported by respondents in two ways. First, I raised the raw scores (divided by 100) to the 2.5 power. The resulting probabilities still run from zero to one, but a raw score of 50 turns into a transformed score of .177 (approximately one-sixth). This transformation reduces the average total "probability" assigned by each respondent to about 1.2. In order to remove remaining individual differences, I then normalized each respondent's probabilities to sum to one.

There are four kinds of missing data to confront in dealing with these perceptions of chances. If the respondent did not recognize the candidate's name in an earlier question, I attribute a "chances" score of zero. If the respondent recognized the candidate's name but did not know where to place him on the chances scale, I attribute a score of 50 (before making the adjustments described above). If the respondent was interviewed in a week in which the "chances" question was not asked for Gary Hart (i.e., before New Hampshire), I attribute a raw score of 50 or zero for Hart depending upon whether or not the respondent could rate him on the thermometer scale. If the respondent was interviewed after "chances" questions were dropped for a candidate (after Connecticut for Cranston, after Pennsylvania for Glenn), I attribute a score of zero for that candidate.

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