Speakership Elections and Control of the U.S. House: 1839–1859

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The years preceding the Civil War were characterized by political turmoil at the national level, suffusing politics in the most representative of national political institutions, the U.S. House of Representatives. An important feature of this political turmoil was the persistent difficulty of the House in organizing itself for business. In half of the twelve Congresses that convened from 1839 to 1861, the House had to endure multiple-ballot affairs for the choice of Speaker. In at least a couple of these multiple-ballot affairs, divisions were so deep and resolution seemed so elusive that simply adjourning and waiting for the next election was a seriously-debated option.

One presumes that these organizational fights emerged because organizational control over the House seemed like an important tool of legislative control. This presumption has been at the heart of virtually all the historical treatments of this era. However, because of data and theoretical limitations, this presumption has never been subject to systematic analysis. Beginning such a systematic analysis is the purpose of this paper.

Students of formal legislative institutions should be particularly drawn to the question of whether the resolution of organizational conflict in the antebellum House influenced subsequent legislative behavior. This question is interesting for two distinct reasons. First, one might be interested in understanding what these organizational fights were really about. Were they, in fact, fights over how to organize the House that were intended to lock-in certain policy trajectories, or were they orgiastic episodes of "position-taking," with votes for Speaker candidates serving as proxies for Representatives' positions on the pressing issues of the day?

Second, one might be interested in understanding how modern debates over the consequences of formal legislative organization, particularly partisan organizations, are refracted through the politics of an earlier party system. Modern scholars are currently engaged in a vigorous debate over whether partisan organizations, as such, have any substantive influence over the legislative process, or whether they are simply a convenient re-labeling of the substantive issues that divide voters and their representatives. In this paper, I examine antebellum speakership battles with this questions in mind, searching for evidence that the resulting organizational coalitions had persistent policy effects beyond the narrow act of organizing the House for business.

Therefore, the simple question this paper asks is this: Did the coalitions that came together to elect Speakers of the House from 1839 to 1859 have persistent effects beyond the moment of organization? If they did, then there is evidence that even in a contentious, conflict-ridden era of American politics, partisan (or nearly-partisan)[1] legislative organization could operate as an independent influence on policymaking, distinct from underlying preferences *per se*. If they did not, then this lends credence to the view that American political parties, at least in general, label underlying cleavages, but have no independent pull on legislative behavior.

I pursue this topic by drawing on techniques used in recent scholarship that have attempted to discern the independent influence on parties on congressional decisions. In Section II, I examine whether there is evidence of "legislative cartels" in House roll call voting from

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[1]I distinguish "partisan" from "nearly-partisan" organizations for the simple reason that a couple of the organizing coalitions of this period were drawn from cross-party agreements, particularly in the 26th Congress, when a small number of Calhounite Democrats joined with the minority Whigs to elect a Whig speaker, and the 34th Congress, when Nathaniel Banks led a multi-party coalition comprised of proto-Republicans and Americans.

1839 to 1861, by studying the "win rates" of House members on floor votes. In Section III, I explore the influence that being a member of an organizing coalition had on the voting behavior of its members, by examining changes in voting behavior from one Congress to the next as a function of being in such coalitions. Preceding these two analyses, it is necessary to review the history of antebellum speakership contests. That is the topic of Section I, to which I now turn.

I. A Brief History of Speakership Elections, 1789–1861

Even though the speakership is arguably the second-most-powerful political leadership position under the American Constitution, contests for it have been relatively subdued in the twentieth century.[2] Only once in the past century has it taken more than one ballot to pick a Speaker—in 1923 (68th Congress), when it took nine ballots over three days. Both parties have now developed routinized voting procedures to winnow down multiple pretenders whenever the speakership comes open and more than two candidates emerge to seek a party's nomination. More importantly, however, regardless of how contentious intra-party wrangling over the speakership has been, once a party's speakership nominee is chosen, the matter is settled. The story for the past century has been one of even disaffected "moderate" majority party members (i.e., potentially pivotal from the perspective of the entire chamber) staying loyal to their party's candidate for Speaker, allowing the majority party to control the choice of Speaker and other organizational issues fairly seamlessly. As recent events have illustrated, when a member of a congressional party grows disaffected with her party, she might change parties, but she won't actively support a renegade Speakership candidate on the floor of the House.

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[2]Histories of Speakership contests include Follett (1896), Galloway (1962), Leintz (1978) Peters (1997), and Stewart (1999).

Such smooth sailing in formally organizing the House is characteristic of House speackership elections since 1865 (Stewart 1999). From that point forward, the formal trappings of speakership selection have been virtually unchanged: Both major parties have offered a single, formal nominee to the House for consideration as Speaker, and then the majority party has pushed through its nominee with virtual intraparty unanimity. Even in 1923, when splits within the Republican party led to progressive Republicans offering one of their own as a separate Speaker candidate, throwing the speakership selection into multiple ballots, their dissent was eventually accommodated by a "gentleman's agreement" within the Republican party (Galloway 1962, pp. 47–48)

Moving back in time from 1865, however, one quickly encounters another world, full of chaos, confusion, and political intrigue. Table 1 summarizes speakership contests from the 1st to the 57th Congress (1789–1901). Before the Civil War, deadlock over the organization of the U.S. House of Representatives was common. Over one-third of all speakership contests from the founding of the Republican until the outbreak of the Civil War (14 of 41) took more than one ballot to resolve. And at least two of the 27 single-ballot speakership elections during that time were resolved in favor of a candidate whose party held a minority of House seats.

Basic summary statistics are a good first step in illustrating contention over organization of the House in the antebellum period, but they are just a first step. The multiple-ballot speakership elections that occurred before the Civil War sprang up from many causes that are associated with the political development of the nation, including the evolution of the House as a political institution, the evolution of the speakership within it, and the evolution of the role of the political parties as channels of mass (or even elite) political conflict.

Based on what limited prior research there is on antebellum speakership battles (see Leintz 1978), we can divide the nineteenth century into four periods, based on the strength of party identification among House members, strength of organizational party discipline, and the value of the speakership as a political prize. The periods are summarized in Table 2, and I discuss them briefly here.

The first period lasted through the eleventh Congress, from 1789 to 1811. This period was characterized by loose party identification among the rank-and-file, a weak partisan role played by the Speaker, and a sense within the House that the Speaker was a minor prize. At least four Speaker elections during this period were multi-ballot affairs,[3] reflecting the weakness of legislative party organizations and haphazard politicking for control of the House. None of the multi-ballot affairs was protracted, however. The repercussions of organizational jockeying tended to be minor, with the notable exception of Theodore Sedgwick's (Fed.-Mass.) election in the Sixth Congress (1799–1801), whose behavior as Speaker only heightened the severe divisions that already existed between Republicans and Federalists (see Follett 1896, pp. 87–88).

The second period was ushered in by Henry Clay in the Twelfth Congress (1811–13) and lasted until roughly the 26th Congress (1839–41). It, too, was a period more characterized by factionalism than by party loyalty. But, unlike the first period, Clay's speakership demonstrated the strategic value of the speakership, and thus contests for the office became more heated. Encompassing most of the "Era of Good Feeling," speakership fights during the second period were not structured along partisan lines, but rather along personality-based or regional factions. Somehow, Clay was able to hold these centrifugal forces at bay, but efforts to replace him during

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[3]We do not know for certain how many ballots it took to elect the first two Speakers.

his two hiatuses illustrate just how fractured the power distribution within the House was during this period (cf. Young 1966, Stewart 1998, Strahan, et al. 1998, Jenkins and Stewart 1999, Strahan 1999). What stability could be found in organizing the House in this period rested largely in the person of Henry Clay himself.

A similar story can be told about an equally-dominating, but less well-known Speaker from the same era, Andrew Stevenson (Jack.-Va.). Stevenson was an ardent supporter of Andrew Jackson, and thus was clearly aligned with the emergent Democratic party that eventually controlled the federal government. He was elected Speaker four consecutive Congresses—the first time by a hair's breadth, but the other times by comfortable margins. But, after Stevenson resigned in the middle of the 23rd Congress (1834) to accept Jackson's appointment as ambassador to England, the House was thrust into a succession crisis. The majority Jacksonians could not settle on a single candidate, resulting in a first ballot in which six Jacksonians received more than ten votes, including four (Richard H. Wilde [Ga.], James K. Polk [Tenn.], Joel Sutherland [Penn.], and John Bell [Tenn.]) who received more than thirty. After ten ballots Bell was elected Speaker, most likely on the votes of many Whigs. Lacking a public vote for Speaker, both Whigs and Jacksonians claimed victory.

Another Whig-Democratic coalition emerged in the 11-ballot affair that ended this era in the 26th Congress (1839–41). Factionalism among both the Democrats and Whigs was rampant, which led to a number of aborted efforts by leaders of both parties to build a majority. Robert M.T. Hunter (Whig-Va.) was eventually elected Speaker, receiving votes from seven South Carolina Democrats, which sent him over the top.

Hunter's cross-party coalition marked the end of an era. The sorting of national politics in the late 1830s along Whig-Democratic lines ushered-in a third period in the organizational politics of the House. Party became a more direct organizing device, though its effectiveness was limited. The principle of party loyalty in organizational matters that emerged in this period simply meant that House members (almost) never voted to support a Speaker candidate from the opposite party. It did not mean that party members automatically supported a single party candidate of their own—assuming one existed. At the same time, though, because both parties were delicately-constructed national organizations, regional issues often interfered with the ability of the majority party to rally behind a single Speaker candidate.

This third period, which lasted from roughly the 27th Congress (1841–43) to the 36th (1859–61), witnessed the most protracted and bitter fights over the organization of the House in its history. While this bitterness was heightened in the wake of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, it only irritated a nerve that was already raw. The refusal of small factions of both parties to support their parties' candidates, combined with an even stronger aversion to crossing party lines to effect an organization, led to the election of Speakers via a plurality rule twice in this period—in the 31st and 34th Congresses (1849 and 1855)—and led to the proposal of the plurality rule even more often than that.

The fourth period lies beyond the coverage of this paper. The Civil War, and the Republican hegemony that accompanied it in the House, saw a rapid consolidation of the majority party's control over its organization. The new era was ushered in at the start of the 37th Congress (1861) when the majority Republicans split their votes between two speakership candidates on the first ballot—between Galusha A. Grow (Penn., 71 votes) and Francis P. Blair

(Mo., 40 votes)—in addition to scattering individual votes among half a dozen other candidates. Unlike past Congresses, when such an occurrence might set off a protracted struggle between the various majority party factions for control of the House, the next step was truly amazing: One after another, supporters of Blair were recognized and changed their votes to Grow.[4] Grow's tally now stood at 99 out of the 159 cast, and he was elected Speaker. In an instant, the simultaneous fight for control of the Republican party and of the House was over, not to erupt again on the floor at its convening for the next sixty years. From that time to the present, with only a couple of notable exceptions, control of the House has been effectively settled within the majority party prior to the House's convening.[5]

Although multiple-ballot contention over the speakership has been commented on in various histories of the House, and has certainly been a subject covered in various monographs about the speakership, systematic analysis of speakership contests has been scant. With the notable recent exception of Jenkins and Nokken (2000), very little research has addressed individual-level behavior in these episodes. The primary reason behind this deficiency in the literature is obvious: Until 1837 (25th Congress), voting for Speaker was done via secret ballot.

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[4]The vote switching also contained a couple of puzzling details that must await future research. In particular, just as 27 erstwhile supporters of Blair switched to Grow, along with the one representative who had supported Stevens, two members abandoned Grow, one to vote for Wright, other for Corning.

[5]Of course, this is not to say that petty factionalism or small third parties did not make their appearance in the future, only that these occurrences were trivial with respect to organizing the House.

Following a rules change at the end of the 25th Congress, voting began to be *viva voce,* effective

with the balloting for Speaker in the 26th Congress, in 1839.[6]

This paper is part of a larger project, in which I have been gathering the individual-level

data associated with voting in the speakership contests. With such data, we will be in a position

to address empirical issues that have hung over histories of many of the contentious speakership

battles, particularly issues that pertain to the nature of the coalitions that came together to choose

the Speakers of this period, and questions that pertain to the *individual-level* legislative behavior

that may have flowed from organizing particular Houses.[7]

For the rest of this paper, I confine my analysis to the antebellum period for which we

have individual-level data about who House members supported for Speaker on each ballot,

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[6]There is no research, of which I am aware, that treats this important rules change
directly. The change to *viva voce* balloting elicited the most anxiety from northern Whigs, as the
following cross-tabulation of support for the rules change shows. (Percentages are the fraction of
the category who supported the rules change. The numbers in parentheses are the *n*'s.)

			Party			
Slave state	Whig	Dem.	Anti-Mason	Nullifier	Ind.	Total
No	12% (53)	93% (69)	0% (6)	—	—	55% (128)
Yes	47% (43)	100% (32)	—	67% (3)	100% (1)	68% (79)
Total	27% (96)	95% (101)	0% (6)	67% (3)	100% (1)	60% (207)

[7]Jenkins and Nokken (2000) is one model of how such individual-level data can be
marshalled—in this case, analyzing the organizational implications of electing American Party
member Nathaniel Banks Speaker in 1856.

1839–1859 (26th–36th Congress). As suggested above, this period is fairly self-contained with respect to historical dynamics, particularly with respect to the volatility of choosing Speakers. This fact makes this period unusual, for the reasons already stated. It is, however, one of the rare cases in American history when organizing Congress hinged on the coalition-building abilities of its leaders at the outset, and therefore offers unusual opportunities for studying coalition-building in the American context—what comparativists might call government formation in other contexts.

II. Legislative Cartels in the House, 1839–1859

In recent years congressional scholars have hotly debated whether political parties can, for very long, control legislative machinery to ensure that policymaking favors the mainstream of the majority party, at the expense of the mainstream of the whole chamber. For the sake of simplicity, we can pose this debate in terms of a "legislative cartel" model, associated with the work of McCubbins and collaborators (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Cox and McCubbins 1993), versus a "pivotal politics" model, associated with the work of Keith Krehbiel (1998).

A "legislative cartel" can be defined as the capturing of internal legislative institutions by a majority—usually the majority party—for the purpose of enacting policy more to the liking of that majority, as distinct from, say, a more centrist majority which might emerge in a legislature dominated by the dynamics of pure majority rule in one dimension. A legislative cartel might operate through many mechanisms, including committee composition and floor recognition rules. Here, I focus on recognition rules, since it has direct implications for patterns in roll call behavior, which I later examine.

One way in which the majority party might use the rules to encourage policy to march toward the majority party median is illustrated through the following spatial example. Begin with the standard unidimensional spatial model that operates under pure majority rule. Suppose the ideal points of a legislature are arrayed uniformly in a unidimensional space, as illustrated in Figure 1. This legislature considers ten roll call votes, with "cut lines" located as indicated in the figure. In roll call vote number 1, with cut line number 1, the rightward alternative prevails, since that is the side of the space that includes the chamber median. Thus everyone to the left of the cut line is on the losing side of the roll call and everyone to the right is on the winning side. The *L*s and the *W*s in the figure indicate whether members of the separate ideological regions win or lose that roll call.

After all ten roll calls are taken, all the legislators who lie between the fifth and sixth cut lines—which includes the median—have been on the prevailing side on each roll call vote. Members lying further away from this region prevail less often, in direct proportion to the distance from the region that includes the median.

Now, consider a world that is organized by a legislative cartel that operates as follows. First, for simplicity, assume that all members of the minority party lie to the left of all members of the majority party, as illustrated in Figure 2. Second, assume that the majority party controls the agenda-setting mechanisms of the legislature, such that no votes are allowed on propositions that would result in the median of the majority party (indicated by *J* in the figure) being on the losing side. In such a world, any roll call vote involving cut lines 6 and 7 would be ruled out of the agenda, since *J* would lose the vote. As a consequence of this agenda-control device, all members who lie in the regions between the one occupied by the chamber median and the one

occupied by the majority party median prevail in all *observed roll calls.* Empirically, the ideological region of the "most frequent winners" of roll call votes has expanded, shifting toward the majority party median.

The frequency of being on the winning side of observed roll call votes under these two regimes—pure majority rule versus agenda-controlling legislative cartel—as a function of ideological location is summarized by the graph in Figure 3. This graph illustrates again an important implication that is likely to be associated with a party-based legislative cartel controlling the agenda: Majority party members win more often than they would under pure majority rule; the members who benefit the most lie in the region between the floor median and the majority party median.[8]

In applying this insight to roll call voting in the antebellum House, we need to make one important modification. Because parties did not uniformly unite behind a single candidate for Speaker, it is probably best to explore it with respect to the coalition that supported the victorious speakership candidate on the final ballot—what I have been calling the *organizing coalition.*[9]

If agenda-setting operates in a manner consistent with this example, then we should discover that the most frequent winner of roll call votes is not the median of the House, but has rather been shifted toward the median of the organizing coalition. Figure 4 graphs the percentage of times from the 26th to 36th Congresses that each House member was on the prevailing side of

[8]See Lawrence, Maltzman, and Smith (1999) for an examination of a similar model, using a more modern set of roll call votes. Also see Cox and McCubbins (1999)

[9]In coining the phrase *organizing coalition*, I remain agnostic for the moment about whether the coalition was anything more than simply an empirical phenomenon. Indeed, the point of the paper is to explore whether these coalitions were anything more than an epiphenomenon of the beginning-of-Congress Speakership balloting.

roll call votes against a measure of his "ideology," measured by a linear factor technique

described by Heckman and Snyder (1997).[10] Also indicated are the location of the floor median

and the median of the organizing coalition. A second-degree polynomial has been fit through the

data in each graph, using least squares regression, to help in identifying where the most frequent

roll call winners are located in each Congress.

Visual examination of Figure 4 suggests a mixed bag with respect to the legislative cartel

idea as applied to the antebellum House. It was rarely the case that the floor median was (close

to) the most frequent winner of floor votes in this period. However, there is mixed evidence

about whether the *organizing coalition* could reasonably be termed a legislative cartel that

controlled legislative outcomes on the floor. In at least four instances (26th, 31st, 32nd, and 35th

Congresses), more frequent legislative victories came in the direction of the ideological space of

House members who had *opposed* the Speaker's election. In only six cases (the 27th, 29th, 30th,

33rd, 34th, and 36th Congresses), does it appear that roll call success was shaded in the direction

toward the organizing coalition.

We can test this visual impression more precisely by running the regressions that are

implied by the graphs in Figure 4. In this case, the dependent variable is the percentage of roll

call votes in which member *i* was on the prevailing side of all roll call votes in Congress *c*. The

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[10]The Heckman-Snyder technique produces roll call scales based on linear factor analysis. Like Poole and Rosenthal's (1997) NOMINATE technologies, the Heckman-Snyder technique is built on an assumption that members of Congress act based on a spatial model of decisionmaking. Linear factor scales are highly correlated with NOMINATE scores. For the 26th to 36th Congress, the correlation in scores between the two techniques averages .9864 on the first dimension, ranging from .9916 (35th Congress) to .9783 (33rd Congress). The correlation between the two techniques on higher dimensions is smaller, however, undoubtedly due to the different functional forms the two techniques use to estimate ideal points.

independent variables are "ideological location," as measured by the first two dimensions derived

using the Heckman-Snyder linear factor scaling technique. The second dimension is included to

improve the efficiency of the estimates, but does not change the first dimension coefficients

materially.[11]

Because I want to test whether the maximum of the winning percentage in each Congress

is located at the median (in both directions), I need to include the squared terms of the two

ideology measures. Furthermore, because I want to test whether the maximum of the estimated

winning percentage is at the median of the House in a particular Congress, I need to transform

the ideology measures by subtracting them from their respective medians. Therefore, the

regressions I perform can be written as follows:

$$W_{i,c} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(h_{1,i,c} - m_{1,c}) + \beta_2(h_{1,i,c} - m_{1,c})^2 + \beta_3(h_{2,i,c} - m_{2,c}) + \beta_4(h_{2,i,c} - m_{2,c})^2 + \varepsilon_{i,c}$$

where $W_{i,c}$ = the percentage of time that member i was on the winning side of roll call votes in

Congress c; $h_{1,i,c}$ and $h_{2,i,c}$ are the first two dimensions of the linear factor scores for member i in

Congress c; and $m_{1,c}$ and $m_{2,c}$ are the respective chamber-wide medians of the linear factor

measures for Congress c. With this set-up, we can test the null hypothesis that the chamber

median is the most frequent winner in a Congress by testing statistically whether $\beta_1 = \beta_3 = 0$.

Table 3 reports the results of these regressions. In general, the results confirm the visual

analysis: With the exception of the 28th Congress, we can confidently reject the idea that the

median (along the first Heckman-Snyder dimension) was the most frequent winner of roll call

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[11]By construction, first and second dimension scores are uncorrelated with each other.
However, the second dimension scores often provide a significant improvement in overall fit,
which assists in improving the overall efficiency of the estimation.

votes. However, in the ten Congresses where we can reject this hypothesis, the sign of the coefficient is in the proper direction six times, and in the wrong direction four times.

Three of these four cases in which the sign of the coalition coefficient is in the wrong direction are associated with Congresses in which either the Speaker was elected via a plurality or the Speaker was elected by a coalition that was dominated by the minority party. Thus, for instance, in the 26th Congress (1839–41), the Whig Robert M.T. Hunter was elected Speaker with the help of a small band of defecting Democrats. Yet even though a Whig wielded the gavel in this Congress, having been supported by a coalition that was dominated by other Whigs, Democrats still held a nominal majority in the chamber, and they apparently used their numerical majority to their advantage.

How they pulled off such a feat is a puzzle which must await further research. Contemporary Whigs complained that Hunter's committee assignments looked as if they had been made in the President's cabinet—a cabinet presided over by the Democrat Martin Van Buren (See Leintz 1978, p. 77). My own preliminary analysis of Hunter's committee assignments confirms much of this charge. Thus, the tendency of the "left" side of the ideological spectrum to dominate roll call voting in the 26th Congress, even though the "right" side of the spectrum had formed the coalition that elected the Speaker may be due to the agenda-setting power of committees. Of course, this begs the question of why Hunter abandoned the coalition that elected him Speaker when he made up committee assignments.

This preliminary analysis of the possibility of legislative cartels in the antebellum House suggests the usefulness of further research on this matter, which would combine quantitative analysis of how cartels might have operated (such as through committee assignments) with a

qualitative analysis of the historical record. It is clear that the median member did not generally dominate floor deliberations in the antebellum House. It is also clear that nothing guaranteed that members of the organizing coalition would go on to be the dominant legislative force for the remainder of the Congress. Resolving this puzzle will be the goal of future research.

III. Voting Patterns and Organizing Coalitions

Another observable implication of the enduring effects of organizing coalitions concerns the roll call behavior of coalition members viewed another way than in the previous section. The thinking here is very similar to that proposed by scholars who suggest that legislative parties exert some sort of influence (or perhaps even "pressure") over their members, independent of party members' preferences (see Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart, 2000; Snyder and Groseclose 2000). Within the current party debate, the independent influence of political parties is most directly tested by regressing a measure of roll call behavior on a measure of preferences and a dummy variable indicating one's nominal party membership. Measures of roll call behavior are easy to come by, and typically include measures such as Poole and Rosenthal's D-NOMINATE scores or Heckman and Snyder's linear factor scores. Measures of preferences that are uncontaminated by roll call behavior are harder to come by, but have included scales developed using answers to questionnaires administered to incumbents (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart, 2000; Burden and Kenny 2000) and scales using subsets of roll call votes (see Snyder and Groseclose 2000).

We can address a question that is similar to that invovled in the current party debate, by asking whether the coalitions that emerged to elect Speakers in the antebellum House had a

similar influence on roll call behavior, once preferences had been controlled-for. Unfortunately,

for current purposes I cannot rely on a clean measure of preferences for House members that is

uncontaminated by the legislative situation I am intent upon studying. Therefore, for the current

research I am stuck relying on roll call votes to measure preferences.[12]

To understand the technique I will use in this section, consider a situation in which we

can measure the roll call voting behavior of a legislator on the same scale in two succeeding

Congresses. The scale indicates the member's true preferences, plus or minus an error that is

peculiar to that Congress. Therefore the scale score in Congress t for member i can be written,

$$S_{i,t} = p_i + e_{it}$$

where p_i = the preferences of member i, measured on the scale, and e_{it} = the random error

particular to member i in Congress t, which has a mean of zero.

Now, suppose that all members of the organizing coalition agree to actions that move

their scale scores systematically in one direction, by a uniform amount. If this "coalitional

pressure" is written c_t, then

$$S_{i,t} = p_i + e_{it} + c_t$$

if the member is in the coalition. If the member is in the coalition in Congress 1 and not in the

coalition in Congress 2 ($c_2 = 0$), and if values of e_{it} are not serially correlated, then the average

difference in the scale scores between the two Congresses will simply be the value of the

coalition pressure coefficient: $S_{i,2} - S_{i,1} = c_t$. Therefore, if we had legislator roll call behavior

measured on the same scale across two Congresses, then the amount of "pressure" exerted by the

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[12]For a general critique of using roll call votes to learn about party voting, see Krehbiel
2000.

organizing coalition would simply be the average difference in the scale scores among members

who had been in the coalition one Congress, but not in the other.[13]

For the analysis below, we do not have a simple common-space measure of roll call

behavior for the time period of the 26th to 36th Congresses.[14] However, we do have individual,

Congress-by-Congress measures of roll call voting behavior. If we assume that the difference in

scales from one Congress to the next is simply due to a linear transformation of the scale, then

we could test for the effects of being in the organizing coalition with the following regression:

$$S_{i,2} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 S_{i,1} + \beta_2 C_{i,2} + \varepsilon_{i,2}$$

where

$$C_{i,2} = \begin{cases} 1 \text{ if member is in coalition at time 2 and not at time 1} \\ -1 \text{ if member is in coalition at time 1 and not at time 2} \\ 0 \text{ otherwise} \end{cases}$$

The test of coalition pressure would then come down to a statistical test of whether $\beta_2 = 0$.

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[13]Needless to say, we could not measure the degree of coalition pressure by observing only members who had either been in the organizing coalitions of both Congresses or had been outside the coalitions in both Congresses. These members are still important controls, and need to be included in the analysis, since they help to identify systematic changes in voting patterns across the two Congresses that may be independent of coalition membership.

[14]The Poole-Rosenthal DW-NOMINATE scores are common-space estimates, but they are also *dynamic*, in the sense that they allow members to move systematically across time. It is, of course, possible to produce common-space estimates of ideological positions by pooling together numerous Congresses, under an assumption that the underlying preferences of members of Congress do not change. I have not pursued that avenue here, precisely because I want to analyze Congress-to-Congress changes in roll call patterns, and at least hold open the possibility that roll call patterns are mutable on such a short time horizon.

However, we also may encounter a situation in which the mapping of the scale from one Congress to another is not through a simple linear transformation in one dimension. In particular, if the space is "rotating," as would happen during a realigning era, then the test would be badly mis-specified if we simply included the lagged value of the first dimension scale score in the regression. During the time in question, this is a salient problem, since almost all scholars agree that American politics underwent precisely such a realignment in the middle of the 1850s, such that what had been a second dimension of politics—regional issues, especially slavery—became the primary cleavage.

Therefore, to account for possible rotations in the issue space, I controlled for higher dimensions—six, to be precise—in testing for coalition influence below. Finally, to allow for the possibility that the mapping from one Congress to the other might not be strictly linear, I included the squares of all the roll call terms in the regression. Therefore, the regressions I ran can be written as follows:

$$S_{i,2,1} = \alpha_0 + \sum_{d=1}^{6} \alpha_d S_{i,1,d} + \sum_{d=1}^{6} \beta_d S_{i,1,d}^2 + \gamma_1 C_{i,1} + \gamma_2 C_{i,2} + \varepsilon_{i,2}$$

The scale scores ($S_{i,2,1}$ and the various $S_{i,1,d}$ terms) are linear factor scores derived using the linear technique justified by Heckman and Snyder (1997). The variable $C_{i,2} = 1$ if the member voted for the winning Speaker candidate in the current Congress, 0 otherwise; $C_{i,1} = 1$ if the member voted for the winning Speaker candidate in the previous Congress, 0 otherwise.

In Table 4, I have reported the coefficients associated with the coalition membership variables (γ_1 and γ_2), suppressing the coefficients associated with the lagged values of the scale

scores.[15] (As the overall R^2s indicate, almost all of the variation in scale scores is explained in

terms of lagged values of those scores.) The coefficients that interest us most are in the first two

columns labeled "this Congress" and "last Congress." In general, if coalitions perturbed member

voting patterns, then the signs of the coefficients under the first "this Congress" column should

correspond with the ideological direction of the organizing coalition. That is, if the organizing

coalition resided to the left of the space, then its members should be moved an extra increment to

the left. This is generally what we find, although the effects are statistically significant in only

four Congresses—the 27th, 30th, 34th, and 36th. Interestingly enough, three of these four

Congresses—the 30th, 34th, and 36th—were associated with multi-ballot speakership fights.

Each of these cases also coincided with the speakership changing partisan hands.

The effect of being in the organizing coalition is particularly striking in the 34th

Congress, which is notable for two reasons. First, it is the only Congress in American history

when a member of a "third party" was elected Speaker. Second, as argued by Jenkins and

Nokken (2000), the coalition that emerged to elect Banks represented the first *organizational*

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[15]In all Congresses, the strongest predictor of the first-dimension linear factor score was
the first-dimension linear factor score from the previous Congress. The only Congresses for
which the coefficient on the lagged value of the first-dimension linear factor score was less than
0.7 were the 28th , 31st, and 34th Congresses. In the 28th Congress, which experienced a
tremendous amount of electoral turnover, the space had rotated in such a way that the third
dimension of voting from the 27th Congress was the strongest predictor of first dimension voting
in the 28th. Second dimension scores in the 30th Congress had a strong effect on first dimension
scores in the 3st Congress—an effect rivaling that of the first dimension. And in the 34th
Congress, 4th, 5th, and 6th dimension scores from the 33rd Congress had a strong effect on
predicting first dimension scale scores. (Jenkins and Nokken [2000] argue that the issue space is
stable during this period, although results like this suggest otherwise.)
      All of this is evidence that the political space was evolving during this period, and should
caution us against proceeding too quickly to our conclusions. However, recall that the purpose of
including these higher dimensions in the prediction is precisely to get the issue space mapping
right, from one Congress to the next.

victory for the new Republican Party. Here, we can add to Jenkins and Nokken's evidence that this was an *organizational* victory for the nascent party by noting that supporting Banks for Speaker had an appreciable effect on the subsequent roll call behavior of his supporting coalition's members.

In Figure 5 I illustrate how the behavior of the Banks coalition members in the 34th Congress differed from the coalition of members who supported Linn Boyd (D-Ga.) in the 33rd Congress. In Figure 5a, I have plotted the 1st dimension linear factor scores for the 33rd Congress against those of the 32nd Congress. The curve in the figure is the second-degree polynomial fit of the data. Data points labeled with "1"s are members who voted for Boyd at the organization of the 33rd Congress; "0"s are those who voted against Boyd. Even though a fair number of Boyd supporters shifted to the "left" of the issue space, compared to where they were in the 32nd Congress, a non-trivial number actually shifted to the right. These members were primarily Pennsylvania and New York Democrats who had grown disaffected with the southern wing of the party. On the other hand, although most of the anti-Boyd (mostly Whig) contingent moved rightward between the two Congresses, a small number of border-state Whigs drifted toward the left.

Not so in the 34th Congress. Note here that the "moderate" members of both the pro- and anti-Banks coalitions (i.e., the members closer to the center of the overall issue space) moved away from each other between Congresses. The members who particularly define the relationship that is reported in Table 4 are the "rightist" anti-Banks members and the "leftist" pro-Banks members. In the 34th Congress, House members such as Emerson Etheridge (Tenn.), who had been good Whigs, and thus in opposition to the coalition that had been assembled by

Boyd, were repelled by the coalition assembled by Banks. At the other extreme, members like

Matthias Nichols (Whig, Ohio) and Galusha Grow (Penn., former Free Soil Democrat), who had

often voted with the Democrats in the 33rd Congress, were shoved in the direction of Banks and

his coalition of new Republicans.

In the analysis reported in the first few columns of Table 4, I did not control for nominal

party membership, allowing all "partisan" effects to act through the organizing coalitions.

However, almost all of the organizing coalitions that did emerge were *primarily* partisan affairs.

With the exception of the 26th and 34th Congresses, virtually no members of the "wrong" party

crossed over and supported the victorious Speaker candidate. However, in almost all of these

Congresses, some members of the "majority party" refused to vote for the victorious Speaker.

This suggests that we should, at the very least, test for organizing coalition effects after

controlling for nominal party membership.

Therefore, the middle columns of Table 4 report the coefficients associated with being in

a winning coalition, after entering in a series of dummy variables to account for all parties that

had members in each Congress.[16] In the 28th Congress party loyalty was sufficiently high among

both Whigs and Democrats that we cannot estimate independently the effect of being in the

coalition that elected Jones *and* being a Democrat or Whig. In all other Congresses, however,

adding controls for party actually improves the estimates we get for being in the organizing

coalition. In all of the Congresses where the coalition coefficient had previously been

significant, either the coefficient grew once we controlled for party or the standard error shrank.

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[16]The nominal party codings are taken from Martis (1989).

This is strong evidence that the effect that being in the organizing coalition had on roll call behavior was something other than simple partisanship.

The analysis offered in this section is preliminary, but suggestive. In some Congresses in the antebellum House, being in the organizing coalition appears to have affected subsequent roll call behavior. This is especially significant in the case of the 34th Congress, where independent research has suggested that the coalition that elected the Speaker formed the first organizational manifestation in the federal government of a new party.

IV. Conclusions

Modern students of the American Congress are currently in the midst of a debate about the degree to which Congress is empirically majoritarian. It is *formally* majoritarian, at least as described in the Constitution. Is it *actually* majoritarian? The resolution to this debate is important, both for purely theoretical reasons and for our understanding of how American politics actually works.

Regardless of how this debate is resolved, its resolution will be of limited utility if the field of battle is confined to the modern, post-war (or even post-Reagan) era. If the power of the debate derives from our desire to understand something enduring about American political institutions, then we certainly need to know something about the majoritarian nature of Congress well before the field of political science emerged in the late nineteenth century.

Viewed another way, students of American history are also interested in understanding how America's political institutions have functioned during crises. In the antebellum period, did

Congress operate to cool national passions, or to inflame them? How does the answer to this question help us to understand Congress in other periods of inflammatory politics?

This paper provides some preliminary answers to these questions, although clearly more research needs to be done. At least some of the time, the House was not a majoritarian institution in the twenty years leading up to the Civil War. In most years, policymaking was dominated by a relatively extreme wing of the chamber. What is particularly troubling (or at least intriguing) is that policy was not always dominated by the wing of the chamber that had prevailed in its organization. Why, and how, this might occur is an important topic for future research.

There are other topics of future research that flow from this paper. Most obviously, all of the analyses in Sections II and III are preliminary, and await the application of more precise (and time-consuming) methods. For instance, the "win rate" analysis of Section II treats all roll calls equally, even though we need to make finer distinctions among the roll calls, such as between amendments, final passage, and procedural votes. Section III awaits an application of another technique, such as the one recently described by Snyder and Groseclose (2000), to get a better measure of actual legislative preferences that are uncontaminated by legislative action, so that we can be more certain of our estimates of the effects of joining in on the winning coalition. And, of course, very little of this paper has addressed directly the substance of the policies over which House members fought during this period.

Addressing all of these shortcomings, and more, will be the future of future research. As those findings come more sharply into focus, the independent role of legislative institutions in guiding the trajectory of policymaking will also become more sharply defined.

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Figure 1. Winning and losing roll call votes under majority rule.

Vote											
1	L	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
2	L	L	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
3	L	L	L	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
4	L	L	L	L	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
5	L	L	L	L	L	W	W	W	W	W	W
6	W	W	W	W	W	W	L	L	L	L	L
7	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	L	L	L	L
8	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	L	L	L
9	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	L	L
10	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	L
Win pct.	50	60	70	80	90	100	90	80	70	60	50
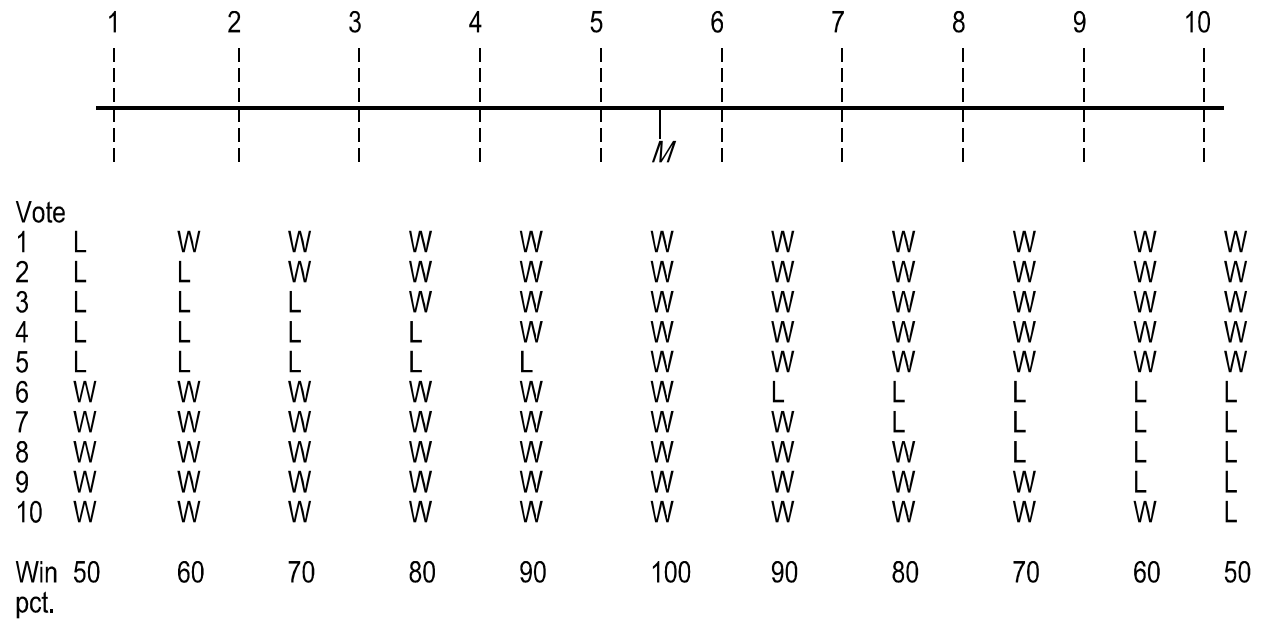
Figure 2. Winning and losing roll call votes under a legislative cartel that controls the agenda.

	Minority party				Majority party				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

(Spatial positions 1–10; median **M** located between positions 5 and 6; majority-party median **J** located near position 7.)

Vote	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	L	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
2	L	L	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
3	L	L	L	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
4	L	L	L	L	W	W	W	W	W	W
5	L	L	L	L	L	W	W	W	W	W
6					Not observed					
7					Not observed					
8	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	L	W
9	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	L
10	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
Win pct.	37.5	50	62.5	75	87.5	100	100	100	87.5	87.5
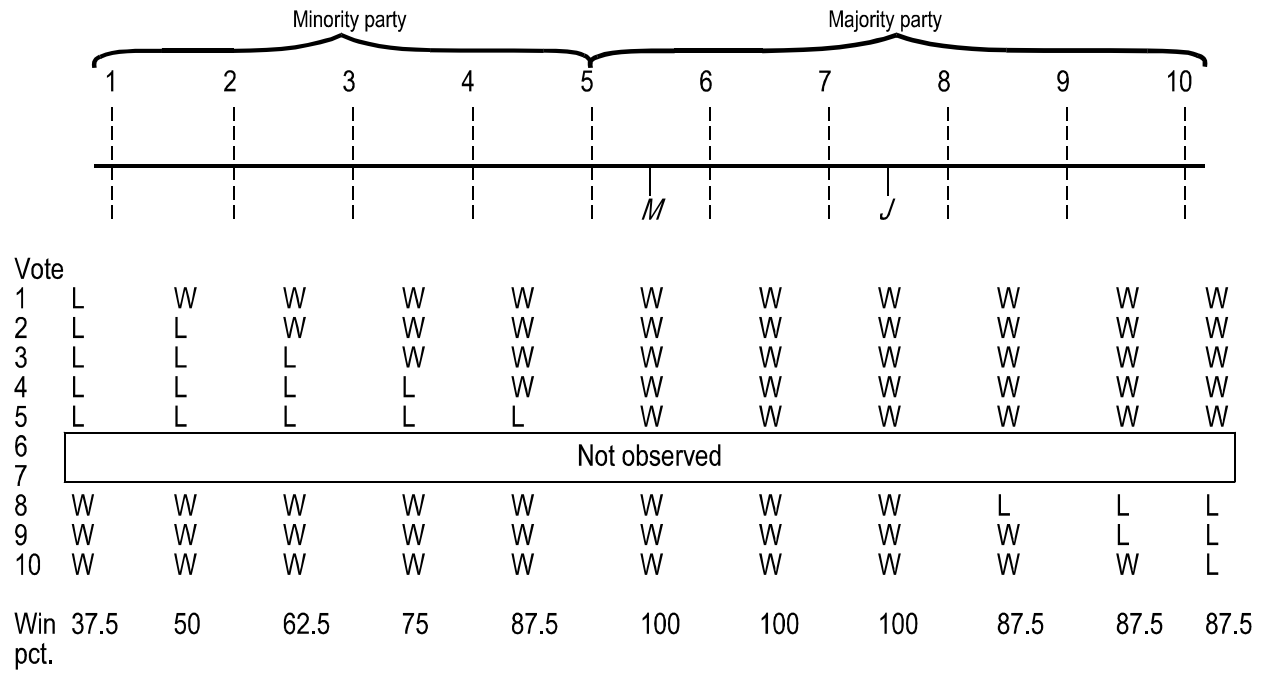
Figure 3. Frequency of being on the prevailing side of a roll call, as a function of ideological location and decisionmaking agenda.
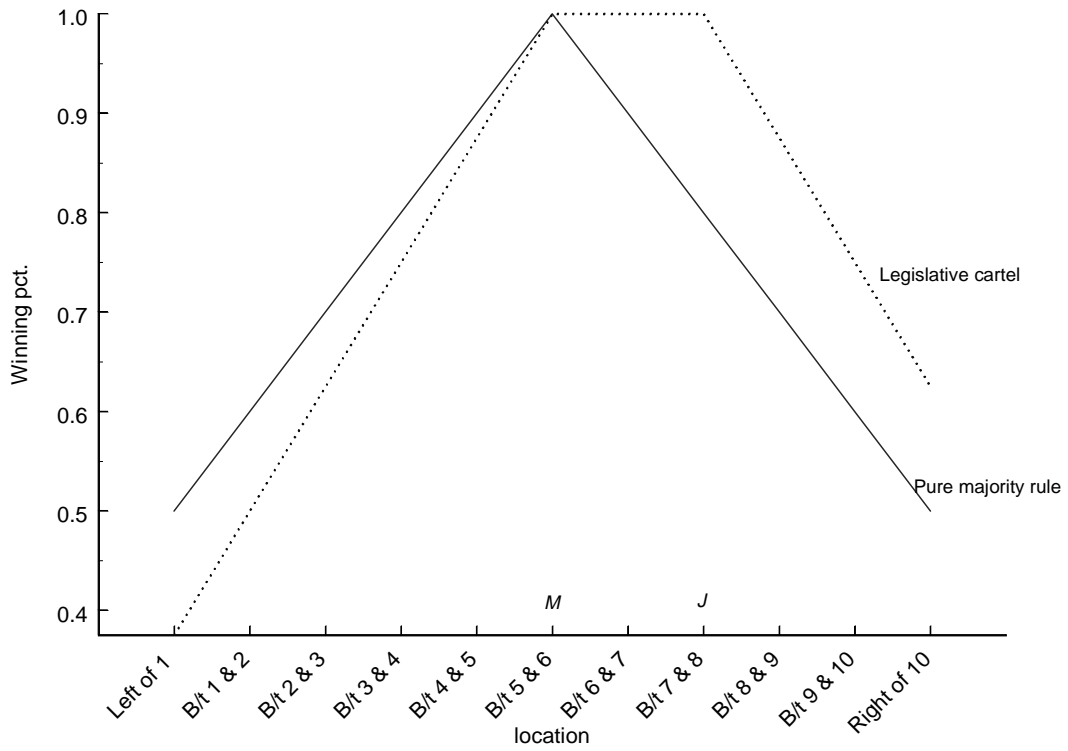
Figure 4. Winning percentage as a function of ideology.
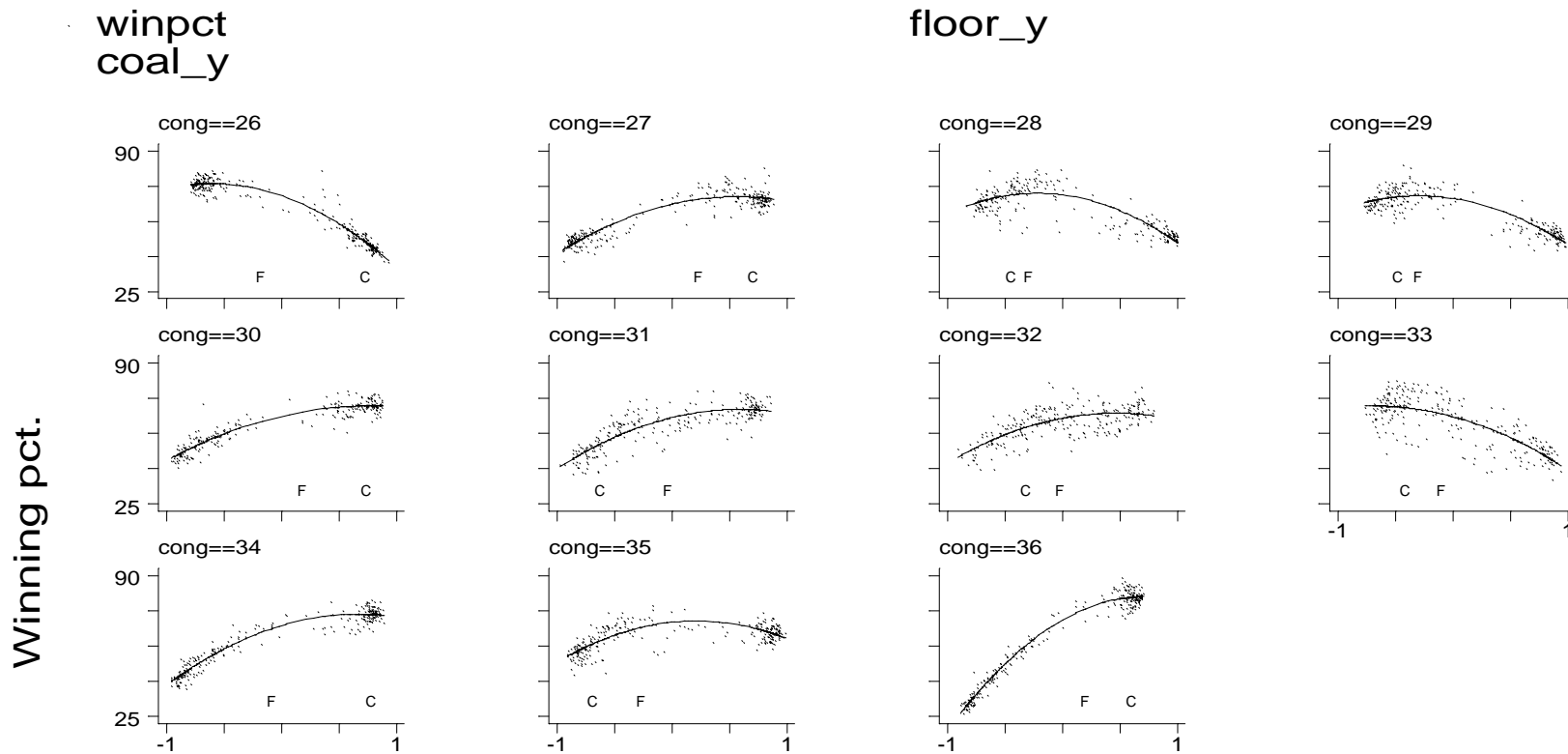
F = floor median; C = median of coalition that supported winning Speaker candidate

Figure 5. Movement in roll call scale scores across two Congresses, 32nd–33rd and 33rd–34th.

a. 33rd Congress versus 32nd Congress.

b. 34th Congress versus 33rd Congress

Table 1. Summary Speakership votes, 1st–57th Congress (1789–1901)

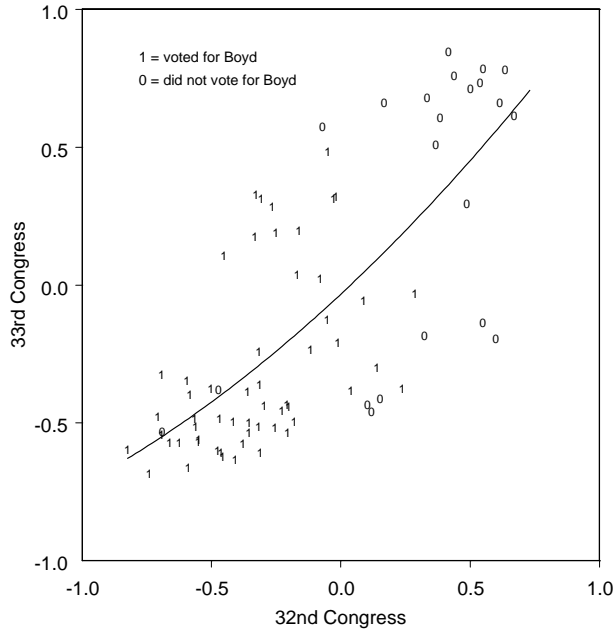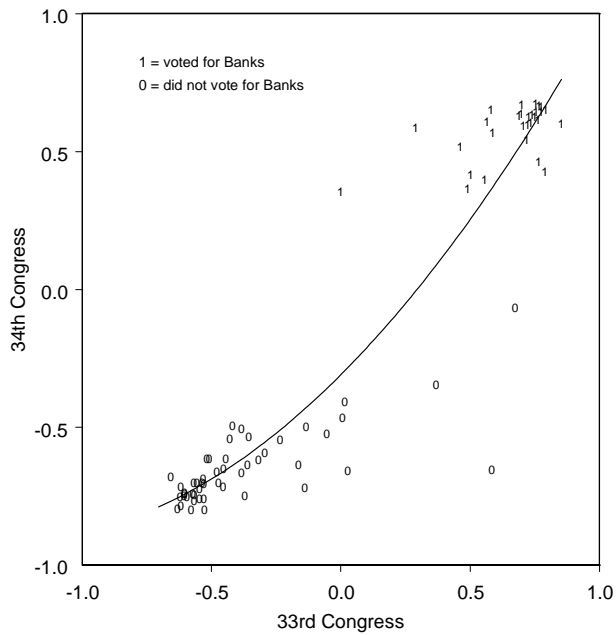| Year	Cong	sess.	Ballots	Effective number of candidates		Winning pct.	Winning Speaker candidate		Majority party	
				First ballot	Last ballot		Name	Party	Name	Pct.
1789	1	1	Unknown		Unknown	Unknown	Muhlenberg	Pro-Admin.	Pro-Admin.	56.9
1791	2	1	Unknown		Unknown	Unknown	Trumbull	Pro-Admin.	Pro-Admin.	56.5
1793	3	1	3	2.87	1.95	57.8%	Muhlenberg	Anti-Admin.	Anti-Admin.	51.4
1795	4	1	1		1.93	59.7%	Dayton	Federalist	Republican	55.7
1797	5	1	1		1.05	97.5%	Dayton	Federalist	Federalist	53.8
1799	6	1	2	2.71	2.18	51.2%	Sedgwick	Federalist	Federalist	56.6
1801	7	1	1		1.79	67.1%	Macon	Republican	Republican	63.6
1803	8	1	1		Unknown		Macon	Republican	Republican	72.5
1805	9	1	3	3.02	2.66	54.7%	Macon	Republican	Republican	80.3
1807	10	1	1		2.00	50.4%	Varnum	Republican	Republican	81.7
1809	11	1	2	2.71	2.21	55.1%	Varnum	Republican	Republican	64.8
1811	12	1	1		1.74	69.4%	Clay	Republican	Republican	74.8
1813	13	1	1		2.02	60.1%	Clay	Republican	Republican	62.6
1814	13	2	1		2.33	54.7%	Cheves	Republican		
1815	14	1	1		1.69	71.3%	Clay	Republican	Republican	65.0
1817	15	1	1		1.08	96.0%	Clay	Republican	Republican	78.9
1819	16	1	1		1.11	94.8%	Clay	Republican	Republican	86.0
1820	16	2	22	4.38	2.59	51.4%	Taylor	Republican		
1821	17	1	12	3.76	2.40	51.2%	Barbour	Republican	Republican	61.5
1823	18	1	1		1.55	76.8%	Clay	A-C Rep.	A-C Rep. +	40.8
1825	19	1	2	3.34	2.75	51.3%	Taylor	Adams	Adams	51.2
1827	20	1	1		2.00	50.7%	Stevenson	Jackson	Jackson	53.1
1829	21	1	1		1.48	79.6%	Stevenson	Jackson	Jackson	63.8
1831	22	1	1		1.85	64.5%	Stevenson	Jackson	Jackson	59.2
1833	23	1	1		1.82	65.7%	Stevenson	Jackson	Jackson	59.6
1834	23	2	10	5.60	2.34	53.8%	Bell	Jackson		
1835	24	1	1		1.94	58.7%	Polk	Jackson	Jackson	59.1
1837	25	1	1		2.00	51.8%	Polk	Democrat	Democrat	52.9
1839	26	1	11	2.37	2.99	51.3%	Hunter	Whig	Democrat	51.7
1841	27	1	1		2.24	54.8%	White	Whig	Whig	58.7
1843	28	1	1		1.78	68.1%	Jones	Democrat	Democrat	65.9
1845	29	1	1		2.26	57.1%	Davis	Democrat	Democrat	62.3
1847	30	1	3	3.01	2.87	50.5%	Winthrop	Whig	Whig	50.4
1849	31	1	63	2.45	2.45	45.5%	Cobb	Democrat	Democrat	48.5
1851	32	1	1		2.94	55.9%	Boyd	Democrat	Democrat	54.5
1853	33	1	1		2.16	65.7%	Boyd	Democrat	Democrat	67.1
1855	34	1	133	5.10	2.22	48.1%	Banks	American	Opposition	42.7
1857	35	1	1		2.16	56.9%	Orr	Democrat	Democrat	55.7
1859	36	1	44	3.79	2.56	50.2%	Pennington	Republican	Republican	48.7
1861	37	1	2	3.63	2.46	62.3%	Grow	Republican	Republican	59.0
1863	38	1	1		2.69	55.5%	Colfax	Republican	Republican	46.2
1865	39	1	1		1.49	79.4%	Colfax	Republican	Republican	70.5
1867	40	1	1		1.45	80.9%	Colfax	Republican	Republican	76.5
1869	41	1	1		1.70	71.1%	Blaine	Republican	Republican	70.4
1871	42	1	1		1.95	57.8%	Blaine	Republican	Republican	56.0
1873	43	1	1		1.74	70.3%	Blaine	Republican	Republican	68.2
1875	44	1	1		1.89	62.0%	Kerr	Democrat	Democrat	62.1
1877	45	1	1		1.99	53.0%	Randall	Democrat	Democrat	52.9
1879	46	1	1		2.19	50.7%	Randall	Democrat	Democrat	48.1
1881	47	1	1		2.10	51.9%	Keifer	Republican	Republican	51.5
1883	48	1	1		1.94	61.7%	Carlisle	Democrat	Democrat	60.3
1885	49	1	1		1.97	56.3%	Carlisle	Democrat	Democrat	56.0
1887	50	1	1		2.02	53.1%	Carlisle	Democrat	Democrat	51.4
1889	51	1	1		2.01	51.7%	Reed	Republican	Republican	53.9
1891	52	1	1		1.73	71.5%	Crisp	Democrat	Democrat	71.7
1893	53	1	1		1.94	62.5%	Crisp	Democrat	Democrat	61.2
1895	54	1	1		1.76	70.1%	Reed	Republican	Republican	71.2
1897	55	1	1		2.11	59.5%	Reed	Republican	Republican	57.7
1899	56	1	1		2.06	52.8%	Henderson	Republican	Republican	52.4
1901	57	1	1		2.00	55.5%	Henderson	Republican	Republican	56.0

Table 2. Preliminary periodization of House speakership battles.

Period	Congresses	Years	Summary
1	1st–11th	1789–1811	Weak party identification and organizational strength. Speakership not highly valued.
2	12th–26th	1811–41	Party factionalization. Speakership a valued prize. Strong individuals (Clay and Stevenson) dominated in the face of underlying factionalism.
3	27th–36th	1841–61	Strong party identification. Weak party discipline. Speakership a valued prize. Regional tensions impeded swift resolution to Speakership battles
4	37th–??	1861–??	Strong party identification. Strong party discipline at organization. Speakership a valued prize. Inter-party disagreements ironed out before formal balloting.

Table 3. Roll call winning percentage as a function of first and second dimension Heckman-Snyder scores.

								h_1			h_2		
Cong.	h_1	h_1^2	h_2	h_2^2	const.	N		Floor median	Coalition median	Test result[a]	Floor median	Coalition median	Test result[a]
26	-0.12 (0.01)	-0.18 (0.02)	-0.09 (0.01)	0.03 (0.06)	0.73 (0.01)	254	.96	-0.18	0.72	−	-0.02	-0.05	⊕
27	0.11 (0.01)	-0.05 (0.01)	-0.12 (0.01)	-0.07 (0.03)	0.65 (0.01)	255	.92	-0.23	0.71	⊕	0.03	0.11	−
28	0.01 (0.01)	-0.15 (0.01)	0.12 (0.01)	-0.13 (0.03)	0.72 (0.01)	230	.87	-0.29	-0.45	0	0.02	0.05	⊕
29	-0.03 (0.01)	-0.09 (0.01)	0.12 (0.01)	-0.06 (0.03)	0.69 (0.01)	233	.89	-0.30	-0.48	⊕	0.00	0.19	⊕
30	0.08 (0.01)	-0.13 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.16 (0.02)	0.72 (0.01)	233	.91	0.18	0.73	⊕	0.08	0.16	0
31	0.14 (0.004)	-0.17 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.01)	-0.14 (0.04)	0.68 (0.01)	239	.77	-0.04	-0.63	−	-0.00	-0.02	⊕
32	0.10 (0.01)	-0.08 (0.02)	-0.08 (0.01)	-0.04 (0.02)	0.64 (0.01)	238	.64	-0.02	-0.32	−	0.04	0.01	⊕
33	-0.14 (0.01)	-0.05 (0.02)	-0.17 (0.01)	-0.08 (0.02)	0.66 (0.01)	237	.89	-0.10	-0.41	⊕	0.00	0.04	−
34	0.17 (0.003)	-0.07 (0.01)	-0.11 (0.01)	-0.11 (0.02)	0.64 (0.01)	235	.96	-0.09	0.77	⊕	0.03	0.05	−
35	0.10 (0.01)	-0.09 (0.01)	0.14 (0.01)	-0.07 (0.02)	0.64 (0.01)	242	.81	-0.27	-0.69	−	-0.05	0.03	⊕
36	0.29 (0.01)	-0.06 (0.01)	-0.17 (0.01)	0.10 (0.03)	0.69 (0.004)	243	.99	0.19	0.60	⊕	-0.01	0.00	−

[a] ⊕ = null hypothesis that the floor median is the most frequent winner is rejected; coefficient correctly signed
− = null hypothesis that the floor median is the most frequent winner is rejected; coefficient incorrectly signed
0 = null hypothesis that the floor median is the most frequent winner is not rejected

Table 4. Effect of voting for winning speakership candidate on ideological position of returning House members.

	No controls for party			Controls for party			Overall			
	Voted for winning Speaker candidate			Voted for winning Speaker candidate				Average value of first dimension score		
Cong.	This Cong. (γ_2)	Last Cong. (γ_1)	R^2	This Cong. (γ_2)	Last Cong. (γ_1)	R^2	N	Voted for winner	Didn't vote for winner	p value of t-test
27	0.11 (0.05)	-0.12 (0.06)	.96	0.16 (0.05)	-0.10 (0.08)	.96	103	0.40	-0.43	.00
28	-0.27 (0.27)	-0.04 (0.08)	.98	—	0.18 (0.14)	.81	38	-0.28	0.53	.00
29	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.22 (0.12)	.98	-0.10 (0.07)	—	.98	87	-0.37	0.55	.00
30	0.26 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.05)	.98	0.43 (0.12)	-0.02 (0.05)	.98	86	0.56	-0.55	.00
31	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.09 (0.06)	.97	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.09 (0.10)	.96	84	-0.46	+0.38	.00
32	-0.07 (0.08)	0.09 (0.08)	.92	0.01 (0.08)	0.10 (0.08)	.92	84	-0.27	0.31	.00
33	-0.10 (0.17)	-0.05 (0.08)	.80	-0.20 (0.22)	-0.03 (0.14)	.51	73	-0.22	0.40	.00
34	1.00 (0.09)	-0.09 (0.05)	.99	0.94 (0.07)	-0.09 (0.04)	.98	71	0.62	-0.55	.00
35	-0.10 (0.11)	-0.31 (0.20)	.96	-0.92 (0.08)	-0.35 (0.20)	.96	105	-0.36	0.46	.00
36	0.42 (0.08)	-0.03 (0.05)	.98	0.42 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.06)	.96	103	0.45	-0.46	.00