

Outline

Jeffery A. Jenkins

Department of Political Science
Northwestern University
601 University Place
Evanston, IL 60208
Phone: (847) 491-2703
Email: j-jenkins3@northwestern.edu

Investigating the Effects of Party: Congressional Politics and the American Civil War

Chapter 1: Introduction

My thesis is that political parties matter in the American legislative process, a much debated topic in the political science literature, and that the American Civil War can be used as a test of this thesis. More specifically, I will argue that the Confederacy lost in part because of the decisions (and non-decisions) its non-partisan legislature made relative to the decisions made by the two-party U.S. Congress. Thus, I believe my thesis not only makes an empirical contribution to the theoretical parties literature in political science, but also breaks new ground in the history field. That is, while the economic, social, and military aspects of the Civil War have been the subject of intensive research by historians and social scientists, the political aspects of the conflict have not received the same careful attention.

Chapter 2: Partisan Theory and the American Civil War

I begin by providing a theoretical overview of the contemporary literature on party effects in the U.S. Congress, detailing why it is an important and controversial issue and how scholars have attempted to address it. I then discuss the empirical difficulties that scholars face in showing *discernable* partisan effects (ala Krehbiel 1993, *BJPS*; 2000, *AJPS*). These results aside, I then begin a discussion of how the American Civil War is an *ideal* venue to examine the party effects question directly. I will argue that political parties were *crucial* in determining the outcome of the war, by affecting the number of men and resources that the U.S. and Confederate Congresses devoted to the war effort. I will then make the claim that Civil War politics provides a perfect “natural experiment” to test this proposition, because (1) the Confederacy was nearly identical to the United States in all institutional facets, *except* that a strong two-party system flourished in the U.S. while a party system did not exist in the Confederacy, and (2) policy outputs were easily observable during the war, as the number of soldiers and the provision of military and economic resources at various points in time were carefully documented.

Chapter 3: Why No Parties?: The Case of the Confederacy

This chapter is based on my “exchange” with Richard Bense in *Studies in American Political Development* (1999). Students of political history have concluded that the Confederacy was devoid of a party system during its short existence as an independent nation. Yet, the traditional Democrat-Whig divisions, which had existed in the South since the 1830s, continued through the 1850s (after the fall of the *national* Whig party) and into the state secession conventions in 1860-61. This begs the question: why did these partisan divisions suddenly disappear after the Southern states seceded from the United States and formed their own nation? I find that the Democrat-Whig divisions were eliminated *endogenously* shortly after the establishment of the Confederacy through *partisan* maneuverings. The Democrats used their majority advantage in the Confederate Constitutional Convention to prohibit constitutionally the two major issues that formed the basis of the Whig party: protective tariffs and federal funding of internal improvements. An analysis of these votes during the Convention reveals a highly partisan structure, with Democrats voting for prohibition and Whigs voting against prohibition. Once these two issues were removed from the agenda, the necessary condition for a Democrat-Whig two-party system was eliminated as well. In order for a new partisan system to have developed, a new ideological division had to have emerged — something that did not happen during the short life of the Confederacy.

Chapter 4: War-Time Government: The U.S. and Confederate Congresses, Part I

This chapter is based on my recent papers in the *AJPS* (1999, 2000). I begin by discussing the similarities between the two American legislatures during the Civil War. In short, the *structural* and *procedural* institutions underlying the U.S. and Confederate Congresses were nearly identical. The only meaningful difference between the two legislatures involved an extralegal institution: a stable two-party system existed in the United States, while a party system did not exist in the Confederacy. I then discuss how these very similar legislative systems produced very different legislative results; specifically, using roll-call votes and spatial modeling, I show that the U.S. was a very stable legislative environment while the Confederacy was largely chaotic. I also show that members who first served in the U.S. Congress and then moved to the Confederate Congresses exhibited *no* continuity in voice choice across the two systems. These results, I argue, suggest that parties do indeed serve as “bonding mechanisms” ala Cox and McCubbins (1993, 1994) and Aldrich (1995). That is, parties determine the legislative agenda, which allows them to structure roll-call voting, induce individual-level ideological constraint, and promote the achievement of collective choices. This explains the high degree of stability in the U.S. Congress (where a party system existed) and the lack of stability in the Confederate Congress (where a party system was lacking).

Chapter 5: War-Time Government: The U.S. and Confederate Congresses, Part II

Where the prior chapter analyzed roll-call voting *tendencies* within the U.S. and Confederate Congresses, this chapter focuses on roll-call voting *outcomes* by examining the influence of party on *voting coalitions*. First, I apply the notion of “roll rates,” developed by Cox and

McCubbins (2002, 2005), to assess how often the interests of the majority party conflicted with roll-call voting outcomes, i.e., the frequency with which the majority party was “rolled.” If party is truly influential in legislative politics, then majority party leaders should be able to control the agenda, maintain internal cohesiveness, and produce roll-call voting outcomes that correspond to the interests of the majority. That is, the majority party should be rolled quite infrequently. To that end, I compare partisan roll rates from the U.S. Congress to non-partisan roll rates from the Confederate Congress. I find that the roll rates in the U.S. differ significantly from the roll rates in the Confederacy, suggesting that party is indeed an influential determinant in coalitional behavior. Second, I examine how successful the U.S. and Confederate Congresses were in passing laws. In addition to conducting a simple count of the various laws, I also investigate how quickly outcomes were produced in each chamber of Congress. This provides another way to assess the importance of party in the legislative process, as party theories predict that majority party leaders will use their parliamentary powers to prevent minority party members from disturbing or affecting the legislative agenda. I observe that more laws were passed in the U.S. versus the Confederacy, and find that voting outcomes occurred more quickly and were less affected by dilatory tactics in the U.S. Congress relative to the Confederate Congress.

Chapter 6: Political Legislation, North and South

Chapter 7: Economic and Fiscal Legislation, North and South

These two chapters consist of content-based case studies of legislation in the U.S. and Confederate Congresses. Because both nations were at war, the *same* general set of political and economic/fiscal issues constituted the bulk of all roll-call votes in both the U.S. and Confederate Congresses. Chapter 6 discusses political legislation, specifically conscription, habeas corpus, impressment, and arming of slaves. Chapter 7 discuss economic/fiscal legislation, specifically taxes, currency issues, loans, inflation, and railroads. And, again, because the only significant difference between the U.S. and Confederate legislative systems involved the existence (or non-existence) of political parties, an analysis of similar issue areas will shed some light on whether parties (through the actions of party leaders) can influence the legislative process in *specific* policy domains. Such an issue-by-issue analysis will yield answers to a number of interesting questions with regard to collective-choice decision making: was there a difference in the time devoted to debate across the two systems?; were there more substitute bills and amendments offered in one system?; and was the likelihood of dilatory tactics greater within a party system, relative to a no-party system? The most important question, however, is: were various policy outputs more quickly achieved within a party system? On some issues, like conscription, habeas corpus, and impressment, the answer is “no.” However, on other important issues, like arming of slaves and most economic/fiscal matters, the answer is “yes.”

Chapter 8: Conclusion

I review my thesis, that political parties matter in the American legislative process and that party effects are in fact quite *meaningful*. That is, political parties were *crucial* in determining the production of war-time legislation. Because the North possessed a stable two-party system, the U.S. Congress was better able to determine the legislative agenda. This allowed the U.S.

Congress to structure roll-call voting, induce individual-level ideological constraint, and promote the achievement of collective choices much more efficiently than the Confederate Congress. As a result, I argue, political parties also played an important role in determining the outcome of the American Civil War by affecting the number of men and resources that the U.S. and Confederate Congresses could devote to the war effort. If the Confederacy had possessed a party system, the American Union as we know it today might not exist. Key battles may have been won by the Confederate military, and the Presidential Election of 1864 may have been decided for George McClellan, the “Peace Candidate,” not Lincoln. Based on numerous accounts, McClellan, if elected, would have likely sought a peaceful solution to the war, which would have likely resulted in two separate, independent American nations.