

**The Inefficient Secret:
Organizing for Business in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–1861**

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Students of the American Congress are often disappointed by the institution we study. A major reason is the relatively mechanical fashion by which both chambers of Congress organize themselves every two years. In a world in which most national legislatures, at least some of the time, are organized through intense coalition negotiations, control of Congress goes fairly mechanically to the party with the most seats. The little inter-party strife that emerges every two years is typically harmless and dealt with in short order. While the drama of a deadlocked presidential nominating convention has eluded students of American politics for the lifetime of most political scientists, the drama of a deadlocked House of Representatives has eluded us for the lifetime of *political science*.

It has not always been thus. Before the Civil War, deadlock over the organization of the United States House of Representatives was common. Over one-third of all speakership contests from the founding of the Republic 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.

Stability in Congress is taken so axiomatically in congressional studies that when public choice theory started to suggest that Congress *should* exhibit deep, fundamental instability in its aggregate behavior, the major research program for a generation of scholars revolved around answering the question “why so much stability?” (Tullock 1981). The most influential answer to that question was given by Shepsle and Weingast (1981), who articulated the concept of the *structure-induced equilibrium* (SIE).

Left largely unexplored by the generation of scholars that followed in the path blazed by Shepsle and Weingast is the path by which the American Congress, and particularly the House, honed the SIE solution. As followers of the SIE tradition, we are presumably immune from the functionalist fallacy that asserts that the House *had* to find a way of inducing stability, because of its role as the legislative body in society. As students of legislative history, and as students of America's subnational legislatures, we also know that the modern American House simply anchors one end of the distribution of structure-encrusted legislatures on the North American continent. Therefore, the origins of the SIE solution to social choice chaos remains an important topic of research for legislative scholars.

My long-range goal is to answer the question, "How did members of Congress figure out that *institutions* would solve the most important social choice problems facing them?"

Preliminary to answering that question is addressing another: "What was legislative life in Congress like *before* the congressional institutions themselves reached equilibrium?" A small part of the answer to that question is understanding how the House organized itself for business in its early history. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore speakership elections in the House of Representatives in the pre-Civil War, antebellum period, which was the foundation of the House's organization.

Empirical research into parliamentary fights over the organization of the antebellum House has been spotty and anecdotal. A comprehensive exploration of these cases will require a two-pronged approach, building a series of narrative accounts alongside more systematic, quantitative analysis. Although spotty and inconsistent, Leintz's research (1978) provides a catalogue of narratives of speakership battles from the 1st to the 36th Congresses. For the moment, at least,

we can rely on this research to set the stage for most speakership contests—informing us of the identities of the *dramatis personae*, along with their strategic goals and tactical maneuvers.¹

What is lacking in Leintz’s research, and in the research of virtually all political scientists and historians who have studied this issue, is systematic quantitative analysis of speakership contests, owing to two important data problems.² First, the House elected the Speaker via a secret ballot for the first half-century of its history. Until the onset of *viva voce* balloting for Speaker (and other House officers, such as Clerk) in the 26th Congress, the House left no direct evidence about who supported whom at any step in the process. What is more, until the 26th Congress, the House *Journal* did not regularly record even the aggregate vote returns for the various speakership candidates, requiring us to rely on occasionally questionable and incomplete newspaper accounts in order to analyze the aggregate results. Second, even after the inception of public balloting for Speaker, the standard electronic versions of House roll call votes omit the balloting for House officers. (See ICPSR study 0004.) Even when speakership ballots are included in the electronic files, only the votes received by the leading candidates are typically recorded, seriously limiting our ability to analyze razor-thin elections in which the ballots of pivotal voters are often recorded in the catch-all category of “scattering.”

Therefore, the most important empirical goal of this paper is to overcome the lack of research at the micro level into antebellum speakership battles by collecting and reporting

¹Leintz’s essay is the most extensive research devoted specifically to the topic of this paper. Other notable original research and secondary accounts can be found in Follett (1896), Young (1967), Congressional Quarterly (1982), Peters (1997), and Jenkins and Nokken (1997).

²Jenkins and Nokken’s (1997) research on the speakership contest of 1855–1856 is the first analysis of multi-ballot speakership contests to use modern social scientific theories and measurement techniques.

disaggregated results of these battles for the years in which they exist.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In Section I, I lay out a summary historical narrative about the politics of speakership selection in the antebellum House, drawing on standard historical accounts. I supplement the historical narrative in Section II with a quantitative narrative of sorts, which leans more heavily on a data set I am in the middle of creating which records individual votes in speakership races. I discuss in Section III the applicability of two general sets of theoretical literatures that may be relevant in organizing the antebellum politics of speakership selection. I conclude in Section IV by remarking on the limitations of this paper and on future research that is implied by the analysis I offer here.

I. Speakership Battles: The Narrative Account

When the U.S. House of Representatives convenes every two years, it continues a tradition begun when it first met in New York City in the spring of 1789. The Clerk first establishes that a quorum of the House is present and then balloting for the Speaker begins. After the speakership has been established, members are sworn in. A series of subsequent actions then organize the House for business.³

The details of this governing rite have evolved over the past two centuries, but the logic and basic outline have remained the same. Even though the modern organization of the House

³This is, of course, a highly stylized accounting of the organization of the House. In a few Congresses, for instance, balloting for Speaker has been delayed by other organizational fights, such as election contests. Even the stereotypical practice that is outlined here has evolved over time. Organizational matters are covered in Hinds' and Cannon's *Precedents* (Vol. I, §§ 1–126 and Vol. VI, §§ 1–34).

still witnesses a discharge of minor partisan arrows along the way,⁴ the formal organization of the House is now a type of *kabuki* theater, a highly stylized drama that values form over substance.

Both the (apparent) serenity of the House's first organization and the stylized ceremony of current practice stand in sharp contrast with the organization of the House for most of the antebellum period. Furthermore, important institutional details have changed over the past two centuries. Until 1837, voting for Speaker was done via secret ballot. 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 1839.⁵ Finally, the role of the parties as organizations has changed considerably across time. While there are reports of party caucuses for the purpose of

⁴For instance, at the start of the 105th Congress, the Democrats offered a resolution postponing the speakership election until after the report of the Ethic Committee. The resolution was tabled. At the start of the 106th Congress, the resident commissioner of Puerto Rico protested not being allowed to vote in the election, a challenge seconded by Patrick Kennedy on behalf of the Democratic caucus (*Congressional Record*, 6 Jan. 1999, p. H2).

⁵There 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					Total
	Whig	Dem.	Anti-Mason	Nullifier	Ind.	
Slave state						
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)

settling on a single candidate in the antebellum period, the first formal partisan speakership nomination offered by both major parties did not occur until 1865 (39th Congress), when the Republicans nominated Schuyler Colfax (Ind.) And the Democrats nominated James Brooks (N.Y.)⁶

In the modern Congress, we have also come to expect the vote for Speaker to simply be the first formal action in which the majority party exerts control over the entire institution, with the minority party offering up half-hearted, *pro forma* opposition intended for public consumption. For instance, at the start of the 106th Congress, the first formal business transacted after the Speaker was elected and the members sworn-in was the passage of H.Res.1, which provided for the election of the Clerk of the House, Sergeant at Arms, Chief Administrative Officer, and Chaplain. The resolution was offered by J.C. Watts (R-Okla.), the chair of the Republican Conference. An amendment was offered by Martin Frost (D-Tex.), the chairman of the Democratic Caucus, proposing a different slate of officers.⁷ Frost's amendment was dispatched summarily and the Republican slate was duly elected, without objection.

In the antebellum era, the parties not only failed to formally control the comprehensive organization of the House in this fashion, but it also was not always possible to predict who would be elected an officer of the House even after the Speaker was chosen. In the 4th Congress the House elected a Republican Clerk after electing a Federalist Speaker. In the 25th Congress the Democrats handily reelected James K. Polk Speaker, 116 to 103, but then the Whigs prevailed

⁶See *Congressional Globe*, 4 Dec. 1865, p. 5. Nominations and supporting speeches preceded the 39th Congress, but we can identify 1865 as the date when the two parties regularly settled upon a single nominee and brought that nomination to the floor orally.

⁷Frost's amendment did not challenge the Republican nominee for chaplain.

in the voting for public printer, after twelve ballots (Leintz 1978, p. 76). Just two Congresses later, Whig candidates for Speaker and Public Printer prevailed, even though the victorious House Clerk was a Democrat. While the majority party could usually install its candidates as House officers, it did not always have a single candidate for these posts, and could not always guarantee their election even when they did.⁸

Table 1 summarizes balloting for Speaker in the 18th and 19th centuries. Using Leintz's (1978) essay on speakership contests and other research as a guide to the narrative history, plus the basic summary statistics from Table 1, we can preliminarily divide speakership contests into four periods, which are summarized in Table 2.⁹

The first period lasted through the eleventh Congress, 1789–1811. This is a period 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,¹⁰ 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

⁸Also note that Poole and Rosenthal (1997, Table 3.4) report that voting for House officers was the primary issue explained by the second dimension D-NOMINATE scores in the 27th Congress.

⁹Peters (1997, pp. 1–51) lumps this entire period together under the rubric of the “Parliamentary Speaker.” As this discussion suggests, my own preliminary research into this period calls into question this characterization, certainly with respect to summarizing the politics surrounding the choice of Speaker. While the limitations of this paper preclude my pursuing this point much further, it is a subject of future research.

¹⁰We do not know for certain how many ballots it took to elect the first two Speakers.

the sixth Congress, 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 personalistic or regional factions. Somehow, Clay was able to hold these centrifugal forces at bay, but efforts to replace him during his two hiatuses illustrates just how fractured the power distribution within the House was during this period (c.f. 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 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). 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 major 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.¹¹ 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 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.¹²

¹¹The 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, and the other for Corning.

¹²Of 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.

In his account of pre-Civil War speakership battles, Leintz (1978) concludes this way:

The problems ante-bellum parties had in organizing for Speaker elections reflect their problems in maintaining political control over their memberships. The constant tensions arising from sectional and slavery-related debates, the independence of individual members, and the unreliability of factions, meant that the discipline of party leaders often was weak. Frequently the parties had no influence. At best, leaders could only keep their men from backing members of the opposition. This lack of control and cohesion helps explain why two party systems rose and fell and a third was born in the first seventy years of government under the Constitution (p. 86).

II. Speakership Battles: The Quantitative Account

Battles for the Speaker's chair have left an incomplete quantitative trace. In the earliest Congresses, the *most* we know is the aggregate results and the identity of the major players, and we are not always certain of these. From the 26th Congress on we also know how each member cast his vote on each successive ballot. In this section I review the quantitative record of the multi-ballot speakership races, before delving into a more general set of theoretical issues in the next section.

Most of this section is based on a data-gathering project that is drawing to a close, in which I have been gathering the individual voting records in speakership contests from the 26th Congress to the present. Much of what follows, particularly after the 26th Congress, relies on that data. In the individual subsections that follow, I will use the data to explore the evolution of the coalitions that emerged as the balloting progressed. Because I will focus on the multi-ballot speakership contests, I will not have an opportunity to discuss the data associated with about half the contests of the 1839–1861 period. Therefore, I simply note four tables that summarize basic coalition information for all speakership contests from the 26th to 36th Congresses, regardless of

the number of ballots. Table 3 summarizes the ballots cast by Democrats; Table 4 summarizes the ballots cast by Whig or Republicans, depending on the Congress; Table 5 summarizes the “scattering” vote;¹³ and Table 6 summarizes the regional characteristics of major party members who refused to support their party’s principal speakership candidate on the last (or only) ballot.

I now focus my attention on the protracted¹⁴ multi-ballot speakership contests.

16th Congress, 2nd session

Ignoring the two-and three-ballot affairs that preceded it, the first significantly protracted speakership contest occurred in the 2nd session of the 16th Congress (1820), upon the first interruption of Clay’s speakership. Conflict over the admission of Missouri had arisen at the end of the 1st session, and the conflict over Clay’s succession was immediately mired in regional politics. Northern representatives rallied around John W. Taylor (Rep.-N.Y.), who had been vocally anti-slavery for two Congresses. Southern Republicans split their support between two candidates, William Lowndes (S.C.) and Samuel Smith (Md.). John Sergeant, a Pennsylvania Federalist was the fourth in the race. According to many accounts of the contest, although northerners held a solid majority in the House, Taylor was unable to achieve an immediate victory due to factional politics among New York Republicans. He eventually prevailed by persuading

¹³The “scattering vote” in these cases is defined as either voting for a candidate who received fewer than 10 votes or voting for a candidate who ranked third or lower in the aggregate vote count.

¹⁴“Protracted” in this paper typically means requiring more than three ballots to elect a Speaker. It is my impressionistic sense that the principal divide in the quality of organizational deliberation occurred at three ballots—which is about how many ballots the House could hold in a single afternoon’s session. Thus, more than three ballots typically allowed the various factions to caucus in the evening, and these efforts at coordination and information-sharing appear to have shifted dynamics fundamentally.

the New York and Pennsylvania delegations that he was not allied with the New York governor, DeWitt Clinton (see Adams, V: 203; Jenkins and Stewart 1999).

I have summarized the balloting in Figure 1.¹⁵ The first day saw the House completing seven ballots for Speaker. By the end of that day, support for both Sergeant and Smith plummeted, while support for Taylor and Lowndes grew. While there is no direct evidence to corroborate this, it seems reasonable to assume that this waning and waxing of candidate fortunes was due to coordination among sympathetic ideological factions, with Smith supporters going to Lowndes and erstwhile Sergeant supporters going to Taylor. The second day, which comprised ballots 8 to 19, saw an immediate erosion of Lowndes's support in favor of Smith, followed by an erosion of Taylor's support in favor of Sergeant.

Here we see a symptom of the problems of coordination that would strike time and again in future speakership contests. In the evening between the first and second day of balloting, northern and southern forces apparently caucused and settled upon second choices. Yet, at best, only half of Taylor's original supporters ever went over to Sergeant and only half of Lowndes's supporters went over to Smith. Thus, half-way into the second day, the House was precisely where it had begun—with four candidates splitting the tally roughly evenly. At that point, the early rounds repeated yet again, leading to a second two-man race between Taylor and Lowndes.

¹⁵A similar figure will accompany most accounts in this section. The dark solid line indicates the number of votes needed to secure a majority on each ballot. The other lines indicate the number of votes received by the various candidates. The “scattering” category, before the 26th Congress, is simply taken from press accounts. Later on, after the 26th Congress, I typically assign to the scattering category those candidates who never received more than 10 or 20 votes (depending on the situation and the legibility of the graph).

This time the ending was different. Each of the three ballots held on the third day saw Taylor's support gradually rise, until he broke the majority barrier on the 22nd ballot.

The results of the last few ballots as displayed in Figure 1 are puzzling, if anecdotal accounts are to be trusted. Much has been made in the scant literature on the subject of Taylor's apparent appeal to the Pennsylvania and New York delegations for support on the evening between the second and third ballots (Spann 1960, pp. 391–92; Nichols 1967, p. 264; Cole 1984, p. 104; Niven 1983, pp. 104–05; Greenstone 1993, p. 155; Jenkins and Stewart 1999, pp. 36–37.). Yet, the greatest movement at the end came in the collapse of support for Lowndes, not of Smith, whose followers should have been more ideologically compatible with Taylor than Lowndes's supporters. If Taylor did indeed go over the top due to a last minute shift of southern support in his direction (rather than northern support, which is often assumed), that would help explain why Taylor was much more conciliatory on the Missouri question in the second session of the 16th Congress than he had been in the first session (or in the 15th Congress, for that matter).

17th Congress

Southern bitterness and Martin Van Buren's party-building ambitions are usually attributed with leading to Taylor's defeat for reelection a year later, at the start of the 17th Congress (1821) (Jenkins and Stewart 1997; 1999). It took twelve ballots and two days to overturn Taylor and elect Philip P. Barbour (R-Va.) to the Speaker's chair. The puzzle in Barbour's election comes out of his position on the burning issue of the day: he was the most *ultra* of all southern pro-slavery congressmen, and thus about as far from the House median as humanly possible. Jenkins and Stewart (1997; 1999) suggest that Taylor's defeat in favor of Barbour resulted from the

intrigues of Sen. Martin Van Buren (R-N.Y.), who both had a parochial score to settle with his fellow New Yorker and a large-scale political project to pursue—of building a national political party that could put slavery to the side (Aldrich 1995). On the one hand, the fire breathing Barbour seemed like a strange horse for Van Buren to back, given the Little Magician’s larger political interests. However, as Jenkins and Stewart (1997; 1999) show, Barbour did not act on his *ultra* inclinations as Speaker, and in fact trusted much of the legislative work in the House to moderates of both parties throughout the Congress.

In Figure 2 I have graphed out a summary of the balloting at the start of the 17th Congress. Like the previous Speaker race, this one started out as a four-candidate affair, featuring three Republicans and a Federalist. And, like the second session of the 16th Congress, the race quickly became a deadlock dominated by two people.¹⁶ Throughout the two days of balloting, support for Taylor stayed firm. However, at the start of the second day, supporters of Caesar Rodney (R-Del.) shifted to Barbour, who consolidated his support over the next five ballots to eventually prevail on the twelfth.

¹⁶The first day saw seven ballots taken. The second day saw five ballots.

23rd Congress, 2nd session

Just as the departure of Clay from the Speakership opened up the House to an unruly process of picking a successor in the middle of the 16th Congress, Andrew Stevenson's departure in 1834 (23rd Congress), after three and one-half Congresses as Speaker, created another fracas. He was replaced by John Bell (Jack.-Tenn.), another Republican, but of a different stripe. Stevenson had been a stalwart defender of the Jackson administration. Follett (1896, pp. 84–85) claims that Stevenson worked directly with the administration to effect smooth legislative sailing for its proposals and that this friendship was rewarded, in a *quid pro quo* fashion, by his later appointment to the Court of St. James.

I have graphed out the progress of the balloting in Figure 3. Of all the multi-ballot speakership battles in American history, this one saw the most fragmented beginning. Six candidates—all Jacksonians of one stripe or the other—garnered significant support on the first ballot. Yet unlike the previous two cases and most of the remaining ones, this battle quickly devolved into a two-man race, between Bell and Polk, with support for both gradually rising over time.

Of all the races in this century, the Bell-Polk race in the 23rd Congress is one of the easiest to cast in terms of the standard spatial model. This is illustrated in Figure 4. The curve shows the distribution of first dimension D-NOMINATE scores among members of the 23rd Congress. The locations of the six speakership candidates are also noted, along with the chamber median. Although all of the candidates were nominally in the same party, they were clustered into two regions. Speight and Polk appealed to hardcore Jacksonians while the other four could

potentially appeal even to Whigs. Indeed, Bell was located almost precisely at the median of the chamber, and thus quite readily appealable to the other side.¹⁷

Wilde's early lead in the balloting is not surprising, given the spatial representation, since he could appeal most directly to the Whig vote. Speight, the most hopeless of the six candidates spatially, dropped out first, to the benefit of Polk's numbers. On the right-hand side of the contest, however, it does not appear that the candidates and their followers were very well coordinated. Both Sutherland and Wilde began to leak support early on, but both Wayne and Bell benefitted about equally. It was only after Wayne's supporters began flocking to Bell in the 7th ballot that the median voter theorem started to work its inexorable logic.

Although both Whigs and Republicans declared victory in the election of Bell, the spatial analysis suggests that the Whigs had the most to expect out of the new Speaker. Of course Bell, himself, eventually adopted the Whig label explicitly, suggesting that entering into an agreement with Whigs in the 23rd Congress was not distasteful to him. On the other hand, I show in the next section that even though the coalition that elected Bell was almost certainly dominated by Whigs, the majority Republicans nonetheless dominated roll call voting during the Congress. This undermines the notion that by electing Bell Speaker, the Whigs succeeded more broadly in seizing comprehensive control of the House's legislative machinery.

¹⁷Bell, and his compatriots on the "right" of the Republican party, were National Republicans, migrating to the Whigs.

26th Congress

The remaining protracted speakership contests of the antebellum period occurred after the onset of *viva voce* balloting for Speaker in the 26th Congress. This gives us added, more precise information about the micro-foundations of the support given to each subsequent Speaker candidate. The richness of the data from this point forward allows us both to analyze the bases of support and further analyze the consequences of that support.

The first public vote for Speaker, in 1839 (26th Congress), was also protracted. Democrats held a majority of seats, but only barely. Further complicating organizational politics were two factors. First, the first two weeks of the Congress were given over to a dispute about the seating of the New Jersey delegation, a slate of Whigs and Democrats having claimed victory in the at-large election. The Democrats, who were eventually seated, were barred from balloting for Speaker, which of course gave the Whigs an advantage. Second, Calhoun had reentered the Democratic party, increasing party factionalism, and particularly polarizing South Carolinians away from the rest of the party.

Figure 5 summarizes the evolution of the balloting. In addition to the vote summary, similar to the graphs in Figures 1 to 3, I have added two other graphs that summarize the voting dynamics at each successive ballot. The second graph in the figure reports the effective number of candidates on each ballot, to measure how fractured the voting was.¹⁸ The third graph records

¹⁸I have summarized the fracturing of the balloting in these figures and in various tables, by using a measure of the “effective” number of candidates on a ballot. The measure of the effective number of candidates is similar to Rae’s (1967, chap. 3) measures of the fractionalization of the seat and vote shares of parliamentary parties and is the reciprocal of the economists’ “Hyrfendahl index,” which measures the concentration of firms in an industry.

It is constructed this way. Let f_i be the fraction of votes received by candidate i on a ballot and c be the total number of candidates receiving votes. Then the measure of the effective

the percentage of members at each succeeding ballot who kept their vote unchanged from the preceding one.

At the opening of the balloting the Democrats united behind John W. Jones (Va., 113 votes) while the Whigs split their votes between John Bell (Tenn., 102 votes) and William C. Dawson (Ga., 11 votes). With neither party able to elect their first choice, attention swung around the chamber. As the “effective number of candidates” graph shows, support for specific candidates was never more concentrated than in the opening ballots. As the “persistence of support” graph shows, blocs of members tended to alight on a new candidate for two ballots, before moving on to try someone else.

Toward the end of the second day of balloting (the first day saw 6 ballots and the second day 5), Robert .M.T. Hunter (Va.) emerged as the new Whig candidate. Hunter was one of the most moderate of the Whigs, having shown Democratic sympathies in his past voting record. This, too, placed Hunter near the median of the chamber, making him perhaps the only Whig who could have pulled off a victory. This is illustrated in Figure 6, which graphs the distribution of first dimension D-NOMINATE scores for the 26th Congress, along with the spatial location of the principal Speaker candidates on the first and last ballots. (As before, the triangle indicates the chamber median.) Given Hunter’s near-correspondence with the median voter in the House, it is tempting to ask, “what took them so long?”¹⁹

number of candidates on that ballot is simply

$$e = \left(\sum_{i=1}^c f^2 \right)^{-1}$$

¹⁹The answer to this question probably lay in the characterization of Hunter by John Quincy Adams as a “good-hearted, weak-headed young man” (Adams X, p. 379).

Hunter's winning coalition is one of the rare cross-party coalitions we can firmly document during this period. This is illustrated in Table 7, which shows the party distribution of the winning Speaker coalitions for the next 11 Congresses.²⁰ The seven Democrats who supported Hunter were all South Carolinians and on the "right" side of the Democratic party, lending credence to the interpretation of Hunter's victory as a triumph for Calhounites.

31th Congress

The 30th Congress (1847–49) was controlled by a narrow Whig majority, and it took the party three ballots to consolidate enough votes behind Robert C. Winthrop (Mass.) to prevail. The next Congress saw the Democrats hold a plurality of seats. Nine Free Soilers held the balance of power between the Democrats and Whigs. (On the first ballot, the party strength was as follows: Democrats 119, Whigs 113, Free Soil 9, American 1, and Independent 1.) This resulted in a true stalemate in voting that stretched across three weeks and 61 ballots.

The balloting for Speaker in the 31st Congress (1849) is summarized in Figure 7. For the first two weeks, Whig support for Winthrop held firm. Howell Cobb (Ga.) was the principal Democratic candidate. Although Leintz (1978, p. 80) characterizes Cobb as a "moderate," his D-NOMINATE score puts him on the strong pro-slavery side of the Democratic fold, as is demonstrated in Figure 8. For the first couple of weeks of the balloting, with Winthrop the Whig candidate, Democrats attempted two candidates who can more plausibly be characterized as centrists—first Emery Potter (Ohio) and then William J. Brown (Ind.). This switch to Potter then

²⁰The data set used in this table has not been thoroughly cleaned, therefore the marginals vary slightly from the published totals.

Brown made sense spatially—they were ideological centrists—and regionally—Potter’s and Brown’s midwestern origins were intended to appeal to pivotal Free Soilers.

The Democratic strategy of reaching out to Free Soil representatives backfired on the 40th ballot, when they finally agreed to back Brown. The Free Soil shift caused a surge in Brown’s aggregate support, but he still fell short of a majority by two votes.²¹ George Ashmun (Whig-Mass.) challenged Thomas Bayly (D-Va.) and Brown on the floor immediately thereafter, charging that Brown had made an explicit deal with David Wilmot (D²²-Penn.), in which Free Soil members and their sympathizers would be given control of the committees that had jurisdiction over slavery—District of Columbia, Territories, and the Judiciary. After equivocating, Brown eventually confirmed the deal, reading a letter he had sent to Wilmot that spelled out its contours. (*Congressional Globe*, 12 Dec. 1849, p. 22).²³

This revelation plunged the House into chaos, from which it took nearly a week to recover. As the three panels of Figure 7 show, from the 40th ballot onward, candidate support from one ballot to the next was very fluid. Eventually, an informal council composed of Democrats and Whigs caucused and agreed on a plan: The House would vote three more times.

²¹Leintz (p. 80) seems to imply that Brown gradually built up his Free Soil support across successive ballots. In fact, he only received one Free Soil party-member’s vote (Walter Booth, Conn.) before the 40th ballot.

²²Although Martis lists Wilmot as a Democrat in this Congress, the *Congressional Globe* lists him among the Free Soilers.

²³No doubt inspired by this attempted institutional logroll, on the next day, preceding the 41st ballot for Speaker, David K. Carter (D-Ohio) moved that “any person who may be elected Speaker of this House shall be divested of the power to construct the District and Territorial Committees, and that the same shall be made by a vote of the House.” (*Congressional Globe*, 13 Dec. 1849, p. 25) Carter’s motion was defeated.

If no one received a majority in any of these ballots, the plurality winner on the last would be declared Speaker. In the end, then, balloting returned to an affair between Cobb and Winthrop, a vote Cobb eventually won under the plurality rule, 102–99, with 22 others scattering their votes. The most significant source of this scattering was the Free Soilers, eight of whom cast their final ballot for Wilmot.

Anti-slavery forces outside Congress charged that Wilmot had given the House over to the forces of slavery, by refusing to whip his supporters toward Winthrop. While it is certainly true that Winthrop was not a friend of slavery while Cobb was, it is not at all clear that the Free Soilers cast an irrational vote on the final ballot, by refusing to back Winthrop. Even though Winthrop was anti-slavery, the second dimension D-NOMINATE scores for the 31st Congress—which Poole and Rosenthal (1997, Table 3.2) report measure support for slavery—show that more Whigs were pro-slavery than Democrats. Furthermore, the simple Euclidean distance from Cobb to each of the Free Soilers is less than the distance to Winthrop. Therefore, it is doubtful that a choice of Winthrop as Speaker would have been unambiguously preferable to the Free Soilers. It also calls into question Follett's (1896, p. 56) conjecture, that Whig-dominated committees appointed by Winthrop would have shown more wisdom on the Compromise of 1850 than the Democratic-dominated committees that were actually appointed by Cobb.

The question remains why the Free Soilers chose to throw away their vote on the final ballot rather than vote sincerely for their preferred candidate. The answer here is perhaps obvious: Given their label, no Free Soil candidate could survive politically by supporting a Georgia Democrat for Speaker. Thus, by voting on the final ballot for Wilmot, they could take a

position in favor of Free Soil while enjoying an institution organized by the major party that was (marginally) more palatable.

34th Congress

The next protracted speakership contest occurred six years later, also in the context of minority party government. The Whigs had collapsed, and the 34th Congress (1855–57) was occupied by representatives who fell into three groups—75 Democrats, 48 Americans, and 96 who were elected on a variety of anti-Democratic party labels that Martis (1987) groups together into the “Opposition.” It took 133 ballots to determine the speakership, producing the only minor party Speaker in American history, Nathaniel Banks (A-Mass.). Jenkins and Nokken (1997) have recently reported research concerning this speakership contest. They conclude that although Banks was nominally a member of the nativist party, nativism had no significant effect on the final outcome. The election of Banks organized the House around anti-slavery lines, which formed the institutional basis for the Republican party-in-the-legislature for the years to come.

Figure 9 summarizes the balloting as it proceeded through the two months necessary to effect a result. The Democrats were initially unified behind their caucus’s nominee, William A. Richardson (Ill.), who had previously taken a leading role in the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The Republicans and Americans were split, however. The Americans voted for a total of 8 different candidates, although two—Banks and Humphrey Marshall (Ky.)—dominated, with 10 and 26 votes apiece from fellow Americans. (Banks picked up an additional vote from a Democrat and 8 from Republicans. Marshall picked up 4 votes from Republicans.) The proto-Republicans split their ballots among 16 different candidates, the principal vote-getters being

Lewis Campbell (Ohio) and Henry Fuller (Penn.).²⁴ Voting proceeded for about a week until the anti-slavery forces caucused and agreed on Banks as their candidate. Campbell withdrew on December 7, leaving Banks the primary anti-slavery candidate from the 28th ballot onward.

For the next month and a half, the balloting was virtually unchanged. Banks consistently fell about five votes short of a majority, while Richardson's support held at about 75 to 80 votes throughout. Henry Fuller continued to receive 30 to 35 votes, with the rest scattered. After nearly two months of balloting, the prospect of a deadlocked Congress was real. The Democratic leadership, therefore, changed its opposition to plurality election, allowing it to go forward and for the House to be organized.

Table 8, which is a cross-tabulation of speakership support on the 100th and 133rd ballots, summarizes shifting bases of support toward the end of the balloting. On the last day of balloting, the Democrats (who had briefly shifted their support to James Orr [D-S.C.]), all moved *en masse* to William Aiken (D-S.C.).²⁵

Interestingly enough, Aiken picked up support on the last ballot from 26 erstwhile Fuller supporters. This would not have been predicted at the outset of the balloting, since Fuller's earliest support came from northern anti-slavery forces. However, as the balloting had

²⁴Fuller's party affiliation is subject to some confusion. Leintz (p. 84) refers to him as an American. Martis (1987) classifies him in the "Opposition" camp, noting that his party affiliation has been variously described in different sources as Whig, Democrat, Filmore American, and American.

²⁵I note an ambiguity here that will be cleared up in future drafts: The comment about support shifting from Orr to Aikin involves an analysis of voting between the 132nd and 133rd ballots.

progressed, Fuller shed his anti-slavery support and picked up comparable support from southern, pro-slavery, Americans.²⁶

What is most interesting about the composition of Banks’s final coalition of support, is that he picked up 15 votes from members who, just a few days before, had started regularly abstaining. None of the narrative accounts mention these 15 members—why they previously abstained, why they shifted to Banks at the end, and what they may have received as a consequence of pushing him over the top. While understanding the behavior of these 15 members is beyond the scope of this paper, pursuing this lacunae will be the subject of future research.

In Table 9 I report the average first and second dimension D-NOMINATE scores in a cross-tabulation that allows us to examine the shift between the 100th and 133rd ballots. This table shows that this last-minute switching ended up aligning supporters of Aiken and Richardson ideologically along a pro-slavery dimension, consistent with the findings of Jenkins and Nokken (1997). The final ballots brought out a collection of previous-abstainers who also divided along predictable ideological lines—the anti-slavery abstainers voted for Banks and the pro-slavery abstainers voted for Aiken. The final sorting of Fuller’s former supporters also went along these

²⁶This is seen by comparing the composition of Fuller’s support on the 1st and 100th ballots:

Party	1st ballot			100th ballot		
	Slave state	Free state	Total	Slave state	Free State	Total
American	1	1	2	24	3	27
Opposition	0	15	15	0	5	5
Total	1	16	17	24	8	32

lines: the pro-slavery Americans went to Aiken while the anti-slavery Americans either stayed with Fuller or abstained.

Table 9 also confirms the finding of Jenkins and Nokken (1997) that the final coalition of Banks's support did not include a significant contingent of nativists, which is measured along the second D-NOMINATE dimension. However, that's not to say that nativism had no effects on the balloting. The nativists, toward the end, threw their support to Fuller. On the very last ballot the most committed nativists either stayed with Fuller or abstained. While still nativist in overall sentiments, the former Fuller supporters who went over to Aiken on the final ballot were more moderate in their views. Even though this is not statistically significant, the final reshuffling of previous abstainers is also consistent with this pattern: the pro-Aiken forces among this group were slightly more nativist than the ones who broke for Banks, while the one vote that Fuller picked up among the former abstainers came from a strong nativist, Jacobon Brown (A-Penn.)

36th Congress

The final protracted speakership contest in the antebellum era is more famous for the outcome than for the process that arrived at it.²⁷ In 1859, after 44 ballots that stretched over two months,²⁸ first-term Republican William Pennington (N.J.), whose principal virtues were his juniority and unknown position on slavery, was elected Speaker.

²⁷Most interest in this speakership contest grew out of the southern alarm at Sherman's prominence as the chief Republican candidate, due to the support he supposedly lent to an anti-southern screeed. See Crenshaw (1942).

²⁸The slowness of the balloting was due to protracted debate that occurred between most ballots.

The development of the balloting is summarized in Figure 10. The first ballot revealed that the Republicans held a plurality of seats: 108 *versus* 80 regular Democrats, 7 Anti-Lecompton Democrats, 6 Independent Democrats, 4 Americans, and 18 “Opposition” members.²⁹ On the first ballot, the Democrats lined up behind Thomas Bocoock (Va., 86 votes), the Americans supported Alexander Boteler (Va., 14 votes), and the Republicans split between John Sherman (Ohio, 66 votes) and Galusha Grow (Penn., 43 votes). Although Sherman himself seemed significantly more moderate on the slavery issue than Grow, support for neither man appears to have been ideological. Rather, the division was regional, which Grow’s support primarily coming from his home state delegation and Sherman drawing from throughout the north. Thus, on the second ballot Grow withdrew his name, the Republicans rallied behind Sherman, where they stayed, virtually unchanged, until the end.

The Democrats, on the other hand, were a different story. They stayed united behind Bocoock until the 12th ballot (19 Dec. 1859). With Bocoock stuck at between 88 and 85 votes, he withdrew on the 12th ballot, and the Democrats only rarely unified behind a single candidate from that point forward (*Congressional Globe* 19 Dec. 1859, p. 188). This is illustrated in each of the panels in Figure 10. After the 12th ballot, the lines that graph out support for all candidates except Sherman become a tangled mess. The number of effective candidates shoots up to around 3.5, where it stayed until the final five ballots. Finally, candidate support from one ballot to the

²⁹The Opposition candidates were all from slave states. Most who had served in the previous Congress had been Americans. Using the first dimension D-NOMINATE score, the Opposition representatives occupied the middle-left of the space, with an average score of $-.13$, compared to an average of $-.38$ for the Democrats, $.40$ for the Republicans, and $.04$ overall.

next was very fickle. Even with Sherman's base secure, for much of the balloting between 30% and 40% of the votes were changed from one ballot to the next.

The problem of constructing a winning coalition is illustrated in Figure 11, which shows the ideological configuration of the House with first dimension D-NOMINATE scores. In this figure, the small vertical hatches are the ideological location of all members who voted on the first ballot, arranged by party. The triangles indicate the location of each party's median. The ideological distribution of the chamber is also indicated on the figure. Finally, the ideological location of each of the major candidates who emerged through the proceedings is indicated at the bottom.

As to the general ideological distribution of the chamber, three major partisan blocs were located spatially between the Democrats and Republicans—the “Opposition” camp, the Americans, and the “Anti-Lecompton Democrats.”³⁰ If these minor “parties” were cohesive, any one of these could have joined with the Republicans to produce a majority. However, each of these blocs was about as heterogeneous as the two major parties, and thus the strategic problem that faced both parties was how to pick off the most centrist individuals of each bloc.

Which is consistent with how the balloting emerged. The first ballot saw both parties engage in ideological position-taking, resulting in deadlock. One of the two Republican candidates—Grow—and the Democratic candidate—Bocock—were on the extreme ends of their respective parties. Although Boteler—the major Opposition candidate—lay between the two, and thus was more congenial to the median voter, he was still fairly close to the center of the

³⁰Martis's (1987) “Independent Democrats” were no different ideologically from the regular Democrats.

Democratic contingent. The second round of voting, however, saw two of the three blocs change horses, as they attempted to appeal to the chamber's middle. Grow deferred to the more moderate Sherman and the Opposition forces rallied behind the more moderate John Adams Gilmer (O-N.C.). This configuration—which resulted in the most stable long-term support configuration of the entire affair—continued until the 7th ballot. However, Sherman could never crack the other non-Democratic blocs, nor could Gilmer ever expand his support beyond the Opposition forces, to either the Democrats or Republicans.

While the Republicans remained firm, with Sherman and the Opposition forces alternating between Boteler and Gilmer, the Democrats engaged in a desperate search for a candidate who would be agreeable to the Opposition. This mostly led to chaos, as the Democrats failed to agree among themselves. At its most extreme, Democrats gave their ballots to 21 different candidates on the 12th ballot. More typically, on average, Democrats scattered their support among 7.5 candidates on each ballot in the 36th Congress.

All was not chaos, however, and periodically the Democrats were able to coordinate their support for a single candidate over short periods of time. For instance, on the 17th ballot, the Democrats united behind John S. Millson (D-Va.) and Boteler withdrew in Millson's favor. For the first time, it appeared that a cross-party coalition had been constructed. Millson received 92 votes, which were contributed by 74 Democrats and a total of 18 other non-Republicans. Unfortunately for the Democrats, however, Millson's support from outside the Democratic party came only from southerners. Millson received a declining tally over the next three ballots; Gilmer re-emerged as the Opposition candidate, leaving the Democrats again alone to stew in their indecision.

Another cross-party coalition emerged in the 23rd ballot, this time with southern Democrats agreeing to back Horace Maynard (O-Tenn.). Northern Democrats failed to support Maynard, and so his candidacy was a flash in the pan. The Democrats again descended into the slough of despond until the 29th ballot, when they settled on Andrew Jackson Hamilton (Ind. D-Tex.). Drawn from the mainstream of the Democratic party (though not radical), Hamilton also could not gain non-Democratic support in the midwest and north, and was eventually abandoned.

A month passed until another cross-party coalition emerged around William N.H. Smith (O-N.C.). Smith came within two votes of receiving a majority on the 39th ballot. Unlike previous coalitional efforts, this one was finally national in scope, a fact publicly acknowledged by statements made by Democrats and Opposition members as the balloting progressed.³¹ Smith even picked up the support of two Republicans, George Briggs (R-N.Y.) and William Millward (R-Penn.).

Smith had a virtue that all the previous major candidates lacked: he was a political unknown. He was a first-term member, professing a Whig political lineage, who had served in a judicial position in North Carolina immediately prior to his election.

Smith's success and near-victory prompted the Republicans to try a similar strategy. Over the next weekend, Democratic and Republican leaders negotiated a plan to end the stalemate. In

³¹See *Congressional Globe*, 27 Jan. 1860, pp. 611–21. This passage is a remarkable public accounting of vote switching, logrolling, and charges of betrayal. While Leintz (1978) claims that the net result of all this vote switching robbed Smith of the speakership, my own reading of the account suggests the opposite. In any event, events on the floor immediately following the 39th ballot deserve closer attention from scholars of Congress and secession politics.

the interim, the Republicans also cast around for a candidate who would have an appeal similar to Smith's. They found their man in William Pennington.

The final round of voting began as a face-off between the two political unknowns. From the 40th to 42nd ballots, support for Pennington held firm at 115 and support for Smith held at 113. The balance in each case was held by a half-dozen members who voted for an equal number of other candidates. Learning anything systematic about these members is difficult, given their small number. Smith's previous national, cross-party coalition held firm. Pennington's advantage came in the unification of the Republican party around him, plus the addition of five Anti-Lecompton Democrats

Pennington finally prevailed on the 44th ballot, by one vote. In the penultimate ballot, the national coalition supporting Smith weakened. On that ballot, amid allegations that Smith harbored Know-Nothing sentiments, support was shifted from Smith to John A. McClernand (D-Ill.).³² McClernand's support was also national and cross-party, but he was unable to hang onto 21 southern Opposition members, who scattered their votes among seven other candidates. In the final ballot the Smith-McClernand national coalition was dissolved altogether, as southern Opposition members reunited around Gilmer. The party distribution of the final support for all candidates is summarized in Table 10.

In Figure 12 I have summarized the ideological configuration of the final ballot. It has commonly been noted that the outcome of this speakership contest cemented the Republican party's position as one of the major parties in American politics and, most importantly, cemented its position as a *regional* party. (But, see Jenkins and Nokken [1997].) As Leintz (1978, p. 86)

³²See the proceedings in the *Congressional Globe*, 30 Ja. 1860, pp. 635–36.

notes, Pennington received 116 out of 140 possible free state votes, leaving the opposition to the south. As Figure 12 also illustrates, the Republican party was ideologically cohesive, at least in its organization of the 36th Congress, while the opposition was split. It is also important to note that in the 36th Congress, the opposition to the Republican party was divided into three identifiable camps. The Democrats continued as a broad coalition representing a wide range of pro-slavery sentiment. For whatever reasons—most likely electoral—two non-trivial pro-slavery blocs in the House were unwilling to align publicly with this broad coalition. One bloc—which threw away their votes for Speaker on the final ballot—ranged across the pro-slavery ideological spectrum, but clustered a bit more heavily at the *ultra* end. The other, which supported Gilmer in the end, was less strongly wedded to the institution of slavery, even though most of these were from the border states.

III. Speakership Battles: The Theoretical Accounts

In the previous two sections I developed two related empirical accounts of speakership battles in the antebellum House of Representatives. Because the organization of the antebellum House is not a topic that has excited a large amount of empirical work, simply laying out the basic facts of the case is an important first step in understanding the evolution of Congress. However, if we are interested in generalization, then these contests also become the venue for applying and testing theories about coalition formation in legislatures. This paper is a preliminary exploration, and therefore I will not fully develop the theoretical side of this inquiry. However, it is important to establish the theoretical relevance of this period, as well as its historical significance.

There are at least two theoretical literatures that can help order an investigation into the organization of the antebellum House. The first is the general literature on coalition formation in legislatures. The second is more specific to the United States Congress and relates to the ability—or inability—of political parties to act as “legislative cartels” (Cox and McCubbins 1993, chap. 4). I discuss the applicability of each theory to this historical period, in turn.

General theories of coalition formation

The lack of party discipline during most of the antebellum House of Representatives and chaotic organizational politics brings to mind a generation of social choice theory that informed us that chaos should reign in simple, atomistic legislatures. The historical record I have just reviewed is full of examples in which there was clearly no obvious “equilibrium of tastes” in the House, at least so far as organizational matters were concerned. Poole and Rosenthal (1997) echo this analysis, in their research on the spatial contours of congressional voting through the ages. They note that the Era of Good Feelings, which comes in the middle of the time period covered in this paper, can best be characterized as an era of “spatial collapse” (p. 53).

Yet the social choice literature—both theory and theoretically-guided empirical work—does not suggest that life in an atomistic legislature should be entirely alien and beyond systematic analysis. Rather, in a rather raw state of nature, we can still discern some theoretical principles that might help us impose order on the chaotic behavior we observe, helping us to come to a more precise understanding of organizational politics in the antebellum period.

Riker and the size principle. The most basic of coalition theories that are relevant to understanding antebellum speakership races is Riker’s *Theory of Political Coalitions* (1962). The

idea that forms the core of Riker's analysis is the *size principle*, or the statement that "in n -person, zero-sum games, where side-payments are permitted, where players are rational, and where they have perfect information, only minimum winning coalitions occur" (p. 32). Under the conditions Riker specifies, winning coalitions should be minimal. This prediction is certainly testable. But, Riker's analysis also offers more than simply a prediction about the size of winning coalitions in the House. Yet, we will start there.

Figure 13 displays the distribution of winning Speakership coalitions in the antebellum era, controlling for whether the contest was single- or multi-ballot. Almost no single-ballot speakership contests were resolved with a winning coalition even approaching minimal size. Of the 24 single-ballot contests during this period, only 3 saw the winner receive 53% of the ballots cast or fewer. On the other hand, of the 14 multi-ballot affairs, 9 were resolved by a winner receiving fewer than 53% of the ballots cast.

Before we get too far into testing the most obvious prediction of Riker's size principle, it is necessary to ask whether the conditions he specified actually apply to the empirical topic of this paper. It is easier to accept some assumptions than others. For instance, it appears that the principal actors assumed that obtaining the speakership entitled the winner to decide how a pot of political benefits that was more-or-less fixed in the short-term would be distributed. Thus, it is reasonable to treat these contests as zero-sum games.

But, were these actually n -person games, with n fixed, even in the short-term? Because of the vagaries of travel in the early 19th century and the frequency of electoral challenges, it was not always perfectly clear who was playing the "Elect a Speaker" game at any given time. The late arrival of tardy members or the decision in a disputed elections case could affect the stability

of a winning coalition or its effectiveness in the future. For instance, the multi-ballot contest in the 26th Congress came amidst an election dispute that threw into doubt the viability of the entire New Jersey delegation. Having elected a Speaker and distributed committee assignments on the basis of one winning coalition, it was quite possible for that coalition to find itself in the minority, depending on how the election dispute was resolved. Indeed, in the case of the 26th Congress, although Whigs prevailed in electing the Speaker, they subsequently did not prevail in deciding the New Jersey case. And with that, the organizing coalition was again thrust into minority status.

Furthermore, as the longer-lived speakership fights developed, the ebbing and flowing of attendance became an issue. For instance, the standard deviation in the number of ballots cast in each round of the 34th and 36th Congress speakership contests were 9.5 and 8.0, respectively, in contests where the average number of ballots averaged 213 and 222. While this may not seem like much variation in turnout, both contests were settled by margins of 3 and 1 vote, respectively.

Likewise, the nature of the information environment in which House members acted is subject to scrutiny. With turnover hovering around 40% each Congress, party leaders had to assemble winning coalitions among members whose principles, loyalties, trustworthiness, and abilities were often unknown. Also, the information environment surrounding the actual balloting for Speaker shifted dramatically in the 26th Congress, once *viva voce* balloting was instituted. Before, candidates could assemble promises of support, but they had no way of monitoring compliance. After the 26th Congress, they could not only monitor compliance, they could also monitor the unfolding of each successive ballot in real time, allowing them to adjust their own strategies as a ballot progressed. And, of course, *viva voce* balloting opened up the choice of

Speaker to direct constituency scrutiny, which probably had the contrary effect of complicating coalition-building even further.

In general, then, the deviation from the ideals of the Rikerian coalition-building environment probably induced House leaders to create larger coalitions than needed in order to organize the House in the antebellum era, particularly before the 26th Congress. After the 26th Congress, the greater openness of the voting may have given leaders the luxury of assembling smaller coalitions for success. On the other hand, open balloting required leaders to consider not only internal politics in constructing coalitions, but also the electoral environments of individual members.

In addition to being a theoretical treatise, Riker's book is also directed to particular episodes in American history, including the period covered by this paper (Riker, 1962, chaps. 3 and 7). Writing broadly about American politics during this time, Riker argues that during the Era of Good Feeling and the 1850s, the Democratic party had become such a large coalition that it was essentially valueless. The grand political projects of the time involved leaders (like Jackson and Van Buren) trying to reduce the size of the Democratic coalition, so that it would be more valuable to its surviving members. This comment suggests an empirical question to be directed to antebellum organizational politics in future research: During those periods when massively oversized coalitions arose to elect Speakers (like most of the Clay and Stevenson Congresses), did the resulting distribution of power in the chamber continue to resemble the coalition of the whole, or were Speakers able to increase the value of their coalitions by excluding nominal supporters from the institutional spoils of victory?

Riker's argument does more than simply make a prediction about coalition size, however. It also suggests that the value of belonging to a winning coalition is a negative function of the coalition's size. Thus, the value of institutional positions such as committee seats may have been more valuable in those Congresses organized by razor-thin majorities. While this is not a conjecture we can explore in the confines of this paper, it is the type of conjecture that a full exploration of this subject would require.

Another general source for coalition theory that could be applied to speakership contests comes from the spatial voting model. For the past four decades, the spatial model has been available, and used, by scholars as they consider the formation of majority coalitions in modern legislatures. It is likely to be useful in understanding the formation of majority coalitions in historical legislatures, too.

Axelrod and connected coalitions. Axelrod's *Conflict of Interest* (1970) was an early attempt at formulating predictions about coalition formation in a spatial setting. In applying his theory to coalition formation in multiparty parliamentary democracies, Axelrod considered the unidimensional case, where parties could be arrayed along a single left-right scale. He predicted that the most likely coalitions would be *minimal connected winning coalitions* (MCW coalitions). A "connected" coalition is one whose members are adjacent ideologically. Thus, for instance, if parties A, B, and C are a left, centrist, and conservative party, respectively, then a coalition of A+B might form, but a coalition of A+C (excluding B) would not. Connected coalition form because they minimize the "conflict of interest," or variance in preferences, among coalition partners.

In applying a theory such as Axelrod's to antebellum organizational politics, we are immediately faced with two problems. The first is the unidimensionality assumption. While there was variation within the parties along the major ideological axis that defined partisan competition, most accounts of organizational politics at this time emphasize the cleavage that arose in both parties over regional issues, which cut across the major partisan divide.³³ It is not always clear what a connected coalition would be in such a context.

More problematic, however, is one assumption underlying all modern theoretical and empirical research into multiparty coalition formation—that the parties we are dealing with are disciplined. It is clear from the accounts in Sections I and II that the parties themselves were often anything but disciplined. Even when parties held binding caucuses to settle on a speakership candidate, rebels could easily absent themselves from the meeting, thus being released from a duty to support the party's choice.

A good example of this problem was the 26th Congress, which experienced widespread disloyalty on both sides of the aisle. Sen. Thomas Hart Benton (D-Mo.) undercut Democratic unity behind the candidacy of Dixon H. Lewis (D-Ala.) by convincing several of his followers to skip the caucus meeting, allowing them to block the election of the pro-Calhoun Lewis (Benton 1856, II:160; Leintz 1978, p. 76). At the same time the Whigs tried to rally around John Bell (W-Tenn.), but were stymied by a contingent who insisted on supporting William Dawson (W-Ga.). Thus, the parties themselves hardly seem to be good theoretical primitives on which to base predictions about coalition formation. At the same time, many of the inter-party factions were

³³Poole and Rosenthal (1997, Table 3.4) report that the most frequent substance associated with second-dimension issues from the 23rd to the 33rd Congresses was slavery, clearly a regional issue.

loose coalitions of like-minded individuals with no single, obvious leader. Therefore, the overall problem was often one of coordinating the behavior of scores of individual legislators, not one of coordinating the behavior of a handful of parties or proto-parties.

Leaving aside the problem of inter-party and factional cohesion, plus the problem of multi-dimensionality, Figure 14 provides a preliminary glance at the ideological connectedness of the speakership coalitions that emerged from 1839 to 1859—the period for which we have the micro-level data. Each panel shows the ideological location (measured with first dimension D-NOMINATE scores) of all those who voted for the winning Speaker candidate (the “winning coalition”) and all those voting for another candidate (the “losing coalition”) in each Congress. With a couple of notable exceptions, all the winning coalitions appear to be connected. In the few cases where a House member crossed party lines to support a Speaker from another party, the disloyal partisan was quite close to the Speaker’s party.

An important exception to connectedness was the 26th Congress, in which half a dozen South Carolina Democrats helped throw the contest to the minority Whigs. In that case, there was actually a collection of Democrats who were even *more* ideologically disposed to Whiggery than the South Carolinians, yet they remained loyal to their party.

More interesting, perhaps, is the connectedness of the *losing* coalitions and the evidence these figures provide about the fracturing of parties. Disloyal Whigs in the 27th Congress, for instance, shaded a bit to the Democratic side, yet most Whigs in this ideological space remained loyal.³⁴ The shunning of a party’s winning candidate was often not ideological, however. In the

³⁴These results for the 27th Congress call into question Leintz’s judgement (p. 78) that organizational politics in that Congress exhibited “a strong degree of party unity” among the Whigs.

27th Congress, the disloyal Whigs tended Democratic only slightly. Disloyal Democrats in the 31st Congress came disproportionately from the “Whig side” of the party, but many ideologically-identical Democrats remained loyal. Etc.

That majority party members sometimes refused to support their party’s *winning* Speaker candidate, even when that candidate was ideologically compatible, is intriguing. An important empirical question for future research is how these disloyalists were treated by the victorious Speaker. Harkening back to the discussion of Riker, it is further important to know whether the disloyal members were pushed or jumped. That is, did they withhold support from the winning candidate because the winning coalition was trying to avoid being over-sized (pushed), or were they perhaps responding to constituent or other political pressures (jumped)?

Laver-Shepsle and the making of multidimensional governing coalitions. Laver and Shepsle’s (1996) analysis of government formation also builds from the standard spatial model, but it is explicitly multidimensional. They argue that the practice of allocating cabinet portfolios among coalition partners limits the number and character of plausible governments *and* provides some predictability in the policy directions coalitions will pursue. Furthermore, they demonstrate that the durability of a coalition pairing rides on the distribution of portfolios among partners. Giving the Exchequer to party A and Foreign Affairs to party B may produce an unstable coalition while distributing Foreign Affairs to A and the Exchequer to B may be quite stable.

As with Axelrod’s approach, the applicability of Laver-Shepsle is limited in this case, to the extent that both parties and factions frequently lacked cohesiveness. Furthermore, as already noted, the gulf that divided the two parties was so great that trans-party coalitions were virtually

unthinkable. Therefore, the bargaining over the distribution of “portfolios” took place within the majority party. Because the principal line of cleavage was slavery, this reduces the bargaining situation back to unidimensionality.

Still, there are two ways in which the Laver-Shepsle framework may be helpful in orienting our understanding of organizational politics discussed in the first two sections. First, in the antebellum House there were a few Congresses in which neither major party held a majority and in which minor parties were pivotal. Such Congresses should be ripe for applying the Laver-Shepsle framework, if it is applicable at all. Three Congresses fit the bill here—the 31st (113 Whigs, 119 Democrats, 9 Free Soil, 1 American, 1 Independent), the 34th (84 Dem., 54 Amer., 101 “Opposition”), and the 36th (101 Dem., 114 Rep., 4 Amer., 19 “Opposition”). However, in two of these cases, the House chose to resolve the conflict using a plurality vote, and thus the largest party could prevail without having to forge a majority. Thus, Cobb’s coalition in the 31st Congress was composed entirely of Democrats. Banks’s majority in the 34th Congress was composed almost entirely of Opposition forces—a few of his American Party compatriots supported him on the final ballot, but most actually voted for the Democratic candidate, William Aiken (S.C.). (The Americans were just as regionally fractured as the Democrats.)

Even though an off-the-shelf version of the Laver-Shepsle framework is not especially apt for analyzing these years, the logic of its analysis alerts us to the value of cementing alliances using the distribution of control over institutions as a commitment device. Even when the major action was within a single party, “portfolio allocation” was undoubtedly a matter of negotiation between factional leadership in the antebellum period. For instance, in the process of agreeing upon a single Speaker candidate, northern and southern Democratic leaders undoubtedly

discussed the distribution of committee assignments between northern and southern factions, in those Congresses when Democrats held a majority. Giving control over slavery to the south and economics to the north would produce quite different policy outcomes than giving control over slavery to northern members and the economy to the south. In their research into antebellum House committee appointments, Stewart, et al. (1995) discovered that southerners were regularly over-represented on the committees that considered issues related to slavery—such as the Territories, District of Columbia, and Judiciary Committee. The question for future research is whether this over-representation was tied to explicit deals necessary to organize the House.

Legislative cartels

The final theoretical literature that is relevant to this investigation is more particular to the United States Congress. This is the literature that has emerged over the past decade to understand the dynamics of party government in Congress. In their study of modern House party organization, Cox and McCubbins (1993) argue that the majority party in the House constitutes a “legislative cartel,” in which it seizes control of the organizational prerogatives which belong, in theory, to the whole House. Using the muscle that comes from its numerical superiority, the majority party packs the committees and controls the agenda. This allows it to move policy outcomes toward the median of the majority party, even if the majority does not apply hard “pressure” on its members to toe the party line.

The idea of a legislative cartel seems, at first blush, to be a difficult one to defend in the era I am studying, given all we know about the weakness of holding the parties together for the purpose of organizing the House. Furthermore, many accounts of antebellum legislative battles

have revealed that committees could be readily rolled, suggesting that control over committees needn't lead to control over the policy agenda (see Stewart 1998). Nonetheless, the fact that the speakership was fought over so fiercely at times indicates that control over the organizational reins of the institution was valuable—winning the speakership granted a faction or a party more than just bragging rights. Therefore, the work of McCubbins and Cox prompts us to explore whether the coalitions that finally came together to elect Speakers were able to parlay these organizational victories into policy victories.

Recent work by Cox and McCubbins (1999; see also Lawrence, et al 1999) suggests that we should be able to observe the effects of a party-based legislative cartel by studying who wins the most roll call votes in the House in any given Congress. The intuition behind this idea is simple. If parties (or organizing coalitions) are *not* legislative cartels, then the chamber median should be the member whose preferences prevail on the most roll call votes. This follows directly from the median voter theorem, which states that the median voter will always vote on the winning side—if the median voter always votes on the winning side, s/he must always be the most frequent winner. The power of the legislative cartel can be observed by following the identity of the most frequent winner in the House, as control over the chamber switches hands from one party (or coalition) to another.

Because partisan organization was so weak in the antebellum House, we should expect to see victory go to the median member of the House in this period. Figure 15 shows this was not the case. For each Congress, I have calculated the percentage of times each member was on the winning side of all roll call votes. I have then plotted that winning percentage against the first dimension D-NOMINATE score of that member. The triangle in each figure shows the location

of the chamber median while the vertical line shows the location of the median of the largest party in the chamber. The curves that are fit in each panel are the predicted values from a regression that predicts the winning percentage as a function of a fourth-degree polynomial of D-NOMINATE, for each Congress.

One could spend a lot of time studying this figure, but three points emerge that are relevant to this paper. First, the degree to which ideology is correlated with winning (even accounting for non-linearities) varies across time, as a function of how coherent the party system was nationally. In the first two Congresses there was virtually no relationship between ideology and winning, but beginning in the 3rd Congress there always appears to be some relationship, until we get to the Era of Good Feeling, when the relationship goes flat again. After the Era of Good Feeling, a relationship between ideology and winning reemerges.

Second, one side of the ideological divide usually wins at a higher rate than the other. In part this is due to the fact that one side of the ideological divide always has a majority of the House—that's where the median lies, after all. However, closer examination of the relationship between the chamber median, the majority party median, and the location of the inflection points on the curve in each panel (where we predict the greatest winning percentage) demonstrates that it is not the *chamber* median who is usually advantaged, it's the majority party's median.

To summarize this relationship, in Figure 16 I have graphed the D-NOMINATE location of the chamber median, the majority-party median, and the ideological location of the House member whose D-NOMINATE score is associated with the greatest winning percentage in the

House.³⁵ The solid line graphs the location of the median House member, the dotted line graphs the location of the median of the largest party, and the large dots show the location of the estimated most-frequent winner. On the whole, these two graphs are bad news for a simple majoritarian view of the antebellum House of Representatives, since the ideological location of the most frequent winner is closer to the majority party median roughly two-thirds of the time—24 times out of 37.

What is oddest about this figure is the indication that in nine cases—the 1st, 3rd, 15th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 31st, 32nd, and 35th Congresses—the *minority party* tended to win more often than the majority. Some of these anomalies are likely due to the difficulties of assigning members proper party labels in the earliest period. Difficulties in assigning party labels are likely to account for all of the anomalous cases through the 22nd Congress, with the possible exception of the 15th.³⁶ It does not account for the last three anomalous cases, all of which saw the Whigs (and Whig-leaning Democrats) dominate the roll call record in a Congress that was controlled, at least nominally, by Democrats.

I complete this analysis by exploring whether supporters of the victorious speakership candidate found themselves on the winning side of legislative battles more often in the ensuing

³⁵This was calculated simply by running a regression of the form:

$$W_{i,c} = b_0 + b_1 D_{i,c} + b_2 D_{i,c}^2 + b_3 D_{i,c}^3 + b_4 D_{i,c}^4 + e_{i,c},$$

where $W_{i,c}$ = the winning percentage of member i in Congress c and $D_{i,c}$ = the first dimension D-NOMINATE score for member i in Congress c . I generated predicted values from this regression ($\hat{W}_{i,c}$) and then calculated the location of $D_{i,c}$ that corresponded with $\hat{W}_{i,c}$.

³⁶The 15th may not be exceptional simply because the most-frequent-winner was located nearly on top of the House median, and thus a simpler variant of pivotal politics may have been in operation there.

Congress than those who opposed the winning Speaker. Taking into account the two previous graphs, we need to control for ideology in conducting this analysis. We also need to control for party, to capture whatever degree of party regularity was achieved—against all odds—in any particular Congress.

As Table 7 shows, even after we control for ideology and party, in every Congress but one, supporters of the Speaker were on the winning side more often than non-supporters.³⁷ The average size of the effect was 5.3%, during a period when the average win rate was 62%. The raw difference in winning percentages between supporters of the Speaker and non-supporters was 8.3%. Thus, even after controlling for preferences and party, an added bonus remained to being on the Speaker's side on the final ballot.

There are a couple of general lessons to take from this analysis. First, it does appear that in most Congresses *some* form of agenda control was present sufficient enough to pull policy proposals away from the chamber median and toward one of the ideological polls. Usually, proposals were favored in the direction of the majority party, but not always. Second, in those few cases where the Speaker was elected through plurality or from the minority party, the winning advantage did *not* generally go the Speaker's way. The 26th Congress, in which the Whig Robert Hunter was elected Speaker with the help of a few renegade Democrats, the Democrats still prevailed in most roll call votes. In the 31st Congress, when the Democrat Howell Cobb eventually triumphed by winning a plurality vote, the Whigs were on average more victorious than

³⁷In the regressions reported in Table 2, I have included the first two D-NOMINATE scores, plus the squares of those scores, to control for preferences. Higher order polynomials improve the overall fit of the equations marginally, but do not change the size of the “winner” coefficients.

the Democrats. Only in the 34th Congress, when the American Nathaniel Banks was elected Speaker largely through the good graces of the chamber's nascent Republicans, did the winning "party" also dominate the legislative agenda. Finally, supporters of the Speaker were happier than non-supporters with the legislative product of Congress, even after controlling for the fact that Speakers were usually from the majority party and on the dominant ideological pole of the House. There are many competing explanations for why this may be so, and so we should treat this finding cautiously. However, this does suggest that we should look for evidence of the mechanism through which this might occur, such as through committee assignments.

IV. Conclusion and Discussion

This is a preliminary paper, meant to establish certain empirical regularities and explore future topics of research. The narratives in Sections I and II were laid out in only the barest of details, drawing on standard historical sources and original data-gathering. With electronic databases each day cataloguing new original archival sources of congressional papers, it is now possible to augment the standard historiography—which in some cases is now over a century old—with new qualitative data. Furthermore, the public record—such as newspapers and the verbatim congressional debates—that has always existed contains much more information about the politics of these speakership contests than has ever made it into the scholarly literature. Trolling through all these qualitative sources will be a major undertaking as this project goes forward.

Likewise, even though I have based a good deal of this paper on original data-gathering of voting on speakership ballots, much remains to be done. While of secondary interest to most political scientists, the original data that exist in the House *Journals* concerning balloting for other

House officers—like the Clerk, Public Printer, and Sergeant-at-Arms—have not been collected or analyzed. These are secondary officers, to be sure, but their election was often politically significant.³⁸

The focus of this paper has been on the outcomes of the speakership contests. While even that analysis is only preliminary, I have not explored in any detail the consequences of the outcomes. The only exception here is the analysis at the end of Section III, which points toward something like a legislative cartel even in the antebellum House. However, I have provided no direct information about how such a cartel may have operated, if it in fact existed. Circumstantial and anecdotal evidence suggest that the cartel operated through the committee system. However, previous research by Stewart et al (1995) and Stewart (1998) casts doubts on any simple stories of committee stacking during this period. Most importantly, committees were often stacked, but committees were often rolled. Further research into how legislative organization affected policy outcomes during this period will end up being the most important element of my future research into understanding the origins of the congressional structure-induced equilibrium.

The title of this paper makes reference to Cox's *Efficient Secret*, an accounting of how the mechanism of cabinet government emerged in England in the early 19th century—roughly corresponding with the time period of this paper. The subject of this current paper has certainly been a secret to most political scientists, historians, and observers of American politics. Those observers of American politics who *have* made note of antebellum organizational politics, and

³⁸Also, given the fact that the Clerk and the Public Printer were responsible for the primary original source material congressional historians must use, their election is important for the preservation of history itself. No user of these materials can be unaware that victorious Printers and Clerks varied enormously in their diligence and skill.

particularly those who lived through them, have regarded this feature of early 19th century American government as inefficient, perhaps even sinister.

The one topic I must leave entirely to the future is how this American *inefficient* secret became the American version of an *efficient* secret (with apologies to Cox). That is to say, if the House had not settled upon a simple partisan organization of the body by 1865, it is hard to imagine anyone singing the virtues of the House as an “institutionalized” body in its future history (Polsby 1968). Thus, while understanding how the chaotic years unfolded, understanding how the transition occurred to the modern era of organizational politics is perhaps even more critical. It is to that topic that we ultimately must turn our attention.

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Figure 1. Summary of speakership ballots, 16th Congress, 2nd session.

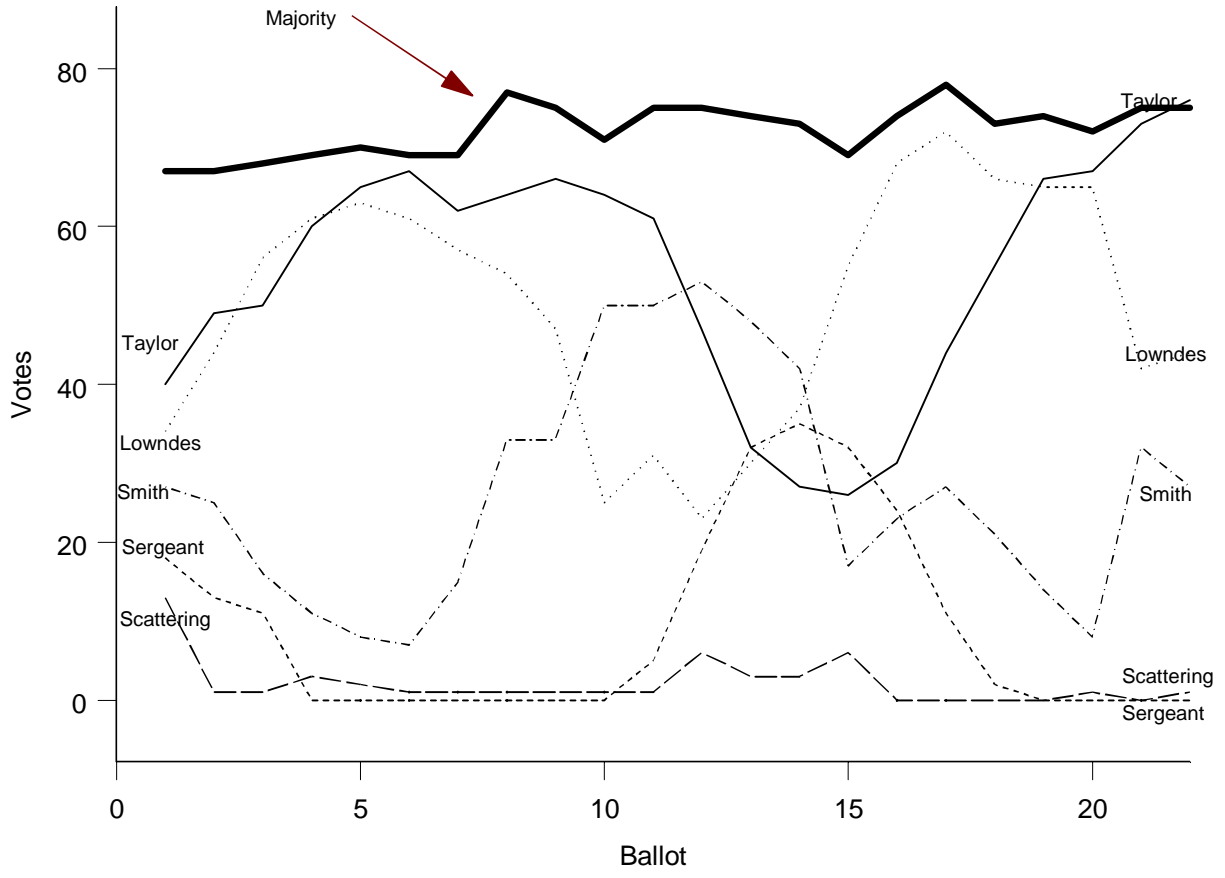


Figure 2. Summary of speakership ballots, 17th Congress.

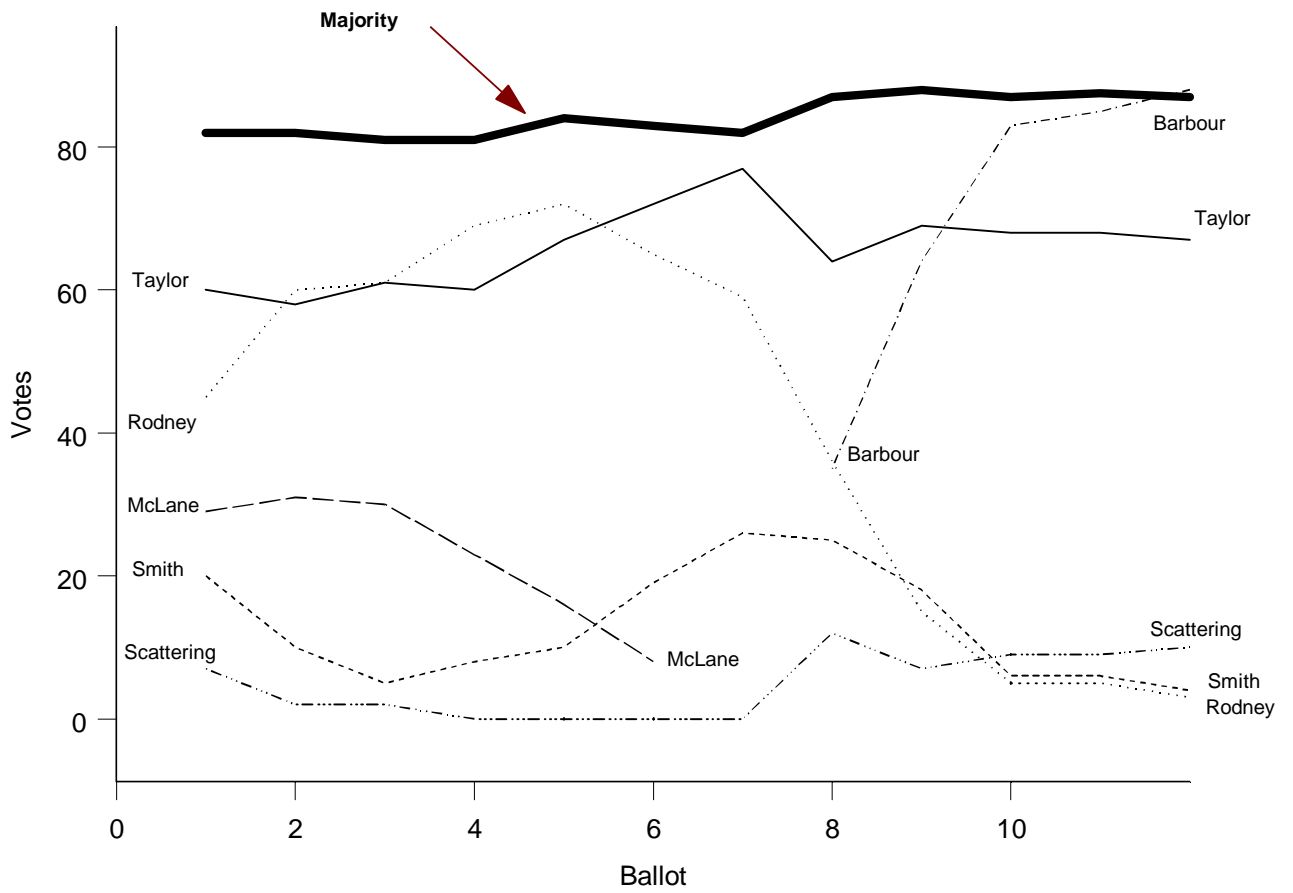


Figure 3. Summary of speakership ballots, 23rd Congress, 2nd session.

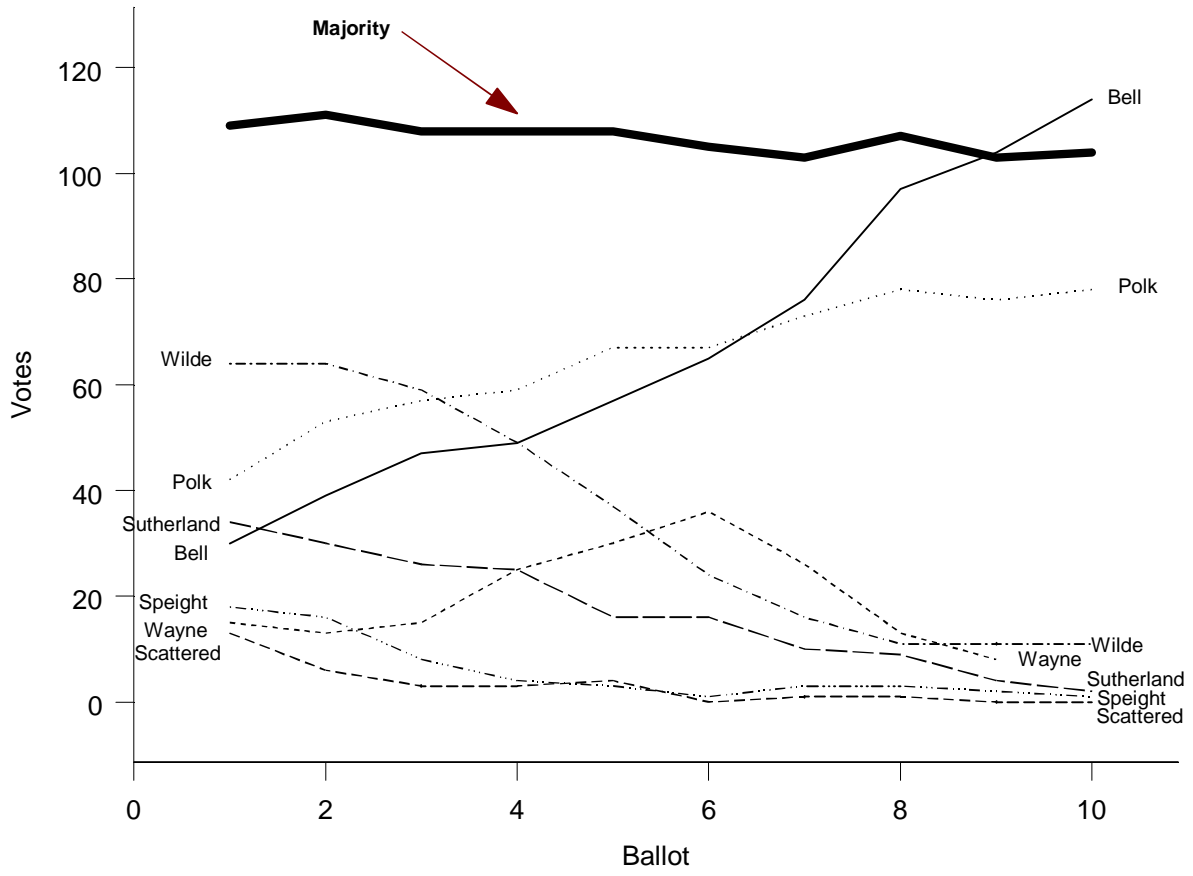


Figure 4. Ideological (D-NOMINATE) location of speakership candidates in the 23rd Congress.

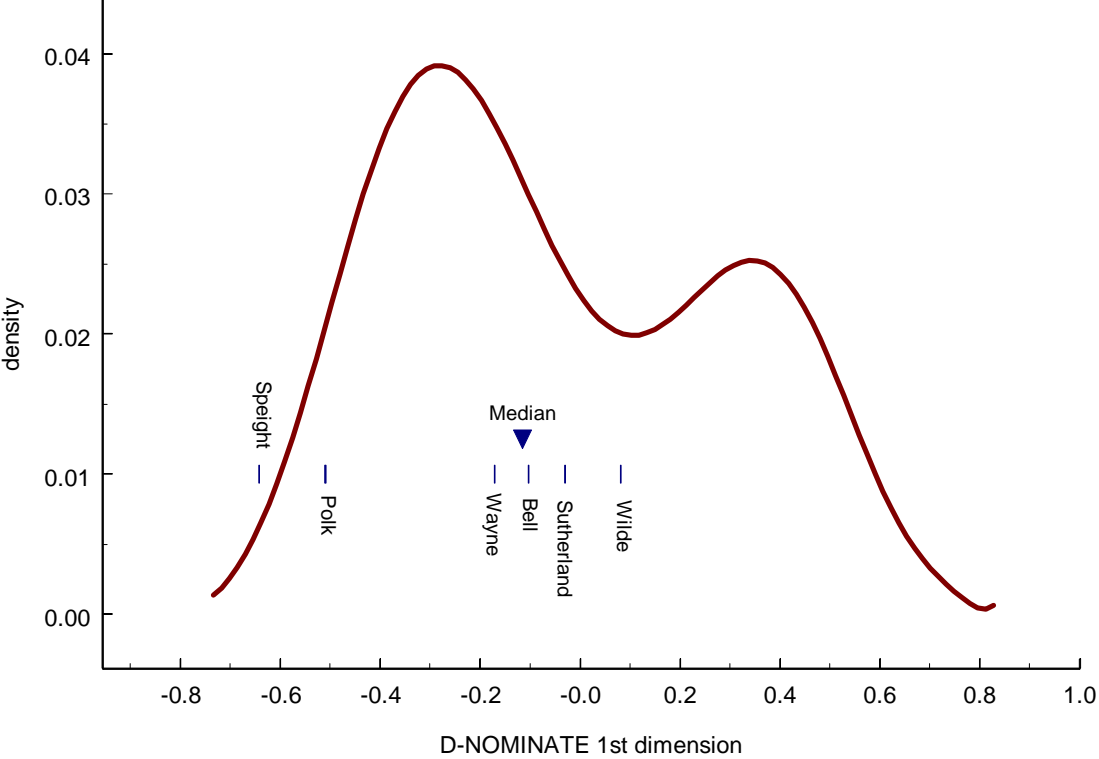
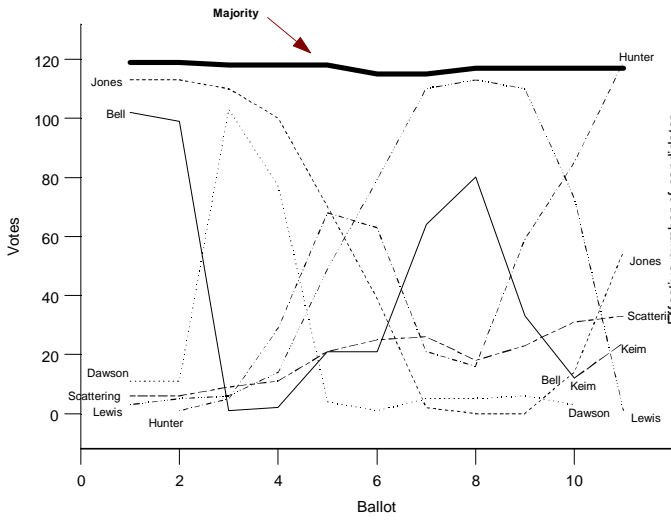
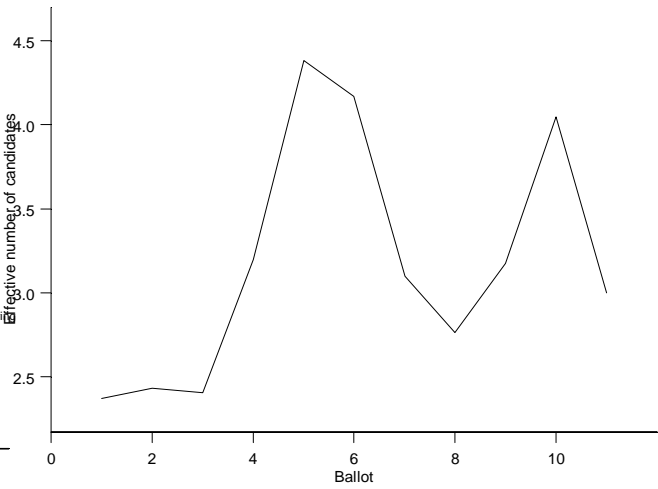


Figure 5. Summary of speakership ballots, 26th Congress.

a. Summary of results



b. Effective number of candidates



c. Fraction of votes unchanged from previous ballot.

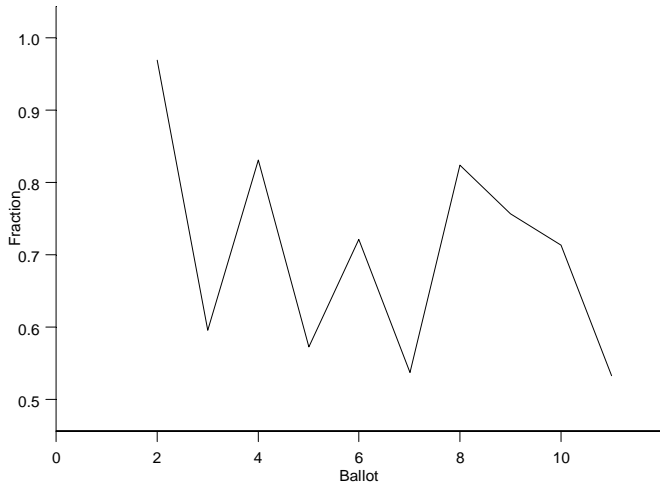


Figure 6. Spatial analysis of 26th Congress Speakership contest

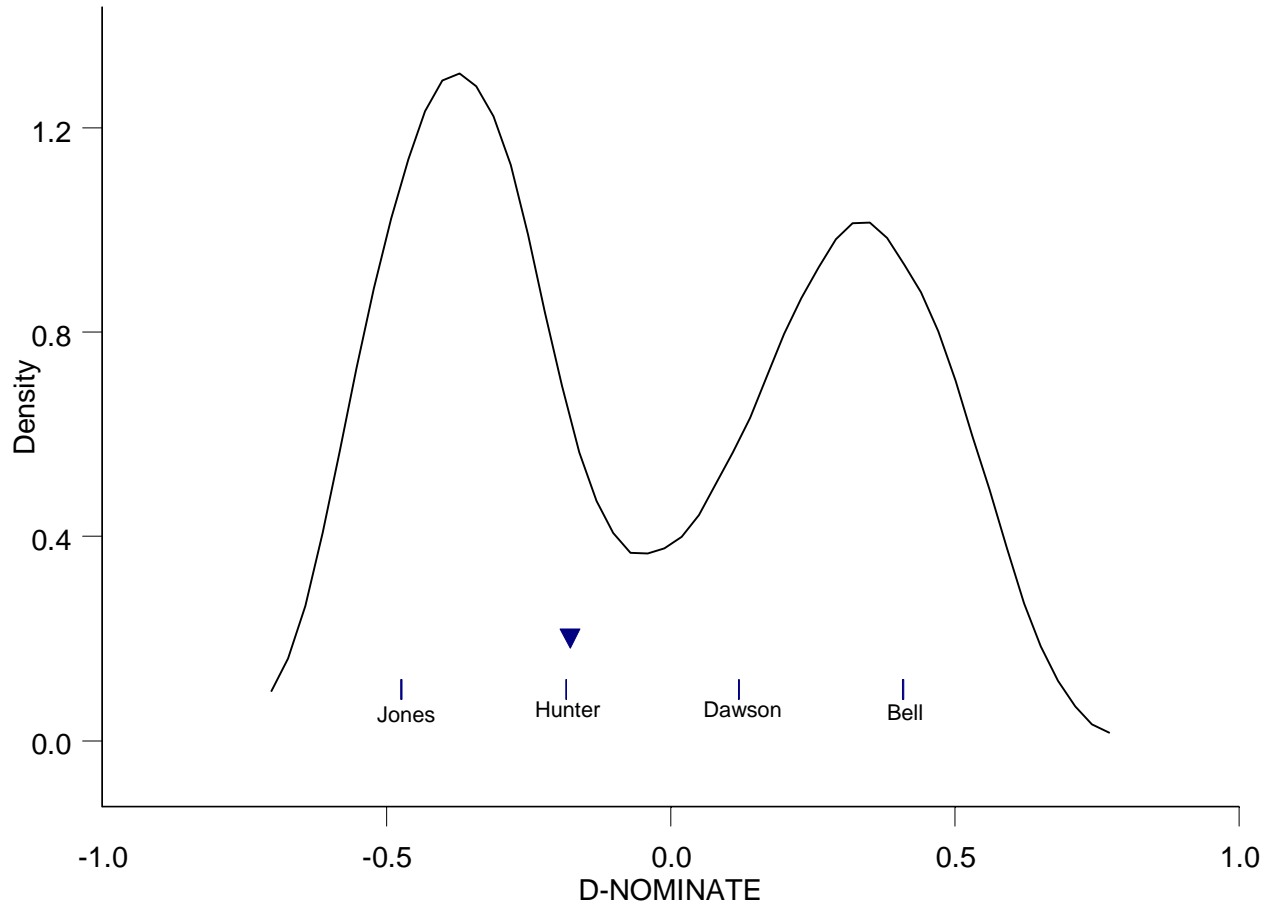
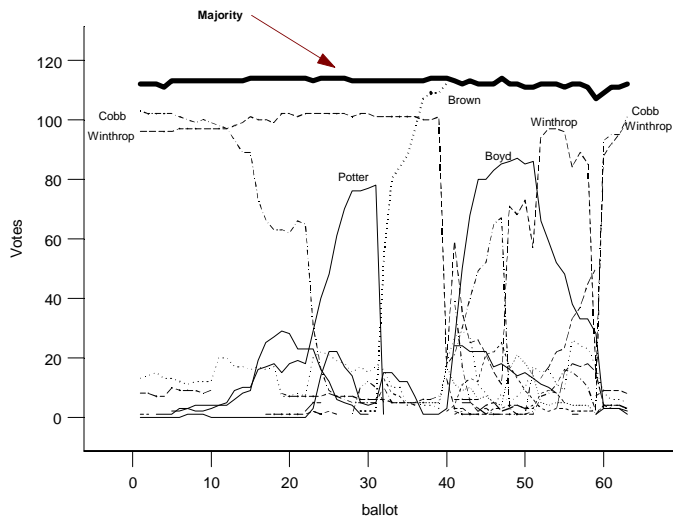
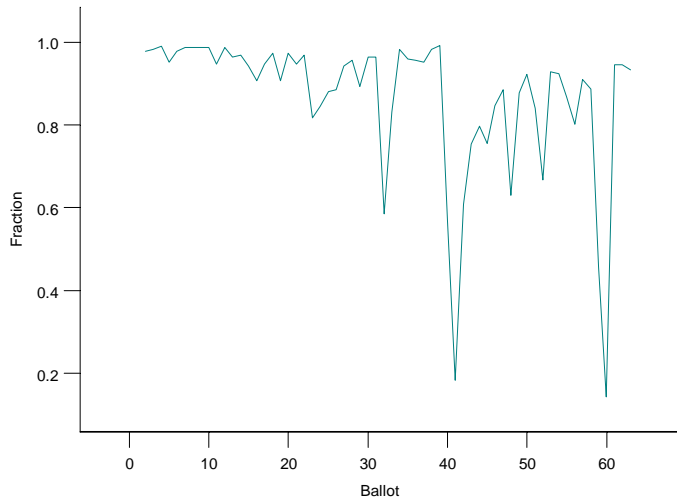
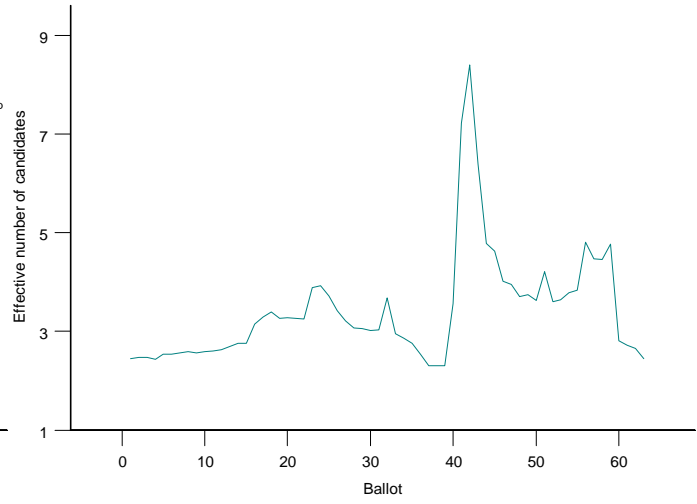


Figure 7. Summary of speakership ballots, 31st Congress.

a. Summary results



b. Effective number of candidates



c. Fraction of votes unchanged from previous ballot.

Figure 8. Spatial analysis of the 31st Congress speakership contest.

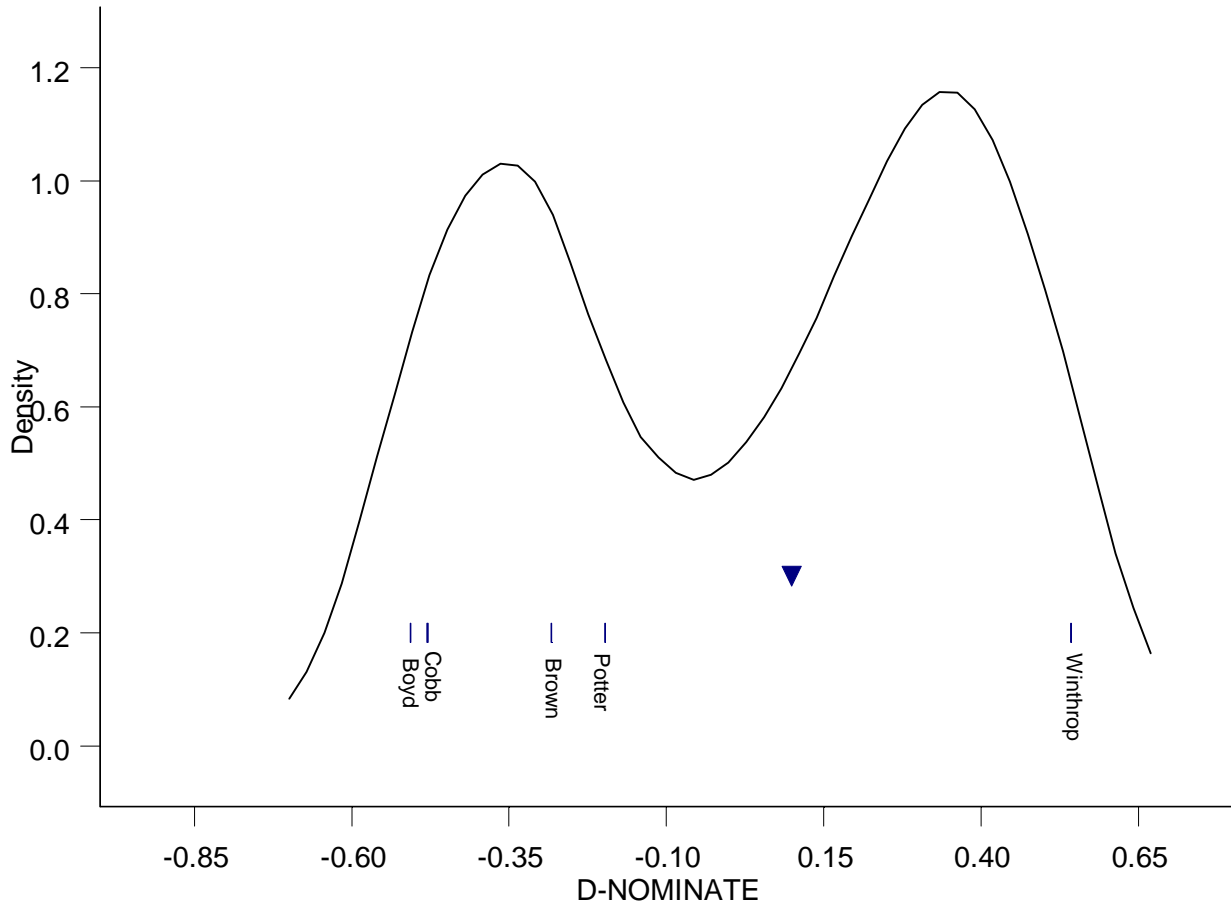
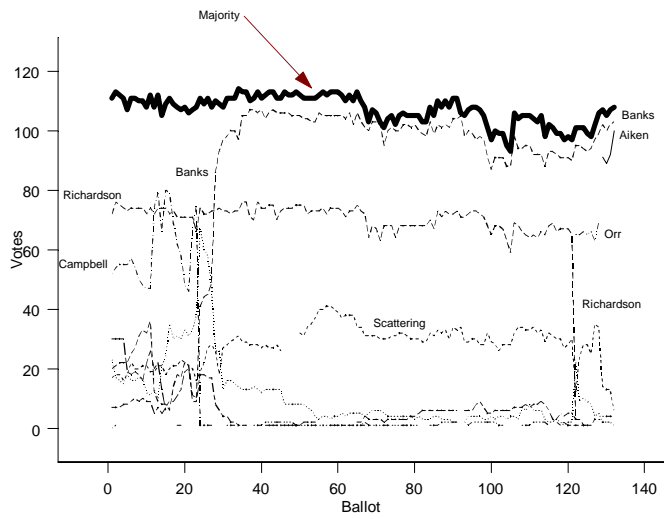
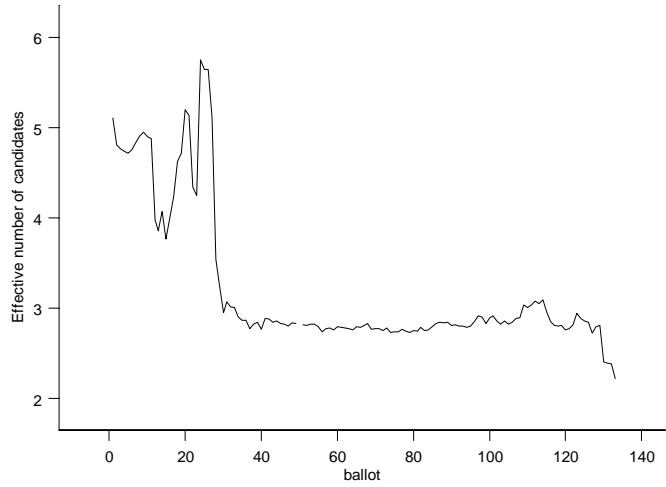


Figure 9. Summary of speakership ballots, 34th Congress.

a. Summary results



b. Effective number of candidates.



c. Fraction of votes unchanged from previous ballot.

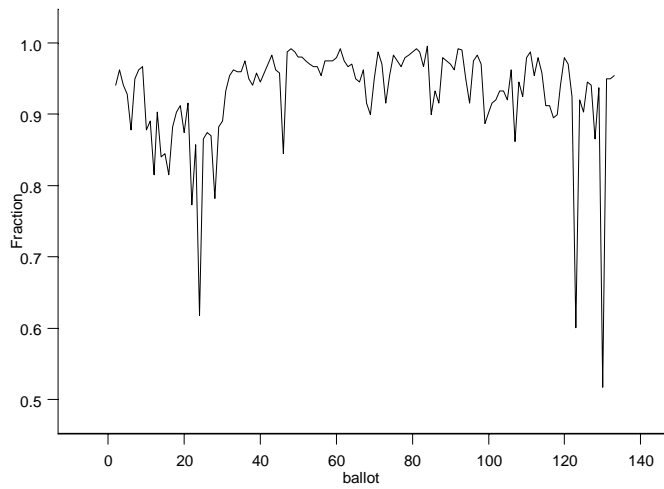
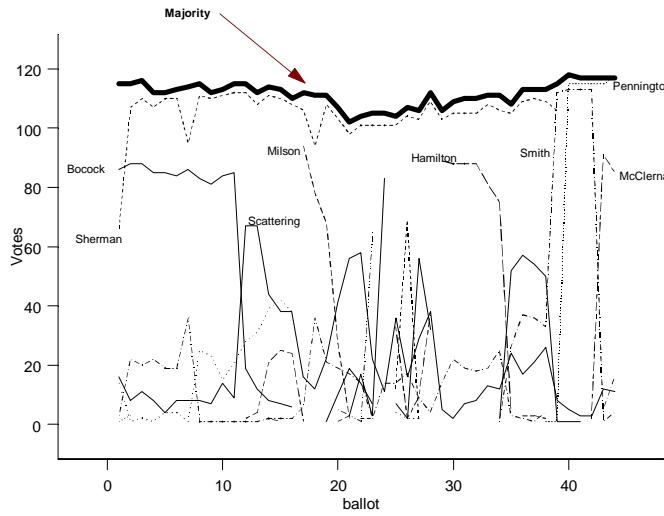
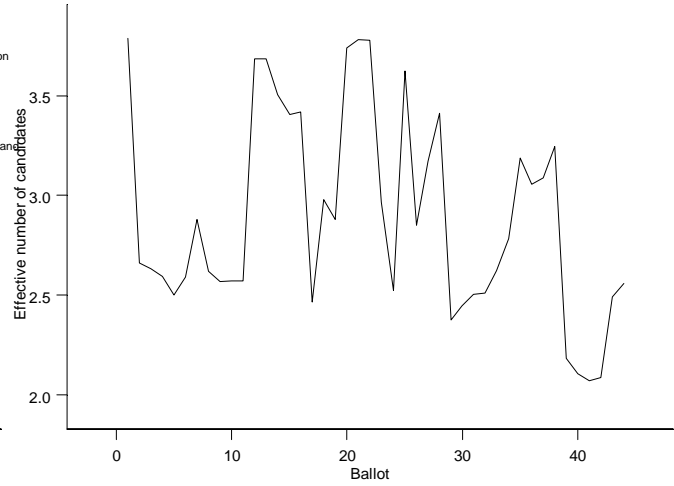


Figure 10. Summary of speakership ballots, 36th Congress.

a. Summary of results



b. Effective number of candidates



c. Fraction of votes unchanged from previous ballot.

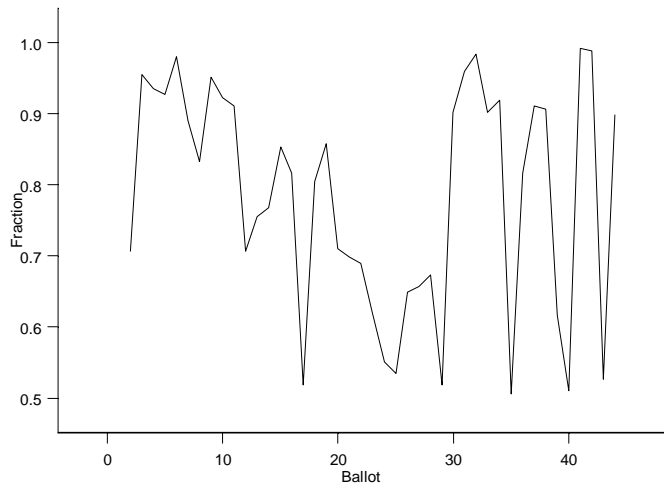


Figure 11. Spatial configuration of the 36th Congress speakership contest.

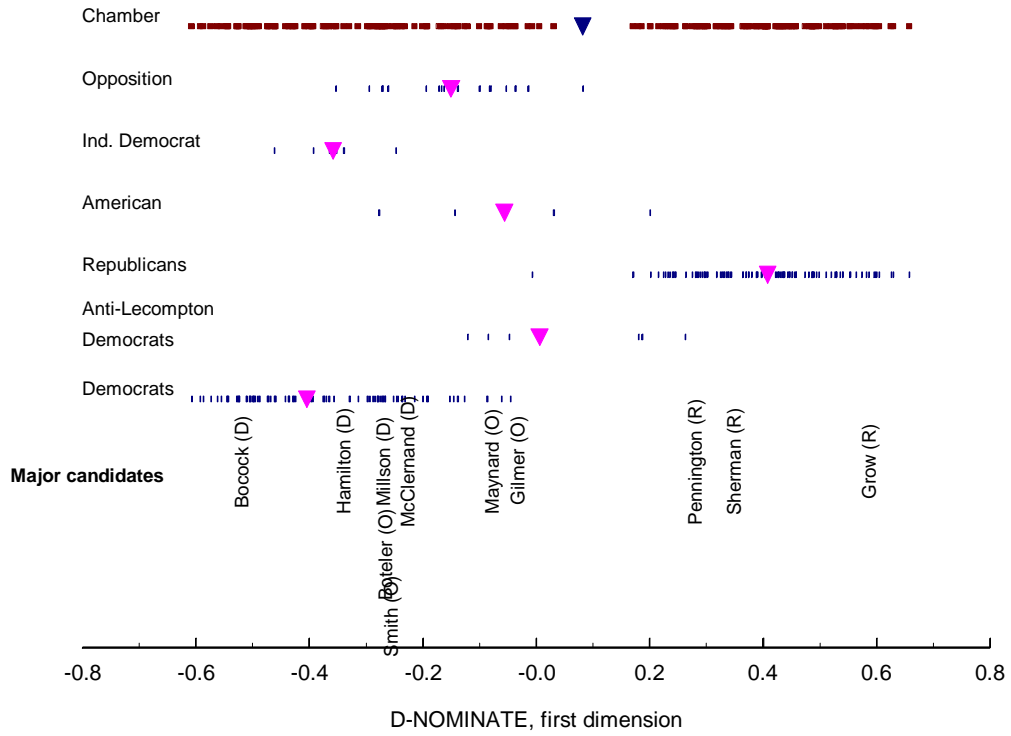


Figure 12. Ideological configuration of support for Speaker on the final ballot, 36th Congress.

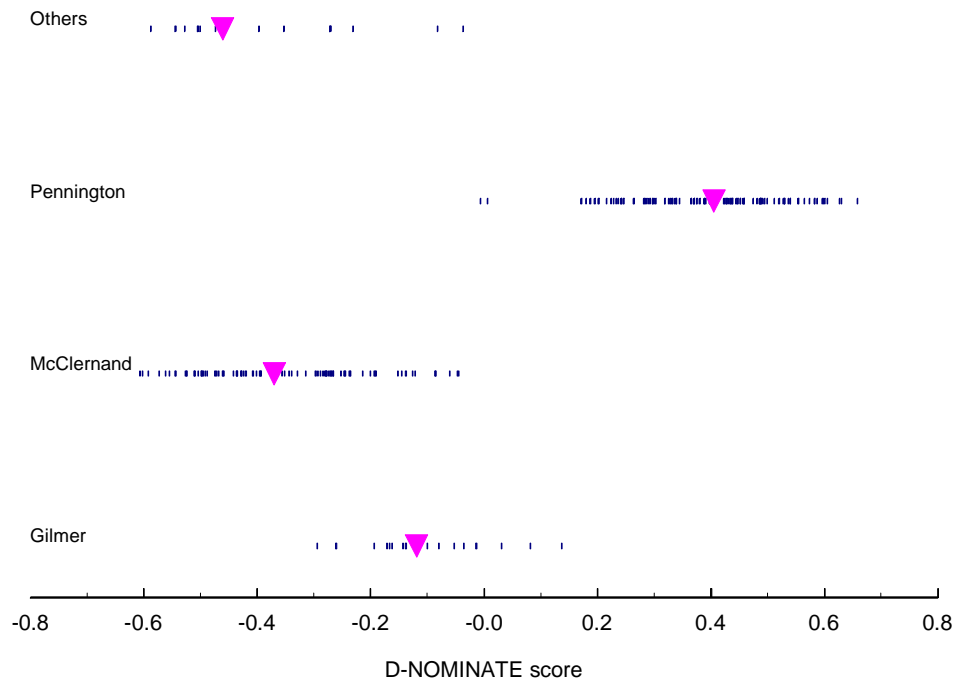
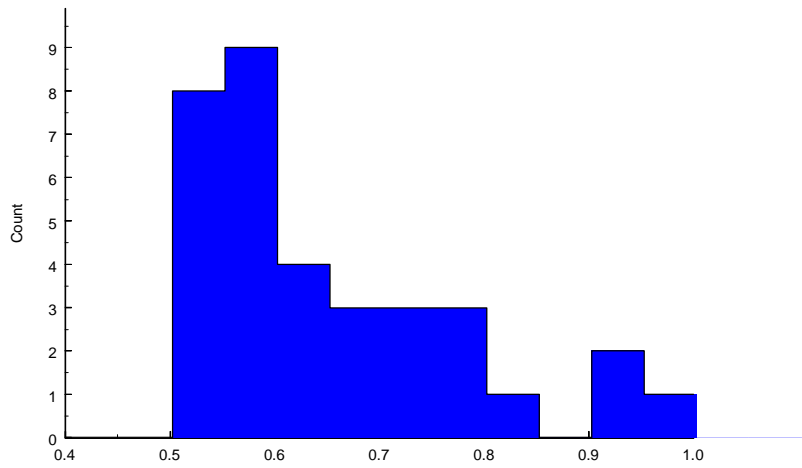


Figure 13. The Size of Winning Speakership Coalitions, 1789–1859.

a. Single-ballot contests.



b.. Speakership contests with multiple ballots

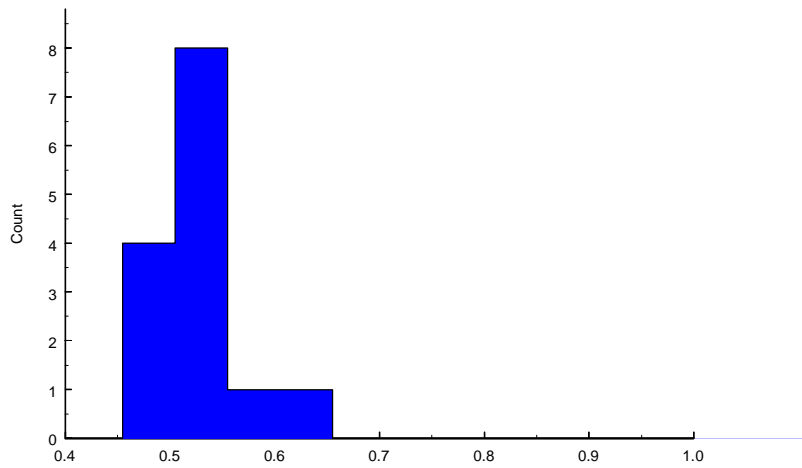
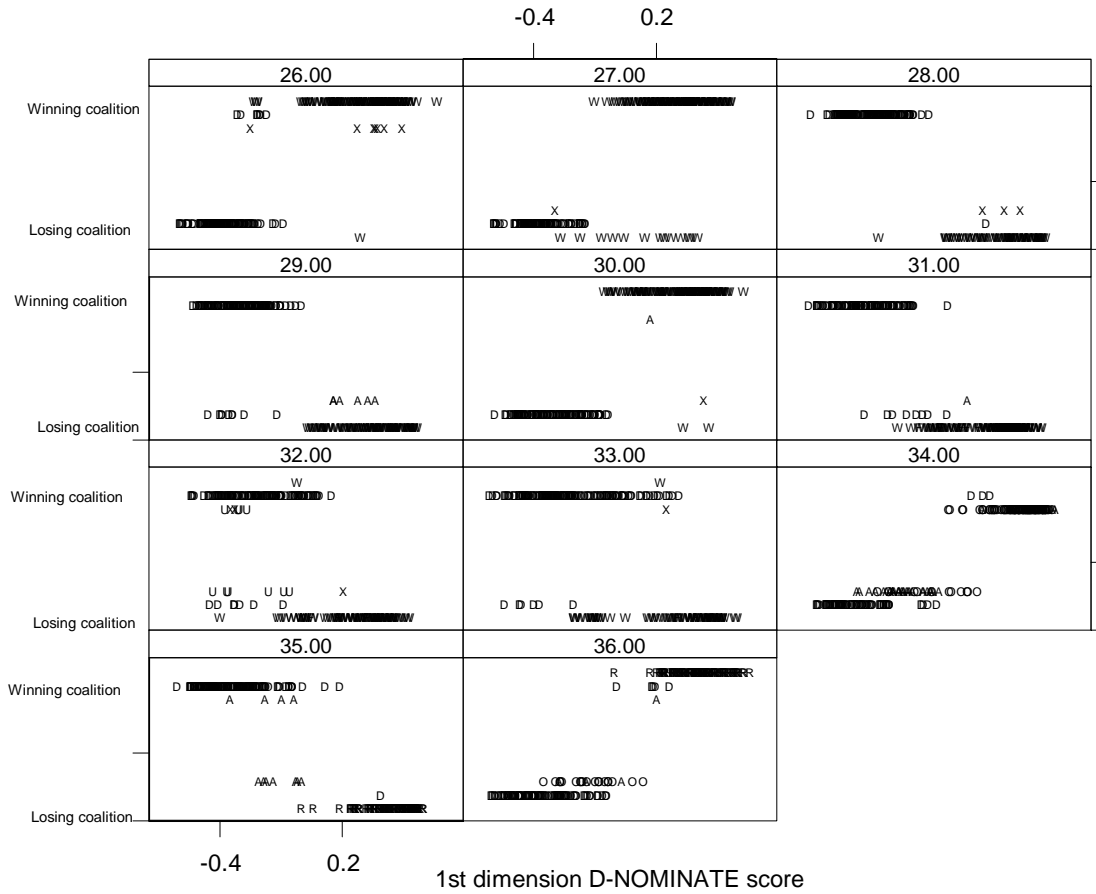
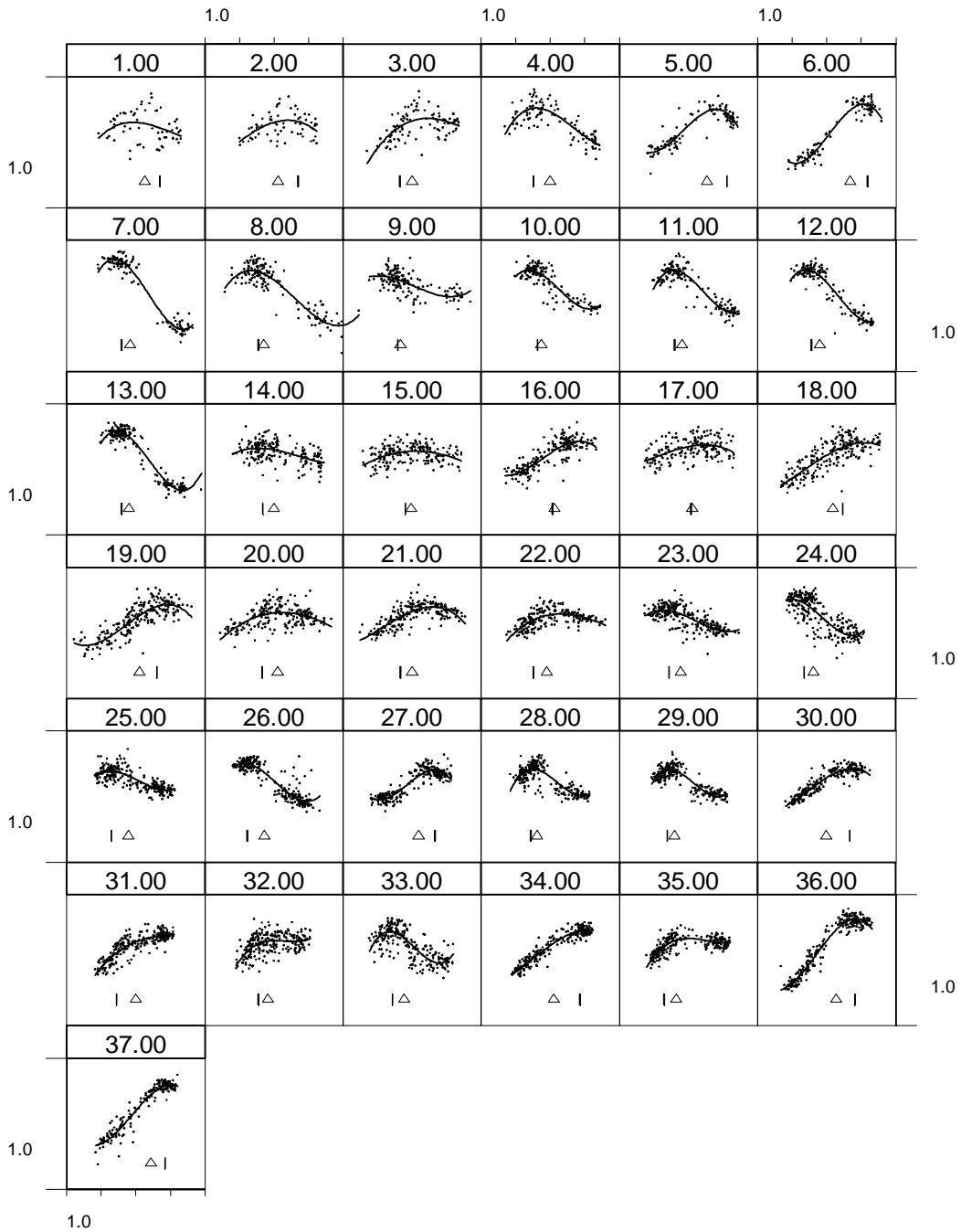


Figure 14. Ideological composition of winning and losing Speaker coalitions, 26th–36th Congress (1839–59)



Party symbols:
 A: American
 D: Democrat
 F: Free Soil
 O: Opposition
 R: Republican
 U: Unon
 X: All other

Figure 15. Relationship between ideology and roll call winning percentage, by Congress, 1st–37th Congress (1789–1861).



Triangle = chamber median; vertical line = location of median of largest party.

Figure 16. Summary of ideological location of most frequent roll-call winners, 1st–37th Congress (1789–1861)

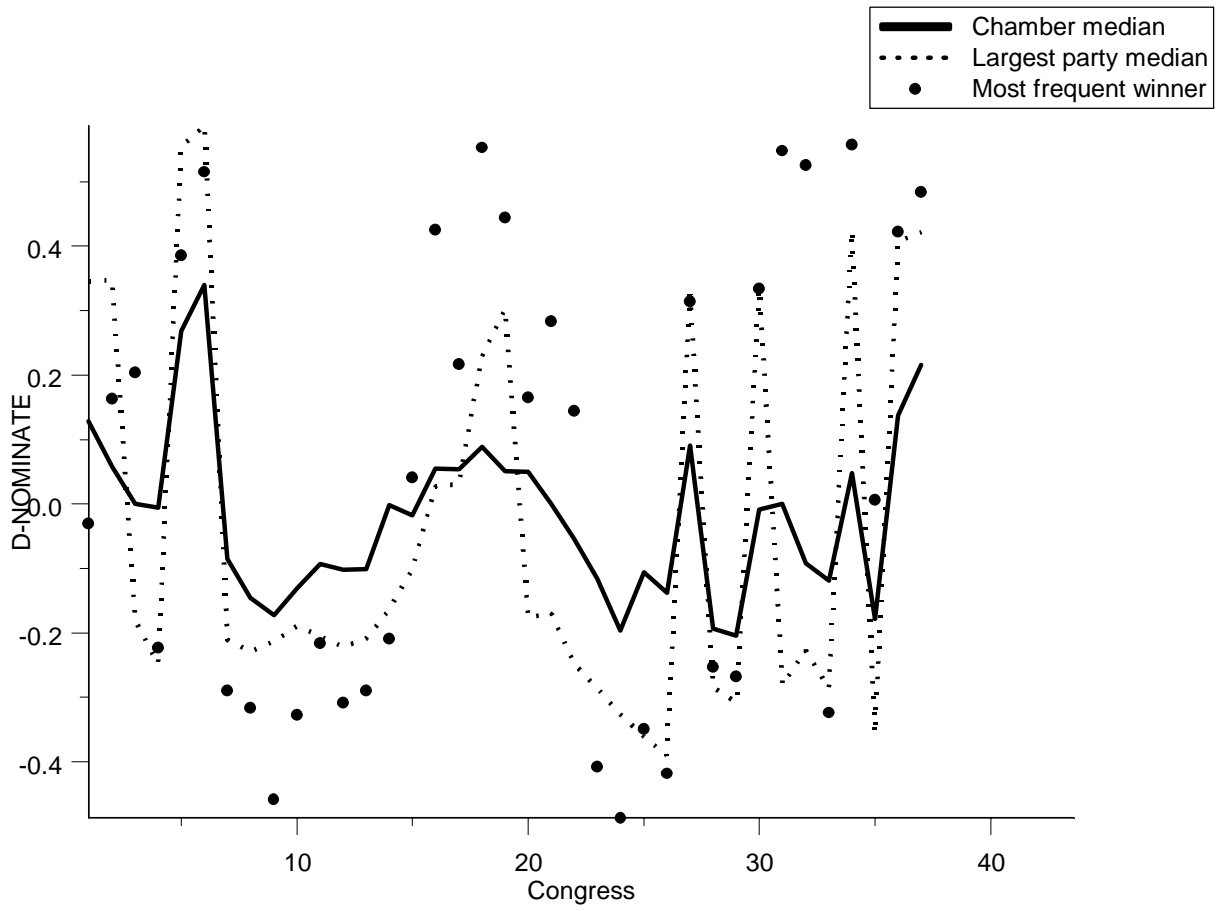


Table 1. Summary Speakership votes, 1st–57th Congress (1789–1901)

Year	Cong	sess.	Ballots	Effective number of candidates			Winning Speaker candidate		Majority party	
				First ballot	Last ballot	Winning pct.	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. Summary of Democratic voting for Speaker, 26th–36th Congress (1839–59).

Cong.	Size	First ballot				Last ballot				
		Leader	Votes	Total candidates receiving ballots	Effective number of candidates ^a	Ballot number	Leader	Votes	Total candidates receiving ballots	Effective number of candidates ^a
26	119 ^M	Jones	111	4	1.1	11	Jones	54	13	3.7
27	86	Jones	83	3	1.1	1				
28	128 ^M	Jones ^s	128	1	1	1				
29	129 ^M	Davis ^s	120	2	1.1	1				
30	104	Boyd	59	7	2.6	3	Boyd	62	11	2.5
31	108 ^L	H. Cobb ^s	102	7	1.1	63	H. Cobb ^s	100 ^P	6	1.2
32	114 ^M	Boyd ^s	107	5	1.1	1				
33	142 ^M	Boyd	136	4	1.1	1				
34	75	Richardson	69	7	1.2	133	Aiken	69	3	1.1
35	123 ^M	Orr ^s	123	1	1	1				
36	80	Bocock	78	3	1.1	44				

^aDefined in text.

^PElected Speaker by a plurality of the ballots cast.

^sElected Speaker.

^LLargest party in the House.

^MMajority party in the House.

Table 4. Summary of Whig and Republican voting for Speaker, 26th–36th Congress (1839–59).

Cong.	Size	First ballot				Last ballot				
		Leader	Votes	Total candidates receiving ballots	Effective number of candidates ^a	Ballot number	Leader	Vote s	Total candidates receiving ballots	Effective number of candidates ^a
Whigs										
26	106	Bell	94	4	1.3	11	Hunter ^a	118	2	1.0
27	134 ^M	White ^c	121	5	1.2	1				
28	56	White	56	1	1	1				
29	75	Vinton	71	5	1.1	1				
30	112 ^M	Winthrop	108	5	1.1	3	Winthrop ^b	109	3	1.0
31	103	Winthrop	95	3	1.2	63	Winthrop	97	5	1.1
32	73	Stanly	21	15	5.5	1				
33	65	Chandler	34	9	3.2	1				
"Opposition"										
34	96 ^L	Campbell	47	16	3.6	133	Banks ^c	81 ^P	4	1.3
Republicans										
35	88	Grow	82	5	1.1	1				
36	108 ^L	Sherman	63	5	1.1	44	Pennington ^b	107	1	1

^aDefined in text.

^bElected Speaker by a plurality of the ballots cast.

^cElected Speaker.

^LLargest party in the House.

^MMajority party in the House.

Table 5. Number of “scattering” ballots, by party, 26th–36th Congress.

Cong.	Party of Speaker	Number of party members voting for a candidate receiving fewer than 10 votes					Number of party members voting for a candidate ranking third or below on the final ballot				
		Dem.	Whig	Opp.	Rep.	Other	Dem.	Whig	Opp.	Rep.	Other
26	W	33	1			0	57	1			0
27	W	3	13			0	3	13			0
28	D	0	0			1	0	0			1
29	D	9	4			6	9	4			6
30	W	27	2			1	41	2			1
31	D	8	6			8	8	6			8
32	D	7	22			8	7	51			14
33	D	6	21			1	6	30			3
34	A	1		6		4	1		6		4
35	D	0			6	7	0			6	7
36	R	10		5	0	0	10		19	0	2

Shaded rows are Congresses when the House elected the Speaker on a plurality vote.

Table 6. Fraction of party contingents refusing to back the party's principal Speaker candidate.

Cong	Democrats			Whigs/Republicans		
	All	South	Non-south	All	South	Non-south
26	48.3% (118)	37.5% (32)	52.3% (86)	1.0% (105)	0% (26)	1.3% (79)
27	3.4% (86)	13.0% (23)	0% (63)	9.7% (134)	22.2% (27)	6.5% (107)
28	0% (128)	0% (32)	0% (96)	0% (56)	0% (8)	0% (48)
29	7.0% (129)	23.1% (39)	0% (90)	5.3% (75)	10.0% (10)	4.6% (65)
30	39.8% (103)	42.4% (33)	38.6% (70)	1.8% (111)	0% (19)	2.2% (92)
31	7.4% (108)	5.1% (39)	8.7% (69)	5.8% (103)	40.0% (15)	0% (88)
32	6.1% (114)	22.2% (27)	1.1% (87)	70.0% (73)	90.0% (10)	66.7% (63)
33	4.2% (142)	14.3% (42)	0% (100)	46.2% (65)	83.3% (6)	42.4% (59)
34	1.4% (73)	0% (40)	3.0% (33)	6.5% (92)	—	6.5% (92)
35	0% (123)	0% (49)	0% (74)	6.8% (88)	—	6.8% (88)
36	12.2% (82)	22.0% (41)	2.4% (41)	0% (107)	—	0% (107)

Table 7. Sources of support for winning Speaker candidates, 26th–36th Congress (1839–59).

Cong.	Winner			Sources of votes for election									
	Name	Party	Votes received	Necessary for election	Dem.	Whig	Rep.	Anti-Mason	Amer.	Opp.	Conser v.	Unionist	Ind.
26	Hunter	W	118	116	7	104		6			1		
27	White	W	121	111		121							
28	Jones	D	128	95	128								
29	Davis	D	120	106	120								
30	Winthrop	W	108	109	1	109			1				
31	H. Cobb	D	100	112 ^p	100								
32	Boyd	D	117	106	112	1							
33	Boyd	D	139	109	137	1						4	1
34	Banks	Amer.	102	108 ^p	3				18	81			
35	Orr	D	127	113	123				4				
36	Pennington	R	113	117	5		107		1				

^pPlurality election.

Table 8. Support for speakership candidates on the 100th and 133rd ballots, 34th Congress.

100th ballot	113rd ballot						Total
	William Aiken (D-S.C.)	Nathaniel P. Banks (A-Mass.)	Lewis D. Campbell (O-Ohio)	Henry M. Fuller (O-Penn.)	Daniel Wells (D-Wisc.)	No vote	
Nathaniel P. Banks (A-Mass.)	0	87	0	0	0	4	91
Henry Bennett (O-N.Y.)	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Henry M. Fuller (O-Penn.)	26	0	0	5	0	1	32
James L. Orr (D-S.C.)	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
Alexander C. Pennington (D-Ill.)	0	0	4	0	0	1	5
Gilchrist Porter (O-Mo.)	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
William A. Richardson (D-Ill.)	63	0	0	0	1	4	68
John Williams (D-N.Y.)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
No vote	9	15	0	1	0	—	25
Total	100	103	4	6	1	12	226

Table 9. Ideological position of supporters for major candidates on the 100th and 133rd ballots, 34th Congress. (Average D-NOMINATE scores, *N*'s in parentheses)

First dimension

100th ballot	133rd ballot				
	Banks	Aiken	Fuller	Abstain	Total
Banks	.45 (86)			.41 (4)	.45 (90)
Fuller		-.14 (26)	.07 (5)	-.03 (1)	-.10 (32)
Richardson		-.38 (62)		-.40 (4)	-.38 (66)
Abstain	.40 (15)	-.31 (9)	-.05 (1)		.13 (25)
Total	.44 (101)	-.31 (97)	.06 (6)	.00 (9)	.07 (213)

Second dimension

100th ballot	133rd ballot				
	Banks	Aiken	Fuller	Abstain	Total
Banks	-.05 (86)			-.02 (4)	-.04 (90)
Fuller		.17 (26)	.26 (5)	.27 (1)	.19 (32)
Richardson		-.03 (62)		-.08 (4)	-.04 (66)
Abstain	-.01 (15)	.05 (9)	.38 (1)		.03 (25)
Total	-.04 (101)	.03 (97)	.28 (6)	-.02 (9)	.00 (213)

Table 10. Partisan distribution of support for speakership candidates on 44th ballot, 36th Congress.

	Dem.	Anti-Lec. Dem.	Rep.	Ind. Dem.	Amer.	Opp.	Total
Gilmer	0	0	0	2	0	14	16
McClernand	73	3	0	2	7	0	85
Pennington	0	5	111	1	0	0	117
Other	10	0	0	0	0	5	15
Total	83	8	111	5	7	19	233

Table 11. Effect of ideology, party, and speakership vote on winning percentage, 26th–36th Congress, 1839–1859.

Cong.	Const.	D-NOMINATE, first dimension (d_1)		D-NOMINATE, second dimension (d_2)		Whig/Rep.	Voted for winner	R2	N
		d_1	d_1^2	d_2	d_2^2				
26	0.69 (0.01)	-0.23 (0.02)	-0.25 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.02)	-0.06 (0.07)	-0.043 (0.012)	-0.057 (0.013)	.93	230
27	0.55 (0.01)	0.12 (0.02)	-0.092 (0.035)	0.085 (0.017)	-0.025 (0.067)	0.062 (0.017)	0.046 (0.012)	.86	221
28	0.60 (0.02)	-0.066 (0.029)	-0.24 (0.04)	-0.14 (0.02)	-0.10 (0.08)	-0.020 (0.023)	0.096 (0.029)	.82	188
29	0.63 (0.01)	-0.090 (0.022)	-0.18 (0.03)	-0.12 (0.02)	0.045 (0.59)	-0.059 (0.013)	0.043 (0.012)	.86	210
30	0.62 (0.01)	0.13 (0.03)	-0.36 (0.04)	-0.017 (0.019)	-0.24 (0.05)	0.004 (0.027)	0.10 (0.03)	.84	218
31	0.64 (0.01)	0.30 (0.02)	-0.35 (0.04)	-0.035 (0.019)	-0.15 (0.07)	-0.007 (0.015)	0.046 (0.014)	.79	221
32	0.63 (0.01)	0.21 (0.02)	-0.17 (0.05)	0.24 (0.02)	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.027 (0.016)	0.050 (0.012)	.58	207
33	0.62 (0.02)	-0.24 (0.02)	-0.15 (0.05)	0.33 (0.03)	-0.30 (0.11)	0.010 (0.025)	0.016 (0.022)	.72	211
34	0.58 (0.01)	0.24 (0.02)	-0.11 (0.03)	0.16 (0.02)	-0.062 (0.071)	0.002 (0.006)	0.063 (0.013)	.94	212
35	0.62 (0.01)	0.16 (0.02)	-0.18 (0.03)	0.18 (0.02)	-0.12 (0.06)	-0.016 (0.017)	0.049 (0.012)	.70	223
36	0.60 (0.01)	0.36 (0.02)	-0.38 (0.03)	0.088 (0.017)	0.004 (0.074)	-0.008 (0.019)	0.13 (0.02)	.96	227