

# Which long coalition? The creation of the anti-slavery coalition

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## Abstract

How are party coalitions shaped and reshaped? Elected officials choose coalitions to win elections, but they must work to maintain those coalitions. Non-elected political actors, advancing an ideology at odds with the party coalition, can undermine the party. This article explores this possibility in the case of partisan change on slavery in the Antebellum United States. Intellectuals in 1850 divided into two camps over slavery and the other major issues of the day at a time when slavery cross-cut the two parties in Congress. The ideological division matches one that develops in Congress a decade later, suggesting that the parties responded not just to electoral incentives, but also to this elite division.

## Keywords

Ideology, party change/adaptation, slavery, United States

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## Introduction

The leading view of why political parties form argues that parties are a long coalition among political actors. Legislators voting on a sequence of bills have incentives to form a permanent logroll (Aldrich, 1995; Schwartz, 1992). The members of a majority coalition, taking care to vote in the interests of their fellow coalition members, bill after bill, will in the long run be better off than if they approached each bill individually.

This theoretical finding is persuasive as to why parties will form, but it does not readily predict which long coalition will form. The theory predicts that almost any

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coalition will be better for its members than no coalition at all, and while some coalitions may be more attractive than others, they need not be the ones that will form. Many such coalitions are thus potentially stable equilibria. Moreover, there may be incentives for the losing party to attempt to break up the winning coalition and establish a different, new majority coalition. This article attempts to sort out one way in which this might occur. I argue that coalitions can be proposed and encouraged outside the legislative setting. Some might call these coalitions ‘ideologies’ (e.g. Bawn, 1999), but what is key is that they are organized and argued for by non-legislative actors perhaps pressuring politicians to adopt them.

I explore this possibility with the coalitional change among the major party system in the United States in the years leading up to the Civil War. In the antebellum period, party divisions were primarily about trade and tariffs. What they were decidedly not about was slavery, an issue that politicians in both parties actively kept off the agenda. This changed by the cusp of the Civil War. Slavery became central to the divisions between the parties. The coalition shifted to include the new issue, along with the old ones, as the Republican Party displaced the Whig Party.

Why? A narrative can be told about politicians using the issue for electoral gain, and there is surely truth to that. But the evidence suggests that the new coalition was developed and formed outside the government, and then the party system adapted to it. I use a unique dataset of intellectual opinions to demonstrate that the coalition that remade the party system originated with intellectuals writing in political journals.

The argument proceeds as follows. In Section I, I lay out a theoretical framework about how and by whom political coalitions are organized. Section II reviews the politics of 1850, on the eve of the Civil War, in light of the theory in the first section. Section III develops a measure of a coalition that is distinct from partisan divisions within Congress. Section IV presents that measure as calculated for the politics of the 1850s to demonstrate that the coalition that included slavery was created outside of government. Section V concludes.

## Section I: Long coalitions

Political parties are coalitions. They unite different actors and get them to vote in concert, sometimes even against the preferences of some of their members. They are made up of logrolls, in which actors support one policy in exchange for the support of another policy.

What is more, political parties are *long* coalitions. They are made up of many logrolls over an extended period of time and covering an extensive agenda. Most of the things the party supports are part of the party’s broad platform. The logrolls are not generally negotiated vote by vote. In *Why Parties?*, John Aldrich (1995, building on Schwartz, 1992; see also Bawn, 1999) argues that these long coalitions are an equilibrium in a game of legislative politics. This dynamic can be illustrated with a simple, three-person legislature and three bills, each of which one member favours, another opposes and the third is indifferent (example adapted from Bawn, 1999) (Table 1).<sup>1</sup>

If the legislature considers each bill in turn, then each bill will pass or fail depending on how the indifferent legislator can be courted. Legislators A and B, for instance, could

**Table 1.** Hypothetical preferences for a hypothetical three-person legislature.

	Legislator A	Legislator B	Legislator C
Issue 1	favours	is indifferent	opposes
Issue 2	is indifferent	favours	opposes
Issue 3	favours	opposes	is indifferent

propose a logroll on issues 1 and 2, each getting something they want for no costs. This is an improvement for A and B, but it is temporary. Their alliance will not naturally extend to issue 3, and after the vote on issue 1 Legislator A may be tempted by Legislator C to oppose the bill in exchange for support on issue 3.

Constructing these logrolls repeatedly is inefficient, even without considering transaction costs. Two members of the legislature could be better off if they could commit to always voting in their collective best interest,<sup>2</sup> rather than taking each vote as it comes. This commitment is the political party, Aldrich argues, and the party members create institutions (of agenda control and discipline, e.g. Cox and McCubbins, 1993, 2005) to enforce it.

Bawn (1999), however, considers the exact same model and calls it an 'ideology'. Because actors are better off forming a long-run coalition, they adopt them even in the absence of legislative institutions. This would explain why people have strong opinions on issues that are not immediately of interest to them.

From a practical standpoint, the difference is this: Who decides which coalition should be formed? Is it chosen by elected officials attempting to organize the legislature? Or is it formed by intellectuals making arguments for why some issues ought to go with others? Are coalitions formed by politicians or pundits? It is not necessary to label the two phenomena 'ideology' and 'party', although I will use that approach as a convenient shorthand. The question is simply, by whom is the coalition first articulated?

The question is important because the two types of political actor respond to different incentives, operate in different spheres and would possibly create coalitions in different ways. Many of these differences are beyond the scope of this manuscript, but are worth sketching for contextual purposes.

### *Politician-created coalitions*

Party logrolls are created for strategic reasons. Legislators hope to win support from their constituents, broadly defined to include voters, but also activists, financiers and any other politically relevant actors, in Mayhew's (1974) term. Party leaders form coalitions with others to accomplish policy ends (which will satisfy their constituents), but they must be careful not to trade their votes for too many things that their constituents oppose. They need a coalition that can win.

For this reason, party leaders may work to keep items off the political agenda. The only thing a coalition may be able to do with an issue that divides its constituents is to avoid it altogether. Slavery before the Civil War and segregation in the mid-twentieth century are classic examples, but party leaders have manoeuvred to avoid

taking stands on prohibition, bimetallism and a variety of other issues. Cox and McCubbins (2005) argue that this negative agenda power is the most important tool the majority party has.

### *Intellectual-created coalitions*

The process by which intellectuals create coalitions is probably quite different. They do so by means of their writings, which invoke logic and principle, both directly and indirectly. They might argue, for example, that if you believe in protecting the interests of working-class Whites, you should also care about economically disadvantaged Blacks. More simply, pundits might make arguments in favour of labour unions on Tuesday and in favour of homosexuals on Thursday, but to the same audience both days, inducing a relationship.

Political writers surely care about winning in elections and on the floor of Congress, but they do not have the immediate stake in those outcomes that elected officials do. So while they want to induce coalitions that can win, they are also free to think about inducing the coalitions that they want to win with – and certainly more free to advocate views that currently lack majority support but may some day have it than are politicians who must stand regularly for election. Pundit-induced coalitions also probably do not need to worry as much about avoiding issues. There may be some issues that some intellectuals avoid, but if the issue is important in the country, someone will weigh in on it.

Pundit-induced coalitions are enforced by persuasion. If pundits organize themselves into opposing camps, as they seem to do, and if the readers of intellectual works are persuaded, they may come to adopt the positions they read. They will internalize the new coalition, and not require agenda-control or party discipline to stick to it.

### *Why does it matter?*

The ability of intellectuals to persuade is key, because if a coalition that is created by intellectuals becomes widely supported, politicians may have an incentive to switch to it. Their constituents' preferences have changed, and now they are demanding something else, in which case the politician-created constraint, enforced by party discipline and agenda control, will come to mimic the coalition formed by the intellectuals.

It seems reasonable to associate intellectual-created constraint with 'ideology' and politician-created constraint with the 'party platform'. That is the distinction drawn by Bawn in comparison to Aldrich and Schwartz. The central question for this article is simpler, however: who appears to be shaping the coalition? If it is shaped by intellectuals, we might take the next step and call it 'ideology', but the important question is, who shapes it?

If actors inside and outside the legislature can shape coalitions, why does it matter? The key to the Second Party System was its success in keeping slavery off the agenda. Slavery, as a sectional issue, would have undermined the intersectional alliances of both the Whigs and the Democrats. Both parties, and especially the majority Democrats, fought hard to keep it off the agenda. The ability of the party leaders to control the agenda in this way is central to their ability to maintain a majority. If parties are to be

understood as long coalitions, then they must be effective at this sort of agenda control. Or, when they collapse, it is important to understand how and why.

Riker (1986) offers the issue of slavery as his first example of 'heresthetics' in *The Art of Political Manipulation*. Debating Stephen Douglas at Freeport, Abraham Lincoln asks whether the people of a U.S. territory can prohibit slavery before statehood. Douglas finds he cannot say 'yes' without alienating southern Democrats, but cannot say 'no' without alienating the Illinois Democrats he was courting. He won the senate seat, but his answer, Riker argues, cost him the presidency two years later.

Effective heresthetic is not a single question in a single debate, however, or even a single wedge issue. To remake the coalition, it must cleave off someone from the winning coalition *and* bring them over to the other coalition, producing 'a new majority coalition composed of the old minority and the portion of the old majority that likes the new alternative better' (Riker, 1986: 1).

A single manoeuvre in a single debate is a nice illustration, but for this sort of thing to have happened in the aggregate, we would need to see a reshaping of the political coalitions offered outside of government in the general political debate and discourse. This article looks for evidence of that transformation in the years leading up to Lincoln's question at Freeport.

## Section II: Slavery and the second party system

The economic, political and cultural significance of slavery is the centerpiece story in early American history. Struggles over slavery gave rise to a new political party and cast a shadow on ideology that is felt even today. The reader is no doubt familiar with the outlines: An inter-sectional party system structured around economic issues was split apart by the cross-cutting issue of slavery. Slavery left some people torn between the old party cleavage and the increasingly salient new issue, and when slavery became the dominant issue the party system collapsed.

The nature of the division between the parties without the issue of slavery is debated and has generated a rich literature. But generally, the Democrats were an agricultural and small government party, while Whigs represented commercial interests and the upper class (Gerring, 1998; Sundquist, 1983). Thus Whigs favoured a National Bank and protective trade policy to protect nascent American industry, while Democrats felt those policies enriched already wealthy commercial leaders at the expense of the agricultural sector. Ethnic and religious divisions also split the parties, and a number of social issues, but not slavery, became important in campaigns by the 1850s (Gienapp, 1988: 40).

However scholars characterize the division, they agree that it was cross-sectional – and deliberately so: 'The existence of national political parties . . . necessitated alliances between political elites in various sections of the country' (Foner, 1980: 35; see also Aldrich, 1995; Riker, 1982; Sundquist, 1983).

Since Democrats and Whigs were attempting to build and maintain coalitions that could win, they dared not risk alienating an important constituency, but taking up the subject of slavery would have had that consequence. Anti-slavery candidates would lose across the South, while pro-slavery candidates could face trouble in the North. Thus, scholars describe slavery as an orthogonal issue. Sundquist writes: 'The slavery issue cut

squarely across the two major parties that existed at the time' (p. 50). As noted, Riker uses slavery as a prime illustration of the use of an orthogonal issue to break apart an existing dominant party. Aldrich (1995: 126–135) and Weingast (1998) trace the institutional practices designed by both parties used to keep sectional issues, and especially slavery, from disrupting their cross-sectional coalitions, and Poole and Rosenthal (1997) demonstrate that slavery was cross-cutting in congressional voting.

By the time of the Civil War, however, we know that the party system had been disrupted, and slavery was the reason. Others have traced the process. Aldrich (1995), for example, argues that as the Whig Party began to falter, ambitious politicians had to decide which party was most likely to be one of the major parties in Congress and the government. Former Whigs switched to the Republican Party as this party showed promise. Issues such as slavery or temperance might have motivated some politicians, but they still needed to choose which party could win, and Republicans had the better strategy. Gienapp (1988) traces the process of issue selection and capitalization in different local settings. Republicans had to build a platform that could beat Democrats, and some policies, such as temperance, proved unsuccessful. The prevailing interpretation is that a number of issues, slavery among them, might have been exploited to build a winning coalition, and the many political parties at the time were each attempting to build the optimal coalition.

Slavery was among the most central. One cannot look at the political discourse of the antebellum period without becoming vividly aware that slavery was a significant issue for political thinkers. These thinkers did not have to run for election in the second party system, so electoral incentives did not impel them to avoid the issue. Political thinkers in the North and the South saw far-reaching implications of the South's 'peculiar institution', and they reached judgements on it.

Moreover, many of the thinkers who addressed the slavery issue addressed other contemporary issues as well – the tariff, internal improvements, the national bank. And it so happens, as I show below, that, by 1850 if not sooner, they had incorporated slavery in their attitudes on these other issues as well.

Let me begin with what has become known as Republican ideology. The Republicans emerged as a major force in the late 1850s, and as they coalesced this is the platform that they presented. This ideology was not simply abolitionist, or even simply about slavery at all, but slavery was a key part of it. The most comprehensive work on this ideology, and how attitudes toward slavery were related to those on other issues, is Eric Foner's (1995) *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*. The Republican ideology opposed slavery, but not because it was morally wrong to mistreat Blacks. Rather, Republicans felt that slave-holding corrupted the White slave holder – and, in turn, the Slave Power of the South corrupted the nation as a whole. Like Whigs, Republicans wanted to see the nation's economic infrastructure grow, and that would require government investment, and possibly tariffs to protect fledgling American industry. Slavery was a threat because a slave economy was stagnant, and the slave-holder need not develop a work ethic of his own.

A work ethic was an important component of 'free labour'. Free labour was the work done by the entrepreneur, who might apprentice himself or otherwise start out small and at the bottom levels of the economy and, through his own hard work and ingenuity work

up to a better place. A country of such men would develop a strong national economy, while a country of farmers who relied on slave labour would lead to stagnation.

A rival ideology developed to the Republican ideology. Thinkers opposed to a national economic order oriented around urban commercial interests came to oppose an anti-slavery agenda that also seemed to serve those interests. Southerners did not think of themselves as a Slave Power, but as a maligned and marginalized group whose way of life was threatened by commercial interests that did not understand it. The North was parasitic. It sought to use government power to give favours to already wealthy commercial interests at the expense of Southern farmers and wage labourers. The tariff in particular was designed to protect commercial interests, but it did not protect farmers, who relied on trade for their profits. Slavery was just part of the system of agriculture that the Northern business interests did not understand, despite the fact that Northern businesses relied on cotton and other Southern products for their development.

Thus the slavery issue did not stand apart from the ideological discourse of the day. It was an integral part of it. One ideology was a free soil, free labour, protectionist, nativist, religious Northern commercial ideology. The other was a slave-holding, free trade, Southern agrarian ideology. This division eventually divided the country in the election of 1860, but what role did it play in 1850?

I argue that this ideological coalition prefigured the party coalitions that came to power a decade later. I do not, of course, have detailed evidence of the sort modern surveys supply to show how the competing ideologies spread among the politically aware and active segments of the antebellum population. I must therefore assume that the mechanisms of ideological diffusion described by Philip Converse in his famous belief systems article (1964) apply in the nineteenth century in more or less the same way they do in the twentieth. Foner's and Gienapp's accounts of the development of the Republican Party do show that these issues were coming together among party elites and in the party's platform as it rose to power in the course of the 1850s.

Thus the Whig and Democratic politicians who resisted the slavery issue were not resisting just that issue. They were resisting new ideological coalitions that *incorporated* slavery within the larger political discourse, and that were likely to be animating the behaviour of the voters and activists whose support they needed to remain in office. They resisted these ideologies because both parties wanted an intersectional alliance. Most of the issues of the two ideologies could at least plausibly play in parts of the North and parts of the South, but slavery could not. Democrats, more often in power, tried to avoid an issue that would break up their successful coalition. Whig leaders, perhaps with good political reason, often balked at taking the risk that a free soil plank in their platform would entail.

Republicans seized on the ideology and used it to win elections. It was hard work, and not at all straightforward. Individual parties in different parts of the country had to come together, and party leaders had to adjust the coalition to win, but they also responded to common wants across the country. Activists wanted something the Whigs were not providing, and that was this ideology. Gienapp (1988) traces this process through the 1850s, but the ideological building blocks were in place by at least 1850.

It was, I believe, inevitable that ideologues would develop opinions on slavery. Ideological thinkers do not ignore important issues because they are politically perilous or inexpedient. And, this being so, the re-alignment that occurred was probably also inevitable, since most of the other issues of the day, from the tariff to the national bank, also had some sectional character, at least potentially.

This argument does not seek to explain the cause of the Civil War. Nor does it explain why one party failed and another replaced it, or why it was the Whigs who suffered and not the Democrats. The argument does seek to explain how and when slavery was integrated ideologically into the other issues that created the division that led to war.

As indicated, I cannot trace in detail the process by which political intellectuals created the new coalition, or how the new ideological coalition diffused through the population of political active and aware individuals. These individuals either pressured party politicians to reflect the new ideology or became politicians themselves, carrying their ideologies into office. What I can do is trace how these ideologies organized political thinkers. But it is difficult to detect the ideological forest for all the specific trees we have. Historians and biographers, rightly, delve into the nuances and idiosyncrasies of their subjects so that it is difficult to detect a general pattern across a number of people and issues. What we want is not the belief system of William Lloyd Garrison, but the ideological space in which he found himself. What we want to see is how widespread is the Republican ideology Foner describes, and how widespread is its polar opposite. This requires a new metric.

### **Section III: A measure of the ideological space**

Ideal point estimates, such as those referenced above, might be interpreted straightforwardly as indicators of true preferences. In practice, many scholars do treat NOMINATE scores as measures of ideology, but most recognize that these scores are in some way influenced by strategic behaviour, notably party discipline, but by other political influences too, such as lobbyists or constituency constraints.

What we know for sure is that NOMINATE scores tell us who votes together, and are thus a good measure of the cleavages that make up a coalition. Those with similar voting records, or issue positions, will have similar scores, and those with different records, different scores. Using the example of ideology, Hinich and Munger (1994) explore the notion formally. They treat ideology as a predictive dimension that voters can use to map a candidate or party to specific policy positions. The ends of this dimension might be called liberalism or conservatism. All political actors have a position on this underlying dimension, and we think that, for instance, a member of Congress's vote on a particular issue is a function of her position on that dimension. Some issues are strongly related to the dimension, but some are not. If trade preferences are related, for instance, then as a member's score on the latent trait increases from one extreme to the other she might go from opposing a tariff to favouring one, along the way reaching a point at which she is indifferent on the issue. Another issue, say slavery, might be unrelated. Then, as a person's score increases, it will not predict a change in her position, or it will predict only weakly.



We cannot observe this latent trait, nor can we know a priori how well it will predict votes. What we can do is look at the pattern of the votes and deduce both the trait itself and the parameters that relate each issue to the trait. Scaling does this. In one dimension, the question is just whether or not an issue maps to the measured dimension.

In Congress, this dimension measures the behaviour of partisan actors. It captures who votes with whom in the legislature. To detect the role of a coalition formed outside the legislature, we need a measure divorced from that context. I develop such a measure by looking at political writers – those who express opinions in political magazines, newspapers and journals.

This section will first discuss in detail the collection process and describe the data. It will then describe the model used to infer the issue space defined by these pundits.

### *The Data*

The data are the recorded positions of pundits in major political publications on the issues of the day. The database includes everyone from *The New York Times* editorial board to correspondents with a publication to major figures such as Henry Ward Beecher. It includes some elected officials, such as William H. Seward and James A. Seddon, who at times in their careers served as intellectuals. It also includes excerpts and summaries of opinions expressed elsewhere in speeches or books. The issue space defined by these opinions is not influenced by the strategic considerations of political actors voting on the floor of Congress, and therefore is presumably a more direct measure of what Bawn called ‘ideology’.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, many of the opinions are expressed as frustration with the ‘compromises’ or blind partisan loyalty of elected politicians.

The data analysed here are part of a larger dataset on intellectual opinion, ranging from 1850 to 1990. They are then organized to be analogous to legislative roll-call data. The data in the present article are from the 1850 segment of the same. The publications in that sample are those archived with the Making of America database<sup>4</sup> on the grounds that these represent what historians believe to be the most politically significant publications available. Publications studied in this article include *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The American Whig Review*, *Harper’s Monthly*, *The International Monthly*, *The New York Times*, *The New-Englander*, *The North American Review* and *The United States Democratic Review*.<sup>5</sup> For monthly and weekly publications, effort was made to collect every article published in each year studied – 1850 for the present paper. For daily publications, large samples were taken from each month.

The data analysed in this article are from publications in the calendar year of 1850, with a few exceptions for journals that begin publication after 1850. This means that some issues that developed after 1850 do show up in the data, but not many. Data from those publications were supplemented by direct searches on the names of all writers to capture articles written shortly before or after 1850. In the few cases in which a writer is an important figure in American history, biographical information is used to fill in positions on issues not addressed in available sources from a given year. Biographical information is used only when it reflects opinions that were held in and around 1850.

As should be evident, these data differ in several ways from the data usually used to estimate ideal points of Members of Congress from their recorded votes. I discuss the most important of these differences below.

First, defining the issue is tricky. For Congress, everyone is voting on the exact same bill. For the pundit data, the context must be used to define the issue. On the one hand, overly general issue definitions can mask significant differences from writer to writer. For instance, an advocate of slavery in general might still support the end of the slave trade. Quite often, writers who oppose slavery nevertheless do not favour the immediate abolition of slavery. On the other hand, overly specific issues degenerate into minutia, where each writer is writing about some very narrow matter unaddressed by others. Effort was made to be as specific as possible while still maintaining a large number of responses on each issue. Second, different pundits are free to address different issues. In analyses of legislatures there may be some abstentions, but by and large every legislator faces and usually votes on the same set of issues. The pundit-by-issue matrix produced by my coding procedure is ‘missing’ just less than 90 percent of the possible observations (that is, compared to a scenario in which every pundit addressed every issue that has been raised in the year). This missingness is misleading, however. It comes largely from the many writers who take on two or three issues, or the many issues that are addressed by only a few writers.

We could drop those cases and instead analyse the editorial boards and a few key writers who all address most of the leading issues. Then the project would be akin to the estimation of ideal points of the nine members of the Supreme Court (Martin and Quinn, 2002), although with fewer issues. Dropping the remaining cases would leave less ‘missingness’, but it would also be throwing away useful information. We cannot learn much about some of the issues or writers, but we can learn from them about the underlying dimension, which in turn tells us something about the other issues. The approach here is thus akin to the use of bridging observations to connect groups who do not all address the same agenda (e.g. Bailey, 2007; Bailey and Malzman, 2008; Bonica, 2010; Masket and Noel, 2012; Shor et al., 2010).

Following these guidelines, I create a pundit by issue matrix. The data for 1850 represent almost 3,000 coded opinions. However, many of those are redundant. Such redundancy helps to clarify that the coded opinion is correct, but in the end it is only one opinion. Still others are on issues on which no other writer is engaged, or on issues on which all writers take the same stand. After eliminating non-informative cases, the matrix for 1850 has 648 opinions spread over 68 pundits and 84 issues.

### *The Model*

The model is an adaptation of a standard Item-Response Model. To address the missing values, I leverage another feature of the data. We know not only who wrote each article, but also for which journal they wrote. I thus combine an Item-Response Model with a Hierarchical Model in which each pundit’s ideological position is a draw from a journal-specific distribution.

*An Item-Response Model:* The article adapts the Item-Response Model as developed by Albert and Chib (1993; see also Baker, 1992; Treier and Jackman, 2002; Clinton et

al., 2002). The model can be estimated for any number of dimensions that the data will support. In this article, I estimate a one-dimensional model, which is a variant of the common models used to estimate ideal points in legislatures (for a discussion of the relationship, see Poole, 1999 and Londregan, 2000).

Responses to items – in this case issues in the public debate – are the dependent variable. They are predicted by the latent trait – in this case ideology – and parameters. More formally, each  $ij^{th}$  article is a Bernoulli trial with a probability defined by parameters for the  $j^{th}$  issue and the latent traits for the  $i^{th}$  pundit:

$$y_{ij} \sim F_{Bernoulli}(\pi_{ij}) \quad (1)$$

where  $\pi$  is a function of the  $x$ 's, as follows:

$$\pi_{ij} = f_{logit}(\beta_j(x_i - \alpha_j)) \quad (2)$$

and where  $\pi$  is the probability of a '1' response,  $x$  is a respondent-specific ideology score and  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are item-specific parameters. The model can be generalized to higher dimensions.

The estimated  $x$ ,  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  parameters all have straightforward interpretations. The  $x$ 's are the ideal points on the latent ideological dimension. The  $\alpha$  parameters are the cutpoint for each issue. Those with values of  $x$  to one side of  $\alpha$  are predicted to take one position, opposing those to the other. The  $\beta$ 's are the discrimination parameters. They measure how well each issue reflects the underlying ideological dimension. Issues with high values of  $\beta$  define the ideological dimension, while those with low values are off-dimensional. A second, third or higher dimension is needed to explain them.

*Hierarchical parameters for ideology:* Many of the *pundits* in the dataset address very few issues. However, each *publication* is represented on nearly every issue.

It would be possible simply to treat every article in a given journal as representing the same ideal point, namely that of the journal's editorial board. This would collapse the data down to eight almost complete cases, one for each journal.<sup>6</sup> But this is surely inaccurate. Even among ideological fellow travellers there can be disagreement. Some publication editors even take pride in the diversity of opinion presented. On the other hand, we would be ignoring useful information if we didn't account for the relationship between different pundits writing for the same journal. A reasonable middle ground is a hierarchical model in which each pundit's latent trait is a draw from a journal-specific distribution. A hierarchical model does more than address the missingness problem. Even without missingness, the model is more efficient by borrowing strength across observations involving pundits writing for the same outlet. That is, we add to the model above these hierarchical parameters:

$$x_i \sim f_N(\mu_{journal}, \tau_{journal}) \quad (3)$$

where  $\mu$  is the mean for the journal and  $\tau$  is the journal's 'precision' (or  $1/\sigma^2$ ). Both  $\mu$  and  $\tau$  are parameters to be estimated. This is a reasonable model of the actual process. Editors presumably have ideal points, but they are also willing to accept writing by pundits who deviate from them to some degree, and the editors probably differ in how much deviation

they are willing to accept. I depart from this procedure only in the few instances in which the editors of the publication explicitly point out that they disagree with the writer in question. This occurs four times in the current dataset. These writers are then treated as free agents, with their ideal point drawn from a flat prior.

The model is estimated in WinBUGS, using a Markov-Chain Monte Carlo algorithm.<sup>7</sup> For a one-dimensional model, identification is straightforward. Here, each posterior draw is normalized to have a mean 0 and standard deviation of 1 (see Leventusky et al., 2005).

## Section IV: Measuring intellectual discourse in the 1850s

In a spatial model of politics, every issue can be its own dimension. In most legislative voting models, however, stable coalitions emerge over a set of issues, such that one group of legislators consistently takes the same side and another group consistently takes the other side. Scaling models establish the extent to which such patterns exist for any set of decision-makers, including the pundits in my data, whose ‘votes’ are the positions they take in print. Ideology is present in a set of votes insofar as the voters can be reliably ordered along a dimension, from the furthest left to the furthest right. Issues that do not contribute to that ordering are of the first ideological dimension. Issues that do contribute to the ordering of the voters define the ideology.

In this section, I report a one-dimensional model of the issue space of pundits at around 1850, and compare it to the equivalent model estimated in Congress at the same time (31st House) and also a decade later (36th House), by which point the dimension structure of voting in Congress had changed. I then discuss the ways in which decisions among the pundits and in Congress appear to split the parties that are represented in both spheres.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 describe the results. Recall that, given the sparseness of some of the data, many of the parameters cannot be estimated well. We should focus on those with more observations, and on those with large effects or which are tightly estimated. The parameters supported by the most data are represented by heavy bars on the 95 percent credible intervals.

Figure 1 reports the posterior means of the ideal points, along with 95 percent credible intervals. The well-represented writers are at the poles of the distribution (as expected, since the others offer little information for estimation of their ideal points). Writers for the *United States Democratic Review*, three ‘free agent’ writers from the *American Whig Review* and a few others are on the left of this dimension, while most other writers are on the right.

However, the ideal points are not the focus of interest in this case. Most studies of NOMINATE scores and other scaling techniques focus on the ideal point estimates, because that is what is of interest to them. But the question here is about the space itself – especially the relationship between the ideological space of the pundits and that of the Congress.

To answer this question, Figure 2 plots the discrimination parameters, which measure how well and in which direction each issue is related to the ideological dimension. Pundits on the ‘right’ take the ‘pro’ position on the issues at the top,

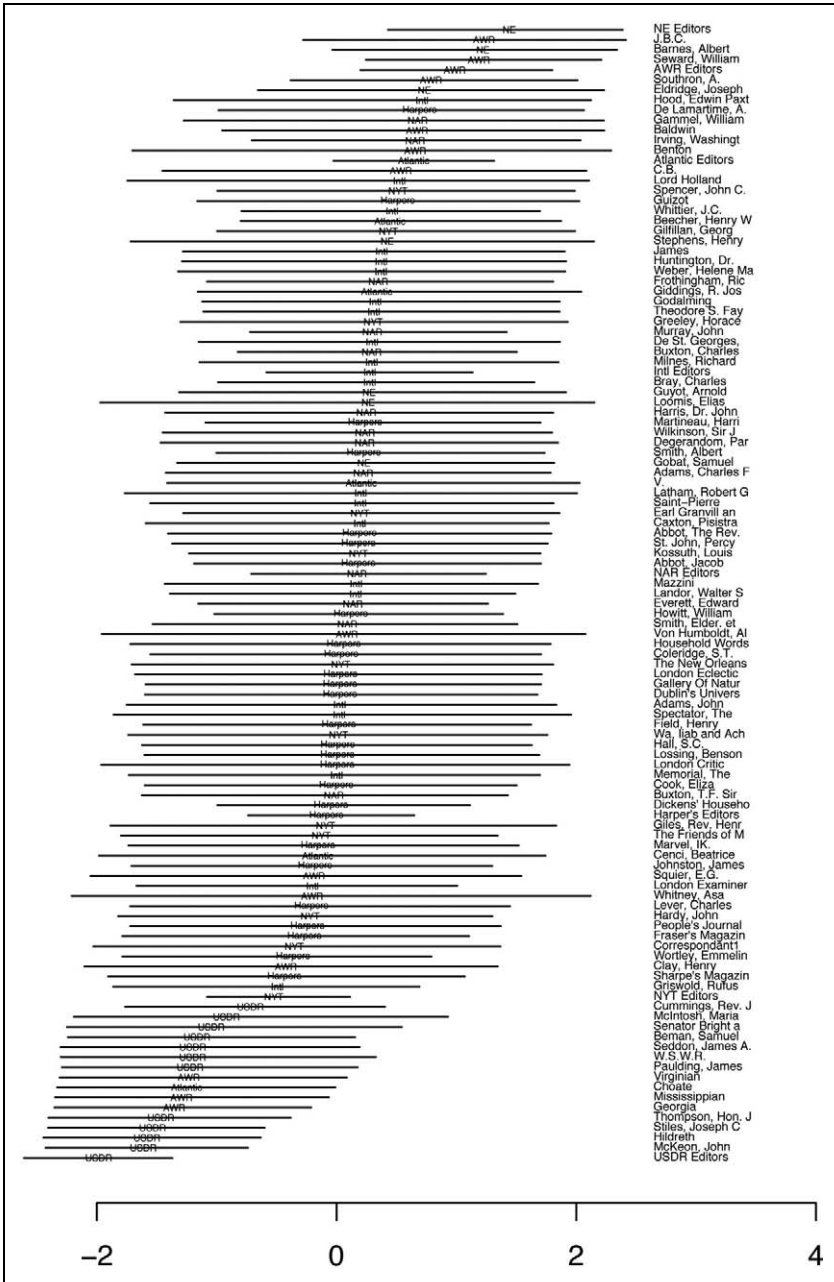


Figure I. 1850 Pundit Ideal Points.

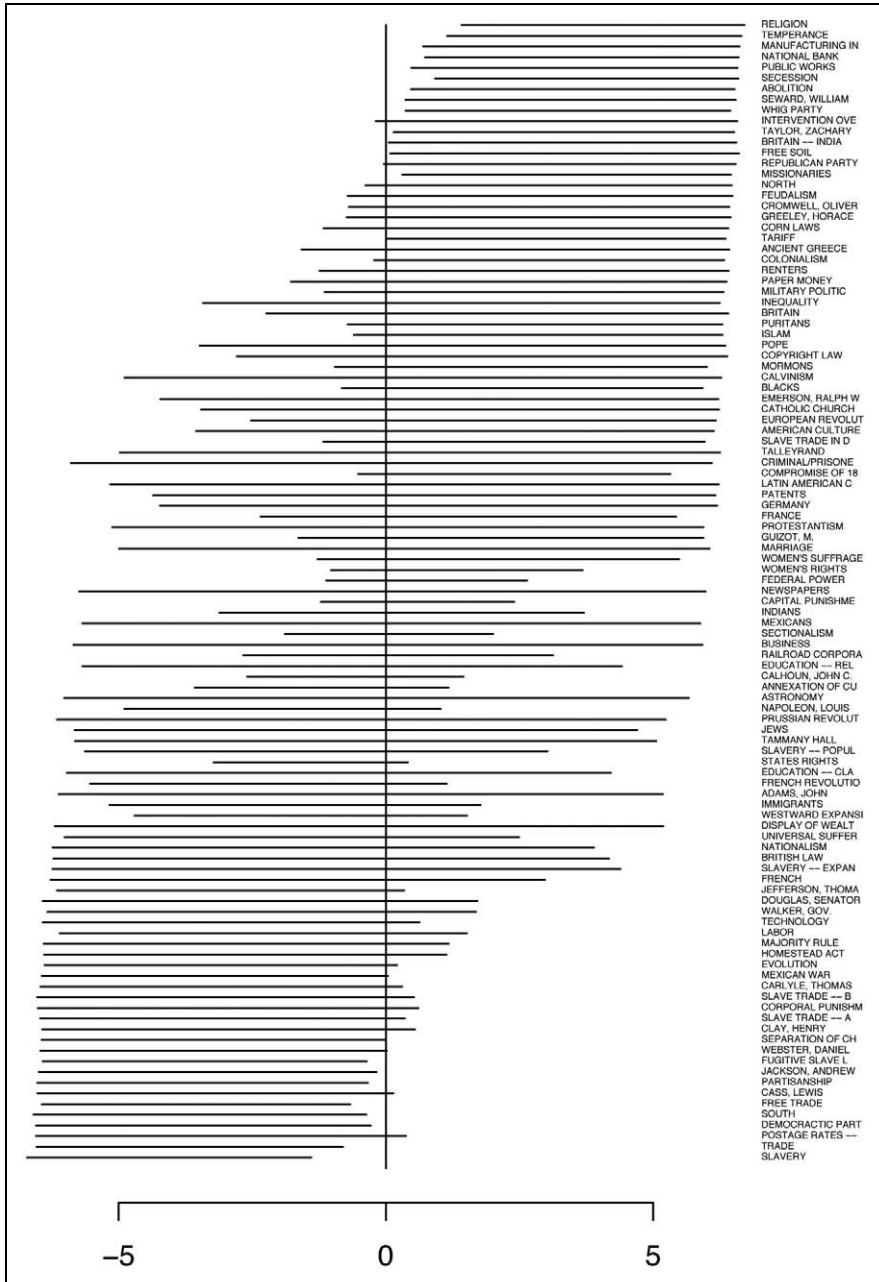


Figure 2. 1850 Discrimination Parameters.

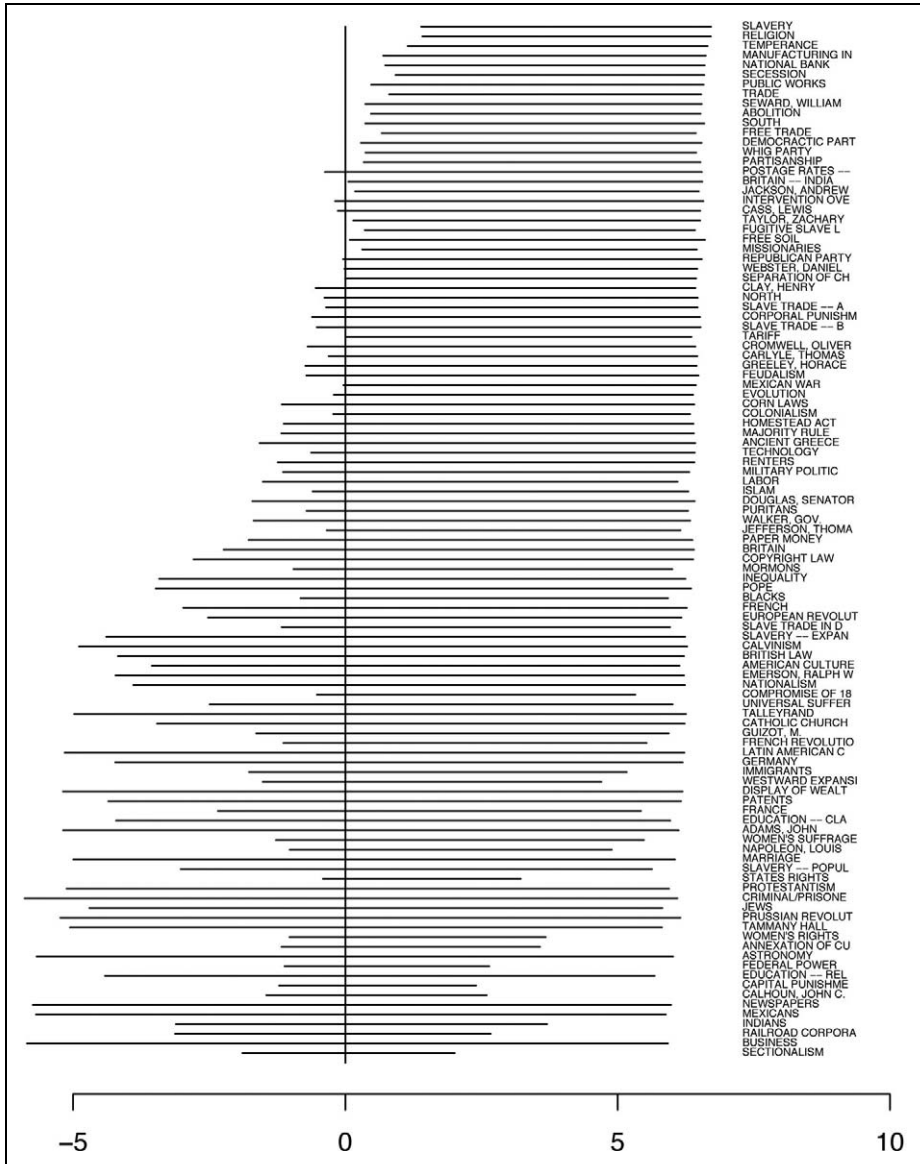


Figure 3. 1850 Discrimination Magnitudes.

with positive parameters, and the ‘con’ position on the issues at the bottom, with negative parameters. Pundits on the ‘left’ are the opposite. So the ‘right’ in this case is the ideology that Foner identified. These pundits are positive toward the Free Soil and Republican parties, and, less dramatically, the Whig Party. They favour the manufacturing industry, public works and a national bank. They favour the tariff and abolition. They are also pro temperance. Temperance at this point was an ethnic

issue, and there was an ethnic character to the Whig/Democratic division. There were also some organizational links between the temperance movement and the abolition movement, so in a space that unites slavery and the Whig/Democratic cleavage, temperance should also fit well. These 'free labour' pundits are opposed to slavery. They do not value trade in general or free trade. Instead, they would like to see the country develop its own economy, protected if necessary. They dislike the South and the Democratic Party. The 'left' pundits, then, are the opposite: Pro-slavery, pro-trade and anti-manufacturing.

The direction of the discrimination parameters is arbitrary. Figure 3 presents their magnitudes. The figure doesn't tell us how each issue influences ideology, but it focuses attention on which issues do. It is clear that slavery and related issues dominate the dimension, but that the other aspects of the 'free labour' ideology do so as well.

It is also important to look at the issues that do not load well onto the ideological dimension. These are the issues that a second (or higher) dimension would be needed to describe, and they do include a few slavery-related issues. Some of these, such as attitudes toward popular sovereignty in the territories or the slave trade, have so few writers that they cannot be estimated at all. Only two off-dimensional issues touching on slavery have more than a few writers discussing them. Both illustrate important concepts with respect to ideology and slavery.

One is states' rights, which is 'significantly' related to ideology in that its 95 percent Bayesian credible interval does not include 0. It has a much smaller estimated coefficient. But states' rights, then and now, is a step removed from the slavery issue. Part of the reason that the argument is made is that it is compelling to those on the other side. Many anti-slavery writers acknowledge and support the idea of states' rights, even if they don't think they should apply to slavery. What is more, some writers recast the question of popular sovereignty in the territories in these terms. Those who favoured popular sovereignty because they felt states like California would vote to disallow slavery turned the idea of states' rights around on slave-holders. This helps to illustrate the danger in taking rhetorical devices at face value.

The most significant ill-fitting slavery issue is attitudes toward Blacks. Slavery in the 1800s was not a civil rights issue. Opposition to slavery among elites was often paternalistic, or even unrelated to the well-being of slaves at all. Attitudes toward Blacks are more like attitudes toward women's rights, immigrants and American Indians, all of which do not load well on the first dimension, despite having many writers discuss them.

These issues will become significant in the future, after the Civil War leads to a new winner on the contemporary issues and frees space on the agenda for these other issues. These data cannot tell us how well these off-dimensional issues formed their own dimension in 1850, but we know that, in the future, they will come to be related. Explicit opposition to immigration does not seem to be a part of the dominant ideological dimension, but important nativist-related issues, including religion and temperance, were. As noted above, some temperance advocates were allied with abolitionists, but for many it was fused with attitudes toward immigration. Irish and German immigrants' consumption of alcohol served to separate them from other Americans. The Republican Party did explore the temperance issue. There were fewer votes on the issue in the 1860 Congress, but after the Civil War temperance votes became more common and highly partisan. The



partisan divide on temperance issues reaches its high in the period between 1870 and 1890.

Another set of ill-fitting issues in Figures 2 and 3 is on foreign policy, another domain that will become important as the United States grows larger and begins to have conflicts with other world powers.

The magnitude of the discrimination parameters is only one measure of how well the issues relate to the underlying dimension. Another is how well the ideological dimension improves over a naïve model, in which everyone votes the same way. The proportionate reduction in error is the proportion of the error from this naïve model that is reduced when we use the ideological model. If the model does not do better than the naïve model, the PRE would be 0. If it explains everything the naïve model does not explain, the PRE would be 1. The PRE for the model as a whole is 0.33, which is not high for a model of this type. As noted, there are several issues that do not fit this dimension, and the model is no help there. But the slavery and trade issues are better. The PRE for all the slavery issues identified above as related to the free labour ideology is 0.67. The PRE for all the non-slavery free labour issues is 0.53. This again indicates that slavery is an important component of the ideological coalition defined by the pundits.

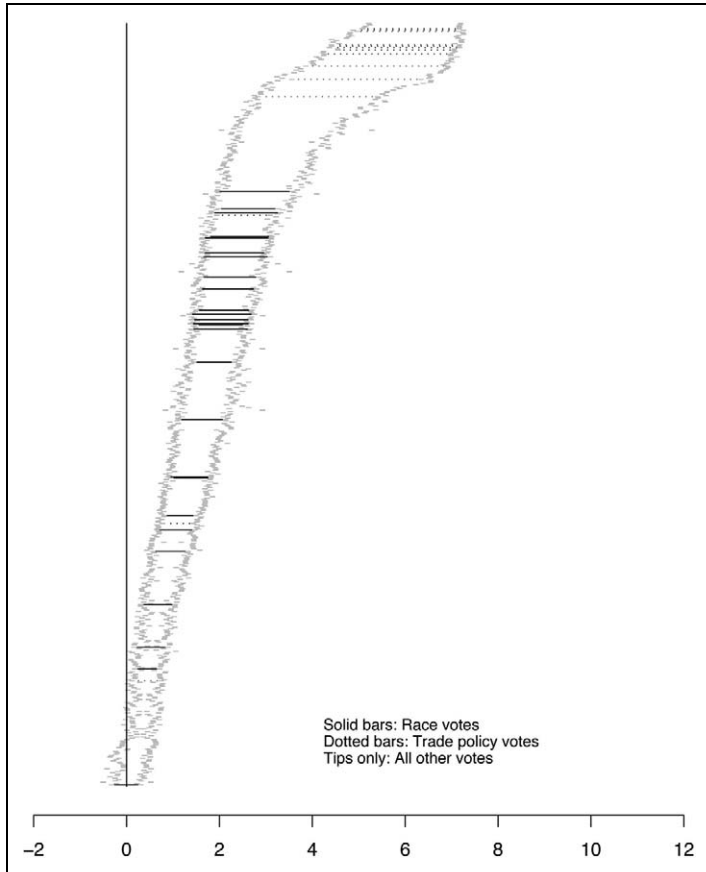
The pundit dimension was definitely not the dimension of the political parties of 1850. It is well known that slavery is an off-dimensional issue in a two-dimensional model of Congressional voting circa 1850, but comparing results from the two-dimensional NOMINATE model with this one-dimensional IRT model would be inappropriate. So I have fitted the same one-dimensional model to the 31st U.S. House. Figure 4 illustrates how each vote relates to an underlying dimension, showing as in Figure 3 the magnitudes<sup>8</sup> of the discrimination parameters for these votes. Because much more data are available for Congress, we get much tighter estimates on each of the issue parameters.

What is the nature of the dimension these bills define? I highlight two sets of bills in the figures. Credible intervals in solid black are for slavery bills, while those in dotted lines are for trade policy bills.<sup>9</sup> As expected, most trade policy bills are at the top of the figure with discrimination parameters around 6.0; correct classification is over 90 percent for these bills. The slavery bills are more scattered. Their average discrimination value is, at best, less than half that of the tariff bills. Thus, the issue that most sharply divides Whigs and Democrats in Congress is trade; slavery does not distinguish the two parties.

Ten years later, however, the structure of congressional voting is markedly different. To see this, compare Figure 4 with Figure 5, which has parallel results for the 36th House (1859–1860). In the later period, slavery has become part of the ideological dimension, perhaps the most important part. The bulk of the slavery votes have very high discrimination parameters, with only a few having small ones. The average discrimination parameter for the whole model is 3.24, while for the slavery votes it is 4.98. The trade votes also have high discrimination values, with an average of 3.86.

This is to be expected. The 36th Congress ushered the nation into the Civil War. By this time, the polarization between northern Republicans and southern Democrats has reached its peak, and politics was now about slavery. The inability to resolve the question caused a war.

Altogether, then, the dimension structure of pundit space in 1850 resembles the issue space in the Congress of 1860, but not that of 1850. This pattern is not consistent with a

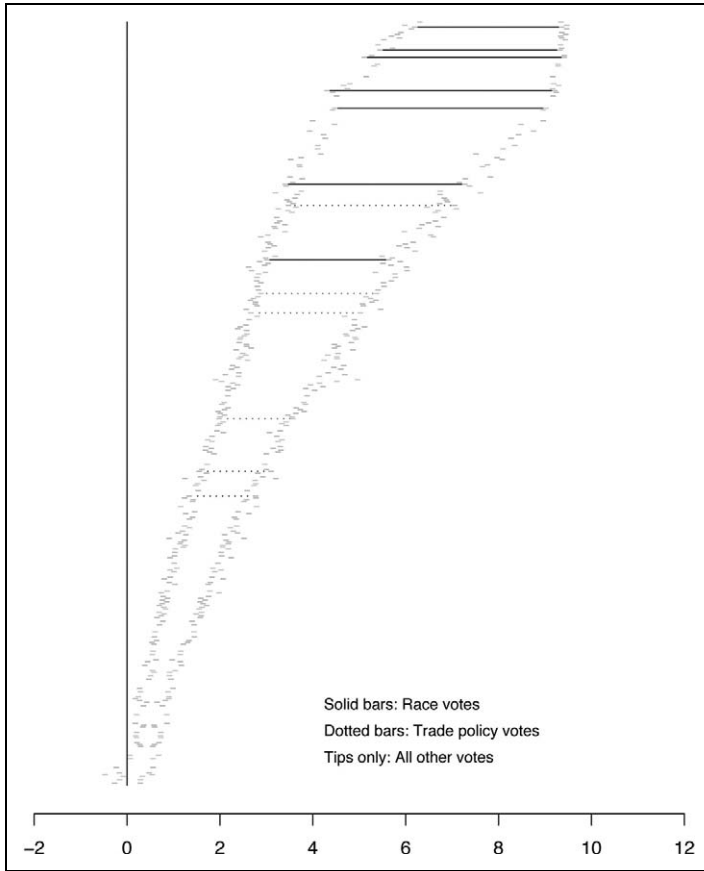


**Figure 4.** Discrimination Magnitudes in U.S. House (1849–1850).

situation in which pundits rationalize party voting, but is consistent with a story in which pundits shape party coalitions.

The PREs for the congresses support a similar conclusion. Table 2 compares the PRE for both of these congresses with similar numbers for the pundits. For the pundits in 1850 and the Members of Congress in 1860, both slavery and trade issues have larger PREs. In the Congress in 1850, however, the model does little for slavery and a lot for trade. The ideological space among the pundits in 1850 looks more like the space that emerges later in Congress.

The scaling technology thus leads to the following conclusion. Among the pundits, a noisy ideological dimension is present. The issues that define it include both slavery and the trade and economic issues that will eventually come to divide the Republican Party from the Democrats. Among Members of Congress, however, the slavery issue is off the agenda until those Republicans come to power. The legislature lagged behind the development of a new ideology that included slavery. This is consistent with ideological marketing. The cleavage that developed among ideologues arrived in Congress years later.



**Figure 5.** Discrimination Magnitudes in U.S. House (1859–1860).

**Table 2.** Proportionate reduction of errors, Pundits and Congress.

	Pundits 1850	31st Congress (1849–1850)	36th Congress (1859–1860)
All issues	0.33	0.36	0.50
Slavery issues	0.67	0.39	0.57
Trade issues	0.53	0.76	0.67

*Party splits:* Moreover, with the data from Congress, we can look more directly at how the issues split the parties. The best measures of party divisions are Rice cohesion scores and measures of likeness between the parties. In this period, such measures do not indicate a strong party system. Rice cohesion scores measure how often the members of a party vote together. A score of 100 is a perfectly unified party, while a score of 0 means the party was perfectly split. Table 3 shows Rice cohesion scores for Democrats and

**Table 3.** Party cohesion in the 31st and 36th houses.

31st HOUSE	Whig Rice cohesion	Democratic Rice cohesion	Likeness
All votes	57.0	43.6	56.3
Slavery votes	34.7	35.4	69.7
Trade votes	85.7	77.1	18.6
36th HOUSE	Republican Rice cohesion	Democratic Rice cohesion	Likeness
All votes	74.6	62.6	37.5
Slavery votes	68.6	73.8	37.7
Trade votes	83.2	80.4	20.0

Whigs in 1849–1850. The Rice cohesion for the Whigs in the 31st House is 57.0, while the score for the Democrats is 43.6. Both of these scores are low, compared with an average Rice cohesion of about 70 since the Civil War, and measures of 80.3 and 88.7 for Democrats and Republicans in the 107th Congress. On the slavery votes, however, the Democrats and the Whigs are even less cohesive, with measures of 34.7 and 35.4, respectively. The only time the parties consistently separate is on trade policy votes, where their cohesions are much higher.

We can also look at similarity measures. How similar are the voting blocs between the two parties? The ‘Likeness’ measure is 100 minus the absolute value of the difference between the percent of each party voting yea. When both parties are equally supportive of the vote, the score is 100; perfect party line votes give scores of 0. So the slavery votes not only show more difference within the parties, they also show less difference between the parties. This changes by the time we get to the 36th House. Trade divides the parties in both periods, but by 1859–1860 slavery has also split the parties.

It is worth noting that this same pattern can be observed for other issues. Temperance and religious issues were never as much on the parties’ agendas as slavery and trade, but the parties do become increasingly polarized on these issues in the following years, again lagging their absorption into the ideological dimension. In the 31st Congress, for instance, there is only one temperance vote, which did not split the parties very much. The Rice cohesion on that vote is 16.6. There are no temperance votes in the 36th Congress, but in the 37th there are seven, with an average cohesion of 30.8. Temperance becomes an increasingly partisan issue after the Civil War, with Rice cohesion scores often in the 80s and 90s. However, that development comes after the serious disruption of the war.

## Section V: Conclusion

The intellectuals who tackled slavery in the antebellum period meant to influence politics, but the traditional way of thinking about how an actor might influence politics is to ask whether the policy positions advocated by that actor are later enacted by policy-makers. This is an important question, but it is perhaps not the most important one. When policy change happens, some favour it while others oppose it. It is notable how often the coalitions defined by one issue are the same as those defined by another. Political parties

are one reason this occurs, but the intellectual discourse, what I have been calling ‘ideology’ is another. The greatest way that ideology influences politics may not be issue by issue, but through binding issues together into a coalition.

A perfect partisan would not much care who his log-roll partners are. So long as they are loyal and they help him get elected and re-elected, they qualify. But intellectuals do care. Partisans need to worry about other things, including loyalty to their past collaborators and the electoral incentive from their constituents. And so sometimes the heresthetic offered by ideology will be a nuisance – often a very insistent nuisance.

It was especially insistent in the antebellum period. Slavery was an issue that threatened party coalitions. It was a threat largely because it was so intractable. It could not be resolved without forcing one side to accept the other side’s position. Politicians hoping to deal with the nation’s business thus tried to look the other way. But ideological thinkers did not. Since they care about what they think is right, rather than on what will win elections, they saw no risk in talking about slavery. So they engaged it, even though that road led to the end of the second party system and the onset of the Civil War.

This article has not explored much the process between the two big-picture patterns. The ideological long coalition is adopted by the party system through specific decisions made by specific actors. These decisions by politicians to manage divisive issues can have long-lasting effects for party cleavages, sometimes at odds with the intellectuals’ agenda, sometimes perhaps only serendipitously in synch with them, but they took place in the context of a world that increasingly organized the issues in a way that the parties did not yet do.

A similar process may explain changes at other times. The Civil Rights movement, for instance, began outside the party system but ultimately shaped the parties. Owing in part to the party’s history with slavery that we’ve just discussed, the Democratic coalition included segregationists. However, the party eventually became the party of civil rights. It did so when the economic liberalism came to include racial liberalism as well, which led northern liberal activists to be intolerant of southern conservatives in the Democratic Party. The religious conservative movement in the Republican Party is another example. The evolution of the issue of abortion has also been carefully studied. Voters did not polarize on the issue until the 1990s. Members of Congress polarized in the 1980s (Adams, 1997). Activist groups take up stands – after *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 – but ideological elites had already chosen sides in 1970 and soon made their influence felt in the Republican Party. The religious character of the Republican Party has been shaped over the course of the past few decades, but the religious character of modern conservatism dates at least back to William F. Buckley’s *God and Man at Yale*.

If these interpretations are correct, then the most significant changes to the party system in U.S. history were driven not only by the electoral calculations of politicians, but also by the ideological movements articulated in part by intellectuals.

## Notes

1. One could illustrate this point with a number of different scenarios. Schwartz (1989) adapts a distributive model in which each bill gives one legislator a benefit while the rest must pay for it. Aldrich (1995) presents a variety of options.
2. Bawn (1999) lays out a number of different ways in which the coalition members could define ‘collective best interest’, but all of them can support the formation of a long coalition as an equilibrium.

3. Of course, all human behaviour is influenced by considerations that make it less than 'sincere'. Political pundits no doubt temper their opinions to win friends, influence audiences and keep credibility. However, those adjustments are the determinants of the extra-legislative coalition.
4. As of late 2005, when these data were collected, the database had 907,750 pages, with 955 serial volumes. 'Making of America (MOA) represents a major collaborative endeavor to preserve and make accessible through digital technology a significant body of primary sources related to development of the U.S. infrastructure. . . . The initial phase of the project, begun in the fall of 1995, focused on developing a collaborative effort between Cornell University and the University of Michigan. Drawing on the depth of primary materials within their respective libraries, these two institutions are developing a thematically-related digital library documenting American social history from the antebellum period through reconstruction' (Available at: <http://moa.cit.cornell.edu/moa/about.html>).
5. Data were collected by the author and a team of undergraduate researchers. For each opinion article, researchers recorded the author, source and issue position. Articles were coded for all positions taken in them, which in most cases was more than one. Researchers also wrote a detailed abstract of the article. Articles include unsigned editorials for each publication, which are attributed to the 'editorial board' of the publication. A subset of articles (about half) were double-coded to confirm the reliability of each coder. In only one instance did two coders conclude that the same article took opposite positions on an issue.
6. The results of such a model are not substantively different from those presented here.
7. Reported posterior means are based on 5,000 iterations after a 25,000-iteration burn-in. Standard diagnostics suggest that the model converged and that the posterior distribution has been explored.
8. Without knowledge of the details of the bills, the direction of the parameters is unhelpful.
9. Bills are classified using the categories provided by Poole's Voteview archive.

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## Author biography

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