Stability in a Sea of Volatility: The Predictive Power of Elite Endorsements in the 2012 Republican Presidential Primary

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Lester Black

This analysis builds on previous scholarship by explaining the 2012 Republican Primary through elite endorsements, polls and trends in Internet search volume. Consistent with previous research, elite endorsements were found to be a significant predictor in the 2012 contest. Trends in Internet search volume were found to correlate with poll support for candidates, especially relatively unknown candidates, or candidates outside of their home territories. Contrary to previous scholarship, a subgroup of elite endorsers were found to respond directly to popular support when making their decision.
Presidential primary election campaigns are one of the most interesting and confusing planned political events for the American Electorate. The 2012 Republican Primary was no different. Five candidates saw themselves lead in the polls before Mitt Romney eventually became the presumed nominee. But, underneath the polling volatility and shouts from the crowd of media onlookers quantitative measures could still be used to predict primary success.

This analysis seeks to explain the 2012 primary contest through elite endorsements, trends in Internet search volume and polling.

**Literature Review**

Like the many small towns that host the presidential primaries, there is more diversity in the political science literature concerning the nominating process than there is consensus. Uniting the different convincing arguments for what predicts the presidential primaries four factors remain a common theme: poll support, campaign money, elite endorsements and the media.

**Polls**

Poll support, while a factor in presidential primaries, has not been show to be the most important indicator of primary success. Cohen et al find that polls stay relatively stable during the invisible primary; most candidates do not see their numbers change from the beginning stages to the last polls before the first contest. Polls also appeared to have the weakest effect on endorsements, donations and media presence in Cohen et al's analysis.
Steger found that polls during the invisible primary matter more for the Republicans, while Democrats tend to wait until the primary season to come to coalesce around a candidate.

Norrander found that the poll leader during the initial polling of the formal primary season had a 57% longer campaign than those with average poll numbers. But Norrander found that a combination of money and the type of candidate, traditional or non-traditional, had a larger effect on the length of a candidate's campaign.

Money

There is a wide consensus in the literature that the amount of money spent on campaigns has increased since the primary reforms of the 1970s, but there is little consensus on how money affects the presidential primaries.

The front-loading of the primary calendar has made money an even greater necessity for presidential candidates. The creation of Super Tuesday, an early March regional primary in the South, made national organizations and the money to fund them necessary to any serious presidential candidate. Between 1980 and 2004, nine out of the 11 Republican and Democrat candidates that received the nomination were the candidate with the most money prior to the election year.

The use of Internet fundraising has allowed second-tier candidates to generate donations outside of the traditional donor lists and maintain campaigns longer. But with more candidates turning down public financing in favor of running without spending

1 Norrander, 2003
2 *ibid*
3 Mayer
4 Norrander, 1992
5 Norradner, 2006
6 *ibid*
limits, and the development of Super PACS after the Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission decision (2010), campaign finance will continue to play a major role in primary elections. The 2010 U.S. Supreme Court decision allowed donors to donate unlimited amounts of money to so-called Super PACs, political action committees that are legally separate from campaigns but often act in a specific campaign's interest. These unlimited donations have allowed wealthy individuals invest far more than they could have in previous elections.

Steger denies that money has any significant predictive quality for the aggregate primary vote. And, Cohen et al had too little confidence in their analysis of spending to make any authoritative claims about its role in the primary battles.

Because of the recent significant changes to campaign finance in the wake of the 2010 Supreme Court decision, finance has been left out of this analysis.

Endorsements

Cohen et al's made the strongest case yet that elite endorsements had a strong predictive factor for winning a party's nomination in their 2008 book, The Party Decides.

Cohen et al's research is founded on the idea that American political parties are a coalition of different groups with different goals that make compromises amongst themselves in order to nominate a candidate that will be able to both get elected and direct the government in a way agreeable to the most amount of people in the coalition. Through qualitative historical research they show how parties have developed an internal

7 Aldrich
8 Steger, 2007
9 Cohen, et al
dialogue to decide on candidates, often thought of as a smoke-filled room in Chicago, which persists to this day.

To study the different factors that determine success in the invisible primary Cohen et al set up a model that quantitatively measured endorsements, media coverage, support in public opinion polls and fund-raising. Their model found that endorsements, especially endorsements coming from outside a candidate's traditional support group, are the most powerful predictor for all other factors going into the formal primary season.

In Cohen et al's model endorsements continued to have the largest effect through the early primary battles and on to the eventual nomination. Endorsements lead to increases in campaign donations, organization, poll support and media coverage, according to Cohen et al, making them the best predictor for success in the fight for a party's nomination.

Media/Information

A campaign's ultimate goal is to get enough information to the public so that a plurality of voters will chose that campaign's message by the time the polls close. Larry M. Bartels simplifies the fight for information in his 1988 *Presidential Primaries and the Dynamics of Public Choice*. "Voters do not cast their ballots for candidates they do not feel they know".\(^{10}\)

The current state of political science literature covering presidential primary strictly examines the traditional vessel voters receive their information from: the newspapers and television networks. Bartels classifies this as a "bound" system in that the television and print outlets have a limited amount of pages and minutes that are

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\(^{10}\) Bartels, 57
strategically allotted to the most newsworthy candidates. Lower-tier candidates that are not known by a large enough part of the public to be thought of as newsworthy must demonstrate their seriousness as a candidate before they will get a significant amount of coverage.

In his analysis of the 1976, 1980 and 1984 presidential primary campaigns Bartels found that in the pre-primary battles informal straw poll victories can increase coverage, but the most reliable launching pad are the first formal primaries and caucuses. Using weekly 1984 National Election Survey, Bartels found that nearly all of the gains in familiarity for Rueben Askew and Gary Hart, two Democrats that were able to break from the unknown into the known, were made during the intense horse race coverage of the early primary battles. Both candidates failed to increase the percentage of the public that was familiar with them after the Super Tuesday battles.

Norrander found that the front-loading of southern states into the Super Tuesday battle quickened the attrition rate of candidates and made the media a more important factor in providing voters with information.\(^\text{11}\) Rather than taking importance away from Iowa and New Hampshire, like its southern architects had intended, the regional primary made the early states and the media's portrayal of them more important.

The level of information voters have on a candidate is important beyond just the threshold where the public feel they know the candidate. Voters are more likely to vote for a candidate that they know more about than a candidate they know less about. And

\[\text{11 Norrander, 1992}\]
more information alters the way voters make decisions about candidates; voters are able to make nuanced decisions when they have more information about the candidates.\textsuperscript{12}

The character of coverage a candidate receives has been shown to affect the amount people donate to campaigns during the primary season. Mutz found that the increased importance of small donations after the campaign finance regulations of the 1970s made candidates more reliant on the type of coverage their campaign received.\textsuperscript{13} Candidates with weakly attached supporters saw their donations rise when their campaigns were covered positively, while campaigns with strongly attached supporters had an increase in the number of donations when their campaigns were portrayed as falling behind.

Cohen et al disregard the traditional media as a strong factor in the invisible primary. In their 2008 book they found that the media only was only a reactive force that reinforced that status quo other factors had produced. They claim that both the national and local news networks pay little attention to the invisible primary, but then only use \textit{Time} magazine as a gauge for the media's attention.

This measure of media may have once been valid, but as the Internet has increasingly been the information medium for most Americans, any study that does not examine its use is flawed. News outlets have been unbound from the system that put price tags on pages and new institutions are adding to the arena of primary information. Search engines will direct voters to not only to the traditional magazines, newspapers and television networks, they will also send prospective voters to online encyclopedias, blogs and the candidate's own websites.

\textsuperscript{12} Bartels
\textsuperscript{13} Mutz, 1995
Data and Method

For this analysis the primary calendar starts on January 3, 2012 in Iowa and ends on April 10th in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania where Rick Santorum, the last obstacle to Romney's presumed triumph, dropped out. The calendar of contest was divided broken down into separate regions. In addition to a national group of every participating primary, the first four states, Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina and Florida are all treated as individual areas. The next two months of the primary contests are divided into five groups based on the timing of the state's primary. Table 1 shows the timing and grouping of these states.

Most of these groups lack any meaningful geographical cohesiveness. Voters in Alaska are most likely voting with different issues in mind than voters in Virginia. Yet they are put into the same analytical category for three reasons. First, there are no meaningful "regional primaries" in the modern campaign season. The jockeying of states for earlier primaries has splintered any area's attempt to create a regional primary with regional issues and voices forced onto the national primary stage.\(^\text{14}\) Second, the 2012 primary, like many before it, was fought on a national stage with national media attention creating a continuous nationwide race, instead of the old style of many local decisions brokered at a national convention.\(^\text{15}\) Despite the geographic distance between many states, each day's dominant talking points were spoken between them. Third, for many of these states there isn't a meaningful amount of data. Not all states are heavily polled like

\(^{14}\) Norrander, Super Tuesday

\(^{15}\) Cohen et al
the first four contests, and the number of endorsements made and reported per state
dramatically decreases as the primary drags on.

Table 1: Division of the Primary Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>1/3/12</td>
<td>Super Tuesday</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>3/6/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>1/10/12</td>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>3/6/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>1/21/12</td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>3/6/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>1/31/12</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>3/6/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>2/2/12</td>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>3/6/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>2/7/12</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>3/6/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>2/7/12</td>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>3/6/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>2/28/12</td>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>3/10/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>2/28/12</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>3/13/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>3/3/12</td>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>3/13/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>3/3/12</td>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>3/20/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super Tuesday</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>3/6/12</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>3/24/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>3/6/12</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>4/3/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>3/6/12</td>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>All states</td>
<td>1/3-4/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The percentage vote share*, rather than delegates won, is the dependent variable
used to indicate success in the primaries. Delegates are a poor measure of primary
success. The scheme used to award delegates to candidates is often complicated, varies
on a state basis and isn't well understood by the public. Even in Iowa, where delegates are not awarded on vote share, vote totals are the dominantly reported figure in the media.

For individual states the vote share is simply the percentage of votes a candidate won in that state. For the multiple-state areas the percentage vote shares were averaged across the states and weighted for the number of votes cast in each state. The national group is the total number of votes cast for each candidate by April 10th.

*Elite party endorsements* were cataloged through U.S. Newspaper and wire service coverage of the primary. The Lexis-Nexis catalog of 515 U.S. newspaper and wire services were searched for every day of the primary campaign. For a detailed description of this search process refer to appendix-1.

The endorsements were assigned a power ranking depending on the type of office the endorser held at the time of the endorsement. Congressmen, and ex presidents who are assumed to have high rank in the party and access to fundraising and organizational structures were rated the highest with 10 points. Statewide officials were given five, state legislators three, local officials two and conservative activists one point. Refer to Table 2 for greater detail.

Cohen et al ranked their endorsements between 1 and .1 based on the weight of the endorser's name and position. Instead of values consistent across the endorser's position, they used a group of eight UCLA political scientists to rank the value of each endorsement individually.16

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16 Cohen et al, 180, 372
Endorsers were not penalized if they were no longer in office: an ex U.S. Representative has the same value as a current U.S. Representative. Most of the power of an endorsement is not derived from the actual office's capabilities. An endorsement has power because of the insider privileges an elite in the party has access to, and most of these do not leave a person when they leave office. An elected official usually maintains the fundraising and organization contacts for as long as they are in good faith with the party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elite Endorsement Power Rankings</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Officials</th>
<th>Statewide Officials</th>
<th>State Legislators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. representative</td>
<td>Statewide party official</td>
<td>State legislator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. senator</td>
<td>Statewide elected official</td>
<td>Ex state legislator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex U.S. president</td>
<td>Governor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex U.S. rep</td>
<td>Ex governor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex U.S. senator</td>
<td>Ex statewide official</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex vice president</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Officials</th>
<th>Conservative Activist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local official</td>
<td>Conservative activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County party official</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town party official</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The "conservative activist" category is the most troublesome for the 2012 primary. There is a large variation between the value of an endorsement in this category. A conservative activist could be anything from a small town Tea Party leader to a Super Pac mega-contributor. Both of those endorsers have value - there was a considerable amount of stock put into the endorsements made by members of the Tea Party - but of very different magnitudes. Endorsers like Foster Friess, who provided millions of dollars to Super PACs along with their endorsement, have a considerably larger impact on the election. But without a quantitative way to differentiate between conservative activists, they were all given one point.

Endorsements were totaled weekly. For state and regional groups, the endorsements reflect all that have been made by the date the primary or caucus was held, any made after that time are only counted in the national group, which includes all endorsements made before April 10, 2012.

*Google Trends* are measures of the volume of Google searches made per week for a specific region. Candidates first and last names were used. Because of Google's auto-fill feature, and the tendency for people to search for a candidate's last name instead of his or her first, using only one name yields greater results. But for candidates like Ron Paul and Rick Perry, their last names are not unique enough to reflect Internet users looking for only the presidential candidate.

Google is not the Internet's only search engine operator; many voters use other search engines that are not included in this analyses. But with 80% of the Internet's search engine market share, Google offers the most comprehensive data.
Search volume is measured against a fixed scale related to the amount of traffic the search term had in January of 2004 - one is equal to the average search volume in January 2004, a two is twice that average search volume.

Google allows the search volume data to be broken down to state levels. For the first four states the Trends represent the search volume in that state alone. For groups 1 and 2 the Trends represent an average of trends between the multiple states that has not been weighted to reflect differences in overall volume between states. For the Super Tuesday and following two groups the national Google Trend was used.

All available public opinion polls were obtained and then weighted for the number of participants and length of time in the survey and then averaged to create a weekly measure. For the first four states individual polls were available for each state. Averages for the multi-state groups were a combination of applicable statewide polls, when available, and national polling. National polls were included because many of the later states were not heavily polled.

**Analysis and Discussion**

**What do Google Trends Show?**

Google Trends have a significant correlation with public opinion polling on both a state and national level. Table 3 shows the correlation coefficients between Google Trends and public opinion polls for each of the four major candidates and for each region of the primary. On average, Trends had a Pearson's $r$ coefficient of 0.65 when compared with polls. While Pearson's $r$ is a measure of association and does not show a causal
direction, a value of 0.65 is a fairly significant level of correlation. Both the Internet searching behavior of Internet users and poll support seem to be expressing a similar public sentiment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Romney</th>
<th>Gingrich</th>
<th>Santorum</th>
<th>Paul</th>
<th>Perry</th>
<th>Huntsman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super Tuesday</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there does seem to be a fairly high correlation between polls and Google Trends, the correlation also has a high degree of variability - too much to outright trust that search behavior will correlate with poll behavior. The standard deviation between the Pearson's r coefficients was 0.225, a third of the entire correlation. And the range of correlations goes from statistically insignificant to almost complete correlation - Pearson's r of 0.05 to 0.94.

But, there is a pattern between the correlations of Google Trends and the relationship of the candidate to the region studied. Romney's search volume had a very
insignificant correlation with his poll numbers in Iowa and New Hampshire, two states where he is very well known. He had already campaigned in Iowa in 2008 and was the frontrunner in 2012. Romney owns a summer home in New Hampshire and was the governor of neighboring Massachusetts. The correlation between Romney's polls and Google Trends were significant outside of Romney's home territory. In Florida, the two measures were correlated at 0.9, and correlated at 0.94 in Group 1 states - Nevada, Minnesota and Colorado.

A similar pattern appeared with Gingrich, a southern Republican. In Florida there was almost no correlation, a Pearson's r of 0.08, but in Iowa the polls and Google Trends were correlated at 0.79.

The pattern of lower voter knowledge to higher correlation is not limited within particular candidates. Romney, Gingrich and Paul, all well-established national figures in the Republican Party, saw an average correlation between polls at 0.64, 0.63 and 0.62 respectfully. Santorum, who was a relative unknown senator before the primaries, saw an average correlation of 0.76 between polls and Google Trends - a difference of 0.13 between an unknown candidate and the average of the three known candidates. Regions where voters know less about a candidate seem to be more likely to express their poll support in their Internet searching behavior.

This pattern of correlation seems to fit the logic of Internet behavior. Voters are less likely to search for candidates that they already feel they know, while more unfamiliar candidates, like Santorum at the beginning of the primary season or Romney among Florida voters, are more likely to be searched for. The data seems to indicate that greater search volume increases the correlation between polls and Google Trends.
Figure 1 illustrates how these patterns between Google Trends and polls are candidate dependent. The figure plots trends and polls for both Gingrich and Santorum in Florida. Florida was considered home territory for Gingrich and search volume does not seem to correlate with poll support. Santorum was not well known in Florida, so just as Florida voters are hearing that Santorum is gaining ground in Iowa they begin to search for him. A week after Santorum’s search volume increases in Florida so does his poll support. Gingrich's Search volume jumps after the Iowa primary and during the New Hampshire primary, and his poll numbers increases moderately after this spike. But the Gingrich and Santorum increases appear to be of two different types. Santorum was posting his first ever increase in Florida polls after that increase in search volume; Gingrich was only regaining some of the ground he had lost during his fight with Romney in Iowa.
The Google search volume on the day of a primary contest is not a good predictor for election results. The Google Trends on the day of the contest are an insignificant predictor of share of votes in a regression analysis. This is not surprising. Google Trends are a measure of people seeking information about a candidate, a process that happens before a voter makes their decision. If Google trends are still high by the day of the contest the candidate has probably failed to get enough information to the voter. Bartels found that in the 1984 primary voters preferred the candidate they knew more about, even if they were learning things they didn't necessarily agree with: "...voters prefer the devil they know more about than the devil they know less about."\textsuperscript{17} Figure 1 shows this same trend. By the day of the Florida Primary on January 31st both Gingrich and Santorum's

\textsuperscript{17} Bartels, 79
Google Trends had dropped substantially, Gingrich's the most. He went on to win 32% of Florida's vote to Santorum's 13%.

So while it can't be assumed that Google Trends stand in for polls, they do have a correlation with poll support, especially amongst unknown candidates. Google Trends are most adept at showing voter interest in a candidate. The positive action of searching for a candidate is unlike the conventional survey methods employed to detect voter sentiments. Google Trends show Internet users taking their own initiative to seek information about a candidate and in the process give a picture, unbiased by a survey question, of the learning environment surrounding a candidate.

Do Endorsements Matter?

Endorsements were a significant predictor for success at the ballot box in the 2012 Republican Primary. Table 4 shows a simple bivariate regression between the dependent variable, the percentage of vote won, and one independent variable, the percentage of endorsements acquired. Each of these are percentage measures for each region studied -- the number of endorsements over all endorsements made in the primary, and the number of votes cast over all votes cast.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share of Vote = 0.145 + 0.295(Share of Endorsements)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Model Estimates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of Endorsements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Endorsements were statistically significant with a p-value of zero and a t-ratio of 5.72, well above 2.704, the required t-value at .01 level of confidence for 47 degrees of freedom. Endorsements were a significant predictor of vote share. An adjusted R-squared value of 0.42, or a 42% explanation of the share of vote is a strong predictor for a single independent variable.

Cohen et al's analysis of endorsements was limited to endorsements made before the first primary's contest, these figures track endorsements up to the day the primary was held. So a straight comparison of the two analyses would be flawed, but the findings in both studies are consistent in that they show endorsements are a strong predictor for success. Cohen et al showed that invisible primary endorsements were the strongest predictor of other typical measures of primary success - money, polls and media attention. This analyses confirms that endorsements matter, but for predicting voting behavior in the actual contests.

Romney dominated the endorsement battle. Figure 2 plots the share of votes by the share of endorsements for each region and candidate; Romney was the only candidate to have more than 40% of the endorsements in any one contest or region. He also never had less than 40% of the endorsements in any contest or region.

Figure 2
The troublesome endorsement category of "conservative activist" decreased the power of endorsements. The contests where endorsements had seemed to have the smallest effect on vote share - notably Gingrich in Florida and South Carolina and Santorum in the late March primaries (groups 3 & 4) - were being bankrolled by a few conservative activists and their Super PACs. As noted earlier, this campaign finance is not included earlier in this analysis, so this isn't an empirical note. But, qualitatively, those candidates would most likely be unable to fight the Romney endorsement train in those primaries without the serious boosts of money from a few donors. The winnowing that Norrander describes would have likely pushed Santorum out of the race before he
could have competed in the late-March primaries. But with access to a large amount of cash from a small pool of people his campaign was able to march on.

Endorsement Timing

Endorsements in the 2012 primary appear to have a weak, but not insignificant, correlation to polls and Google trends. Tables 5 and 6 show the Pearson's r correlation coefficient between weekly endorsements and weekly trends and polls for the first four states and the national region. Overall, there was a stronger correlation between the Google searches and endorsements. Between endorsements and Google Trends the average Pearson's r was 0.337, while polls and endorsements had an average correlation of 0.268. However, both of these groups had a high variability, with a standard deviation of 0.308 and 0.216, making it hard to draw group wide conclusions.

While there wasn't a clear directional relationship between Google Trends or polls and endorsements across all candidates or regions, one particular type of candidate did seem to draw a similar endorsement patter. The candidate that was seen as the viable alternative to Romney gained endorsements only after they saw an increase in Google Trends and poll support.

\[18\] Norradner, Attrition Game
### Table 5
Correlation Between Endorsements & Google (Pearson's r)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Iowa</th>
<th>New Hampshire</th>
<th>Florida</th>
<th>South Carolina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romney</td>
<td>0.525</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.345</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>0.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gingrich</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td>0.562</td>
<td>0.482</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santorum</td>
<td>0.366</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.597</td>
<td>0.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>0.225</td>
<td>-0.170</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.395</td>
<td>0.781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>0.376</td>
<td>-0.248</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average 0.337  
St. Dev. 0.308

### Table 6
Correlation Between Endorsements & Polls (Pearson's r)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Iowa</th>
<th>New Hampshire</th>
<th>Florida</th>
<th>South Carolina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romney</td>
<td>0.457</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.381</td>
<td>0.447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gingrich</td>
<td>0.477</td>
<td>0.422</td>
<td>0.516</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santorum</td>
<td>0.319</td>
<td>0.237</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>0.536</td>
<td>0.399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>0.268</td>
<td>-0.135</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.159</td>
<td>0.584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>0.400</td>
<td>-0.135</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average 0.268  
St. Dev. 0.216
Rick Perry was the first candidate anointed as the viable alternative to Romney. Perry began climbing in polls and search volume even before he announced his candidacy in August of 2011. Figure 3 shows how endorsements immediately came in after his announcement, and then continued to pour in as his poll support and search volume rose. Perry's candidacy lost relevance after a series of gaffs, including a major one at a November debate, but the endorsement pattern for the "not-Romney" candidate continued.

Figure 3

Gingrich gained steadily in the polls and became the clear Romney alternative in the weeks leading up to the Iowa and New Hampshire primaries. Iowan endorsers seemed to disregard polling and search volume entirely when making their endorsements.
- with the exception of those endorsing Gingrich. The average correlation for non-Gingrich endorsements and Google Trends was a Pearson's $r$ of 0.046, and 0.016 for polls and endorsements. For Gingrich, the correlation between polls and endorsements was 0.422 and 0.562 between Google Trends and endorsements. These figures show a clear distinction between endorsers. Those endorsing Gingrich, the alternative to Romney at the time, were clearly affected by popular support. While those endorsing candidates other than Romney were making decisions with little correlation to popular sentiment. Figure 4 shows how Iowans began searching for Gingrich and polling for him before Gingrich received any endorsements in Iowa

Figure 4

Just like in Iowa, Gingrich endorsements in New Hampshire were the only ones that saw a correlation to Trends or polls. The average correlation between non-Gingrich endorsements and public opinion polls was only 0.036 with a standard deviation of 0.043.
For Gingrich, the correlation between the two was 0.516. Figure 5 shows the increase in poll numbers was followed closely by a jump in Google Trends. Three weeks after New Hampshirites started searching for Gingrich's name he got his first big week of New Hampshire endorsements.

When Gingrich lost the number two position, Santorum, the next in line, saw a similar effect. Gingrich maintained his lead ahead of Santorum in the polls through the New Hampshire and South Carolina primaries, but by Florida Santorum was looking more like the alternative to Romney.

Figure 5
Florida was the first state where Santorum endorsements had a significant correlation with Google Trends and polls. Google Trends had a 0.597 correlation coefficient with endorsements, and polls had a 0.536 Pearson's r with endorsements. Unlike with Gingrich, where search volume increased after poll standing increased, Figure 6 shows how an increase polls followed an increase in searches. Santorum, even at this stage in the campaign was not a widely known candidate. Voters had to learn more about him before they were willing to tell a polling agency that they would support him - this learning period is shown by the increase in search volume. Two weeks after Santorum saw an increase in polls, he then received his first endorsement. While this does mirror Gingrich and Perry's 'not-Romney' surge, that Florida surge only brought Santorum one endorsement before the Florida Primary took place.
After the Florida primary Santorum surpassed Gingrich and became the clear alternative to Romney. The following three contest are sorted together as Group 1. Figure 7 shows Santorum's Group 1 trends increase after his success in Iowa, followed by an increase in poll support and finally his first endorsements in these three states. While he wasn't raking in the kind of endorsement figures Romney saw, his Group 1 endorsements were worth 30 points - a jump from his singleton in Florida.

Santorum, still at the top of the race with Romney, only received two endorsements before primaries were held in the next Group 2 states. But Santorum gained endorsements in Super Tuesday states worth 38 points.

Santorum's support in Super Tuesday states followed the existing 'not-Romney' pattern. His endorsements came in weeks after his Google Trends and poll support had already climbed. Figure 8 shows the now familiar pattern.

Santorum had too few endorsements in the final two groups for the pattern to continue. Group 3 states gave Santorum one endorsement. The final Group 4 states gave Santorum endorsements worth 13 points, but they were all made at the outset of Santorum's campaign in early 2011, well before he had any poll support or increase in Google Trends.
Figure 7

Trends, Endorsements and Polls for Santorum
Nevada, Minnesota and Colorado

Figure 8

Trends, Endorsements and Polls for Santorum
Super Tuesday
Endorsement Discussion

Romney obliterated his opponents in the fight for endorsements. He had twice as many points in the endorsement scoring system as all of his competitors combined -- 4579 points to 2187. Romney won the endorsement game well before any primaries happened. His closest rival in the endorsement race, Perry with 814 points, dropped out after only 12 of the 2,286 delegates had been bound to a candidate. But within the endorsement battle there was a division between the endorsers.

Cohen et al found in their analysis that "support in polls... has little effect on endorsements. Thus... endorsers exhibit almost complete 'free will' in their choice of nominee."19 Cohen et al's study of the 2000 and 2004 elections is, again, limited to endorsements made before the primary season started. But there seemed to be a very different pattern for certain endorses in the 2012 election. A small subset of endorsers seemed to base their endorsement entirely on popular support, waiting to endorse a candidate until poll numbers showed someone might be able to beat Romney.

Conclusion

Poll figures in the 2012 race for the Republican Presidential nomination were volatile - five candidates were polled as the number one candidate while Mitt Romney, the early favorite, struggled for most of the campaign to poll higher than 30%. But underneath fluctuations in poll numbers elite endorsements were a stable and significant predictor for primary success.

19 Cohen et al, 261
Google Trends give a more nuanced picture of popular support than public opinion polls alone. Fluctuations in the volume of Internet searches show possible voters seeking out information about candidates, rather than responding to a polling agency's questions. There is a positive correlation between poll support and fluctuations in Google Trends for a candidate, but also a great deal of variability. Internet use had a higher correlation with poll support with candidates that were relatively unknown.

Although endorsements were a significant predictor for primary success throughout the campaign, not all endorsers were free from swings of public support. A subgroup of endorsements had a high correlation with public support and trends in Internet search volume. This goes against previous scholarship that found endorsers acted independently of popular support, but these findings make sense against the narrative of the 2012 Primary. Serious divisions inside the Republican Party made unification behind one nominee difficult. While the Republican elite overwhelmingly made threw their support behind Romney factions in the Party were constantly looking for a candidate that had a chance to beat the frontrunner. Driven by the urge to find a candidate that could beat Romney, these factions made decisions based on popular support.
Appendix 1
Data Collecting Process

Endorsements

Endorsements were tracked through Lexis-Nexis's database of US Newspaper and Wire Services. All available articles from US Newspapers and Wires were searched for every day of each candidate's campaign, from the formal announcement of the start of the campaign to the official suspension or end of the campaign. Although Newt Gingrich and Ron Paul had not formally ended their campaign on April 10, the race for the nomination was effectively over when Rick Santorum dropped out - so endorsements lost almost all of their value.

Between July 2011 and December of 2011 each candidate was searched for individually. Lexis-Nexis allows Boolean search operators. This was the search term used for each individual candidate:

[Candidate's Last Name] AND endors!

This returns all articles with the candidate's last name and any variation of the word endors, including: endorse, endorsement, endorsements, endorser, endorsers, endorsing, endorses and endorsed.

Between January 2012 and April 2012 multiple candidates were searched for concurrently with this search term:

[Candidate Last Name 1] OR [Candidate Last Name 2] OR [Candidate Last Name 3..] w/40 endorse!

Candidates were removed from the search the day after they suspended or ended their campaign. The w/40 condition restricts the results to articles that have one of the
candidate's names within 40 words of one variation of "endors". This limited the size of the search results, which had a high of 1500 results per day in December and January, and average return of 200-300 results per day for the whole campaign season.

The results found in Lexis-Nexis searches were double-checked by two other websites that collected endorsement information: Democracy in Action's p2012 database (www.p2012.org) and the publically edited Wikipedia database (en.wikipedia.org).

Trends

Google offers measures of search volume for particular search terms on its Google Trends website (google.com/trends). Weekly data for search volume was collected for each candidate's first and last name. Data for all candidates was set at a fixed scale to January 2004.

Polls

All public opinion polls reported by two website, Huffington Post (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/pollster/) and Real Clear Politics (http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2012/president/us/republican_presidential_nomination-1452.html) were collected.

Polls were weighted for the number of respondents in the poll and the number of days the poll was considered valid for. Along with these weights, the polls were averaged to create a weekly poll number for each candidate
Works Cited


