

Voting on voting with the feet: a cross-county analysis of the Tennessee popular referenda to secede from the union

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Abstract We analyze a unique case of voting on voting with the feet, when Tennessee twice considered secession from the Union in 1861 by popular referenda. The initial votes to hold a convention, and to send disunion delegates to a convention, failed, but after the Confederate states adopted a new constitution and the bombing of Fort Sumter took place, a second set of votes to separate from the union, and to join the confederacy, passed. Regression results support the importance of both economic interests and political tendencies, along with regional differences, in explaining the variation in votes across counties. Class distinctions were not found to be significant.

Keywords Direct democracy · Secession · Sorting · Voting with the feet

JEL Classification D71 · H1 · N41

1 Introduction

Scholars have long noted that one response available to individuals dissatisfied with the enactment of public policy in their polity is to vote with their feet by moving to a new location and choosing a different set of rules to follow, in the hope of finding a better benefit to cost ratio. A variation of voting with the feet is possible without physical movement; widespread dissatisfaction, especially among individuals living in a geographically contiguous area, can lead to secession and the formation of a new polity. Additionally, in rare cases the existing polity can choose between remaining under its current constitutional structure and joining a different group with an

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alternative constitution. The leading example of secession in American history, of course, occurred when eleven southern states decided to secede from the United States and form the Confederacy in 1860–1861. We examine here the particular case of Tennesseans who in 1861 literally voted on the opportunity to vote with their feet by joining the other states that had already adopted the Confederate constitution.

Our approach represents the intersection of voting with the feet, as initially developed by Tiebout (1956), which suggests that political entities, like private clubs, would tend to attract distinctive, homogeneous groups, and the theory of club goods (Buchanan, 1965) in which an organization is established to provide excludable public goods. The voters of Tennessee, instead of themselves moving to other southern states which had already seceded, were given the opportunity by their legislature to declare their support or opposition to remaining in the union “club” or joining instead the confederacy “club”. The opportunity for voluntary exit is generally considered one of the criteria for efficiency in constitutional formation (Lowenberg and Yu, 1992). The absence of this, as in the case of southern secession, can result in civil war or revolution. Public choice analysis of revolutions has been directed at explaining rational participation in these acts (Mueller, 2003), which we do not pursue here. We seek instead only to understand which types of voters supported secession at the ballot box, not which ones were willing to actively contribute to the subsequent violence to enforce the state’s vote.

One leading approach among historians has been to explain these acts of secession by focusing on major political developments during this period, primarily the election of President Abraham Lincoln in November 1860, which led to the secession of seven states (South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas), and the bombardment of Fort Sumter and President Lincoln’s subsequent call for 75,000 troops in April 1861, which prompted the secession of another four states (Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee).

Other scholars have focused on the actions taken during this period by southern state officials, especially delegates to the state conventions that approved secession ordinances. Wooster (1962) undertook the classic study of these conventions and sought to identify underlying factors related to secession support and opposition, whether among the convention delegates themselves or among the counties they represented (see also McPherson, 1988).

Still other scholars (whose approach we generally follow in this paper) have focused on the attitudes of the citizenry in the southern states, by examining the popular votes on the calling of secession conventions and ratification of the secession ordinances promulgated by these conventions. McCrary, Miller, & Baum (1978) carried out a multi-state study of several states in the Deep South, with the intent of identifying factors related to support for secession and union. Conversely, Crofts (1989) undertook a study of three states in the Upper South. This latter work contains the only empirical investigation of the Tennessee referenda to date.

In the belief that there is much to be gained from further study of these popular votes on secession, given that legislative and convention votes are, for various reasons, not always representative of the views of the citizenry (Dinan and Heckelman, 2005), we turn to study the popular referenda on secession in Tennessee held on February 9 and June 8, 1861. Focusing on Tennessee’s votes on secession is valuable for several reasons. First, Tennessee is the only Confederate state not to hold a secession convention; the crucial decisions in Tennessee were made directly by the people through their votes on referenda submitted by the legislature. This provides a

unique opportunity to study and explain the attitudes of the citizenry, unmediated by the actions of convention delegates. Second, Tennessee voters had an opportunity to vote on secession on two occasions, with quite different outcomes. On February 9, 1861, voters rejected a call for a convention to consider secession, by a 69,681–57,844 margin, and, in a companion vote to select delegates to the convention that would have been held, they supported union delegates over secessionist delegates by an even more overwhelming margin of 88,803–25,107. However, on June 8, 1861, voters approved a legislative referendum on separating from the union, by a vote of 104,913–47,238, and at the same time approved a companion referendum on joining the Confederacy by an almost identical vote of 104,102–47,364. This shift in voters' support for secession provides an excellent opportunity to identify the groups that were most likely to change their position and eventually provide the margin of victory for secession.

In seeking to explain divisions among Tennessee voters regarding secession, we follow in the path of several scholars who have examined some aspect of this question. In the mid-twentieth century, Partin (1935), Queener (1948), and Campbell (1961) undertook detailed descriptive accounts of political developments in Tennessee leading up to the 1861 secession votes. These studies mentioned several factors as potentially relevant for differentiating unionists and secessionists: long-standing geographical differences among the grand divisions of Eastern, Middle, and Western Tennessee, the prevalence of slavery in various parts of the state, levels of support for the Democratic as against the Whig Party, differences in wealth, the degree of urbanization, the dominance of various agricultural products in certain areas, the source of immigration of county residents, and the actions of influential political leaders and newspapers in encouraging or opposing secession. More recently, Crofts (1989, pp. 365–366) undertook a statistical test of the factors correlating with voter support for secession in the February and June referenda, but he focused particularly on percentage of slave-owners in a given county and support for the Democratic Party.

We contribute to this literature in several ways. First, we take the suggestive comments about influential factors contained in the earlier descriptive accounts and subject these hypotheses to empirical testing. Second, we build on the more recent work of scholars such as Crofts by expanding the range of explanatory factors considered and utilizing modern econometric techniques. Finally, we seek to explain not only why voters in certain counties opposed a convention in February 1861 and supported separation in June 1861, but also what accounts for the change in county support for secession.

The paper proceeds in four stages. First, we describe and report the county-level returns for the key secession votes on February 9, 1861 (as seen by support for union or disunion convention delegates) and on June 8, 1861 (yes or no on separation from the Union). Second, we identify and explain our method of measuring a number of factors that might be thought to have influenced the likelihood of a county's voters supporting secession. Third, we determine the extent to which these factors correlate with support for secession on the February vote and on the June vote and with changes in support for secession between these two elections. Fourth, we summarize our results and contrast support for secession at the voting booth as a collective decision with individualized voting with the feet.

2 The February and June 1861 votes on secession

Tennessee was the only one of the 11 member states of the Confederacy to secede without calling a convention. Tennessee voters had a chance in February 1861 to vote on calling a convention to reconsider the relationship between the state and the federal government, but this measure was soundly defeated at the polls. It was not until June 1861, after the other ten states had all seceded from the Union and adopted the Confederate constitution, that Tennessee voters approved legislative-referred ordinances for secession and membership in the Confederacy.¹

The February 9, 1861 popular referendum had its origin in an extra legislative session that was called by Governor Isham G. Harris and met on January 7, 1861. At this extra session, both houses of the legislature unanimously approved a measure to submit to the people the question of whether to call a convention to reassess Tennessee's status in the Union (Campbell, 1961, 159–160). Pursuant to this legislative measure, Tennesseans were asked to cast votes on two questions. First, voters were asked to decide whether to call a convention, by indicating “Convention” or “No Convention”. Second, voters were asked to determine which delegates should represent each county at the convention, if one was approved, with the understanding that candidates for these delegate positions were on record as supporting “Union” or “Disunion”.

The February 9, 1861 referendum results show that voters rejected a convention by a 69,681–57,844 margin, and supported Union over Disunion delegates by an even greater margin of 88,803–25,107. Although a case could be made for considering either of these two votes to be a measure of secessionist support in February—we have reported both the convention vote and the delegates vote in Table 1—the delegates vote is likely the more accurate measure. It turns out that voters who supported holding a convention did so for two very different reasons. Some of the convention supporters clearly wanted to hold a convention in hopes that it would approve a secession ordinance. But a number of other voters supported a convention because they were confident that secession would not be approved, and that the voting down of a secession ordinance by convention delegates would blunt the force of secessionist sentiment around the state (Campbell, 1961, 171). Given the diverse motives of voters on the convention question, we rely on the level of support for Disunion delegates on the delegates question as the proper measure of secessionist sentiment and voting with their feet in February.

The East, Middle, and West regions varied dramatically in their support for a convention and, to a somewhat lesser degree, in their support for Disunion delegates. On the question of holding a convention, the East was opposed by an overwhelming 33,528–7,917 vote; the Middle was opposed by a narrow 28,224–26,897 vote; and the West favored a convention by the large margin of 23,030–7,929.² In terms of choosing delegates, every region supported Union delegates, albeit by varying margins. In the East, the vote was 30,903–5,577 in favor of Union delegates;

¹ Holcombe (2002, 129–137) presents an economic analysis of the Confederate Constitution and contrasts it against the United States Constitution. He suggests the primary difference was more direct limits on special interest politics acting through the legislature. One conclusion which might be drawn from Holcombe's accounting on slavery, taxation, expropriations and general welfare, was that the Confederate Constitution strove to better preserve the status quo.

² Data for the February votes are taken from “Official Voting Results”, *Republican Banner*, 5 March 1861.

Table 1 Support for secession by county (mean percentage and standard deviation)

	# Counties	Convention (February)	Disunion delegate (February)	Separation (June)
State	84	43.56 (29.48)	22.80 (14.28)	64.41 (33.08)
East	30	18.42 (15.39)	16.79 (13.38)	31.55 (21.02)
Middle	36	50.72 (24.97)	24.37 (14.49)	84.23 (23.22)
West	18	70.96 (22.42)	29.57 (12.03)	79.92 (22.17)

Note: Some counties are missing returns for particular votes

the vote in the Middle was 36,809–10,186; and the vote in the West was 21,091–9,344. Table 1 provides the mean percentages of the counties in each of the regions on the convention and delegate questions.³

The June 8, 1861 referendum took place nearly three months after the Confederate Constitution had been ratified on March 11 by seven states, two months after the April 12 firing on Fort Sumter and Lincoln's subsequent call for 75,000 troops to put down the rebellion, and a month after the Tennessee legislature on May 6 agreed to submit to the people a Declaration of Independence. The legislative measure, which passed the House by a 46–21 vote and the Senate by a 20–4 vote, called on the people to vote on two questions (Campbell, 1961, 198). First, voters were to indicate their support for seceding from the Union, by selecting either "Separation" or "No Separation". Second, voters were to decide whether Tennessee should join the Confederacy, by voting for "Representation" or "No Representation".

Overall, the state's voters approved the secession ordinance by an overwhelming margin of 102,104–47,238, and approved membership in the Confederacy by virtually the same margin. However, as indicated by the final column of Table 1, the regions differed dramatically in their support for secession. The East opposed secession by a large margin of 32,923–14,678. Meanwhile, the Middle and West supported secession by even greater margins. The vote in the Middle was 58,209–8,198, and in the West was 29,127–6,117.⁴ Although voters in the East more than doubled their support for secession in June, the increases were much greater in the Middle and West. Whereas the West had previously shown by far the greatest support for a convention and slightly greater support than the Middle for the disunion delegates in February, in the June vote the Middle counties overtook the West for definite support of separation from the Union and adoption of the Confederate constitution. Furthermore, each region showed greater turnout for the June votes, and the increase was by far the highest among the Middle region voters.

³ Note that as reported in Table 1 the mean county support in the Middle region for holding a convention is just slightly above 50%, but as stated in the text opposition among all Middle region voters actually comprises a slight majority. In general, measuring support in a given region on any vote is only slightly different when comparing mean county support rate versus combined voter support rate.

⁴ Totals for the June 8, 1861 vote differ slightly in various sources, depending on how votes from Confederate military camps are included, among other minor discrepancies (Crofts, 1989, 411n3). Our totals, taken from "Official Returns", *Knoxville Whig*, 13 July 1861, do not include votes cast in military camps.

3 Determinants of secession support

Previous studies have identified several factors that might explain variation in county support for secession in Tennessee, but these studies have not utilized regression analysis to assess the effects of these variables. The exception is Crofts (1989), but he only presents results using two explanatory variables and does not test for statistical significance. Crofts' findings suggest that slave interests were the dominant force in the June separation vote but were not important in the earlier February votes, whereas party allegiance as proxied by past vote returns was much more important in the February votes than in June. Our intent is to go beyond Crofts by employing as many of the potential explanatory variables discussed in the literature as we could measure in a satisfactory fashion. We also aim to draw some general conclusions about the relative importance of particular economic interests, political attitudes, class interests, and regional differences in explaining support for secession.

First, we seek to measure the influence of particular economic interests. The prevalence of slavery is agreed by all scholars to have influenced voter support for secession in Tennessee. As a March 2, 1861 editorial in the Nashville *Union and American* argued: "If the question of abolition of slavery is not now upon us, what is it that agitates the country...? What...has already driven seven states from the Union? What...induced meetings...to request the Governor to convene the Legislature...?" (quoted in Queener, 1948, 67).

There are several ways that we might capture the effect of slavery. The percentage of slaveholders would represent the number of individuals in a county whose interests were most tied up with slavery, and therefore likely to vote their interests by supporting secession (Crofts, 1989, 365). However, this would treat all slaveholders the same, regardless of whether they owned only one or hundreds of slaves. Alternatively, the percentage of slaves per capita might better capture the intensity of slaveholder interests and would also capture the interests of non-slaveholders, in that in counties where slaves were plentiful and perhaps even outnumbered whites they would be more fearful of insurrection or the consequences of abolition, and therefore would be more supportive of secession regardless of their own slaveholder status (Partin, 1935, 250–253). We have generally followed the variable construction of Crofts to focus on the percentage of slaveholders as the best measure of slaveholder interests. However, to directly relate this to those who could vote, we calculate the number of slaveholders per white males at least 20 years of age in each county. This turns out to be correlated with the number of slaveholders per total population at .95. We also ran each of the regressions replacing the slaveholder variable with the number of slaves per capita but found no qualitative differences to the reported regressions. Data for the aggregate number of slaveholders, slaves, total population, and white males by age classification are taken from the 1860 census and converted as described above.

Slaveholders' interests are not the only relevant economic interests, though; levels of cotton and tobacco production are also mentioned in several accounts as possibly accounting for some of the variation in voter support for secession (Campbell, 1961, 206; Queener, 1948, 67). The expectation is that heavy cotton and tobacco-producing counties would be more supportive of secession because they had closer economic ties and interests with southern states that also produced these goods, as opposed to relying on grain and livestock as their chief agricultural products. Census reports the

number of ginned 400-pound bales of cotton and total pounds of tobacco produced. We convert these to per capita terms, and rescale tobacco as hundreds of pounds per capita.

Second, we seek to identify the degree to which secession votes were influenced by various political attitudes. Political party allegiance is widely recognized as having influenced voter support for secession, with Democratic voters seen as most supportive of separation from the Union. As Robert Partin has noted: “Although all parties in the State were pro-slavery after 1848, the Democrats were most orthodox on the subject, and they likewise made up the majority of the Secessionists” (1935, 17). As with the prevalence of slavery, though, there are two main ways to measure support for the Democratic Party. On one hand, we could rely on the percentage of votes cast in the 1859 Governor’s race for Isham G. Harris (the Democratic candidate) as against his principal competitor, John Netherland (running as the Opposition candidate, essentially the successor to the Whig Party in Tennessee in the late 1850s). On the other hand, we could rely on the percentage of votes cast in the 1860 Presidential election for John Breckenridge (the Southern Democratic candidate).⁵ Simply because the gubernatorial election was one year further removed from the secession votes, and the county of Sequatchie (East) is missing returns for the gubernatorial election but not the presidential election, we elected to utilize Breckenridge’s vote share, which Crofts did as well. County-level returns for both elections are taken from “Official Voting Results” reported in *Republican Banner* 4 Dec 1860. The two types of Democratic vote shares are correlated at .80. As described below, some minor differences in estimation do arise depending on this choice.

The degree of urbanization, and the political attitudes associated with urban residents, is also cited as an influence on voter support for secession (Partin, 1935, 235; Queener, 1948, 78). The expectation is that rural residents, in Queener’s terms, evinced a “natural conservatism” (1948, 78) that made them more hesitant to undertake the radical act of secession, whereas urban residents would have been more supportive of secession. We measure this variable by computing the percentage of persons in a county who live in a city, as defined by 1860 census data.

Third, we seek to assess the importance of class interests in explaining variation in the votes on secession. Wealth is a factor that has been discussed by various scholars as possibly influencing voter support for secession (Campbell, 1961, 201; Escott, 1978; Queener, 1948, 70–71). The expectation is that wealthy individuals were more supportive of secession out of a fealty to the southern aristocracy in the already seceded states; in contrast, poorer individuals in the Upper South “may have reasoned, why vote or fight to perpetuate a system of which they were not a part, a system in which they were unwelcome and unwarranted?” and might have feared

⁵ Breckenridge was one of four major candidates in the 1860 presidential election, and he took the orthodox position of the Democratic Party on the principal slavery question of the day: he would not have permitted the federal government to have any power over slavery in the territories. His principal competitor in Tennessee (and the winner of the state’s electoral votes) was John Bell, the Constitutional Union candidate and Tennessee resident who took no position on the federal government’s power over slavery in the territories and simply sought to preserve the Union above all else. Meanwhile, Stephen Douglas, the Northern Democratic candidate who sought to permit residents of the territories to resolve the question of slavery through popular sovereignty, received few votes in Tennessee, and Lincoln, the Republican candidate, was not even on the ballot in the state (Partin, 1935, 70–71).

“that the Confederate government would be a government of ‘rich men’” (Queener, 1948, 70–71). We measure wealth by computing the amount of real and personal wealth per white population in a given county, based on 1860 census data.

The three grand divisions of Tennessee—East, Middle, and West—are also seen as exerting an influence on voter support for secession, independent from the other economic, political, and class factors already considered. Although many states have important regional differences, no state’s divisions are more important than Tennessee’s, where the state constitution goes so far as to institutionalize these divisions.⁶ The expectation is that residents of East Tennessee were separated geographically from other regions in the state, and therefore cut off from political doctrines prevalent in the Middle and West, and therefore were less likely to support secession for reasons over and above any partisan or socio-economic factors (Fisher, 1997; Queener, 1948). Regional dummies are included for Middle and West counties, leaving East as the default.

Finally, mention should be made of several other factors that we considered but ultimately decided against including, for various reasons. First, Queener (1948, 72–73) discussed the possibility that counties with significant numbers of immigrants from slave states would have been more likely to support secession than counties whose immigrants came from Free states. Queener empirically rejected the hypothesis but only tested it on a small sample of “representative” counties, and did not control for any other factors. Thus the idea remains plausible and we would have liked to include a variable of this sort. Unfortunately, the 1860 census volume only presents data on immigration by originating state totaled for the entire state of Tennessee, and does not disaggregate by county. Otherwise, these data are only available through the archives in raw form for each enumerated individual and thus it is not feasible to include measures for each county within the state.

Second, we considered examining the role of religion, on the view that opposition to secession would have been higher among members of religious denominations that were critical of slavery. It turns out that even though a number of religious denominations in the North were opposed to slavery, as Campbell noted, “Although the churches felt the pressure of the slavery controversy before the state did, there was no division in any of the churches in Tennessee between 1847 and 1861 on the slavery issue” (1961, 21). The only denomination whose members in Tennessee could be said to have taken a distinctive approach to this question were the Quakers, and their adherents in 1860 (Census, Volume 4 “Miscellaneous Statistics”) were reported as only 1,300 statewide, spread out over only three counties and thus would have been of little influence on the vote totals. Indeed, Crofts (1989, 377) mentions in passing the lack of effect his various religious variables had in unreported regressions.

Additionally, several scholars (Partin, 1935, 253; Queener, 1948, 65) have mentioned that the level of support for, or opposition to, secession was likely influenced by the positions taken by powerful politicians and newspapers in various parts of the state. We are open to the possibility that individual politicians and journalists could have played a role in swaying public preferences on the secession question, over and above the partisan and socio-economic variables we have chosen to examine. But we

⁶ Article VI, Section 2 stipulates that no more than two of the five state supreme court justices can reside in any one of the three grand divisions.

have not determined an objective measure for this variable and thus do not test for this effect in our regressions.

4 Empirical analysis of the variation in county support for secession

Our dependent variable in alternate regressions will be the county level support for secession in the February and June elections. When using percentage data in election studies, the traditional procedure has been to either utilize standard Least Squares (LS) or first convert the dependent variable using a logistic transformation.⁷ For most studies, this will be of little impact since differences in estimation only occur when the data are in the tails of the distribution. For the February delegate election, however, 32 of the 74 reporting counties had support rates at less than 20%, suggesting the logistic transformation may be appropriate. In fact, support was so low that four counties (two East, one Middle, one West) had absolutely zero voters voting for the Disunion delegate. The logistic transformation would be undefined for these counties. This suggests that an alternative methodology would be to use Tobit analysis treating the data as left censored at zero. Conversely, the June election resulted in 38 of the 81 reporting counties showing support levels for separation in excess of 80%, three of which (all Middle) had 100% complete support for separation. The logistic transformation would then be undefined for these three counties and Tobit could be utilized instead, treating the data as censored at 100.

Qualitatively, none of the regression results were dependent on the choice of econometric method. Since the logistic transformation regressions result in a loss of observations, and the Tobit coefficients are more difficult to interpret, for ease of presentation we report the simple LS estimates in Table 2, with *t*-statistics generated by robust White standard errors correcting for unknown heteroskedasticity.

Table 2 Determinants of support for secession

	Disunion delegate (February)	Separation (June)	Vote difference (Separation—Delegate)
Constant	0.016 (0.27)	-0.133** (2.15)	-0.158* (1.64)
Slaveholders	-0.255 (0.68)	1.591** (3.27)	1.898** (3.09)
Cotton	0.030** (5.95)	0.029** (3.74)	-0.003 (0.37)
Tobacco	-0.039** (2.03)	-0.027 (0.72)	0.013 (0.28)
Democratic party support	0.362** (3.21)	0.706** (5.50)	0.349** (2.07)
Urban	-0.048 (0.17)	0.858** (2.88)	0.925** (2.44)
Wealth	0.044 (0.76)	-0.013 (0.19)	-0.063 (0.67)
Middle region	0.045 (1.05)	0.231** (2.90)	0.192** (2.31)
West region	0.184** (4.73)	0.300** (3.92)	0.109 (1.32)
R-square	0.347	0.752	0.592
Mean, dep variable	0.228	0.641	0.401
No. of observations	74	80	74

Note. Absolute *t*-statistics from White robust standard errors in parentheses

** significant at 5%

* significant at 10%

⁷ The logistic transformation is computed as $\log[(\text{percentage support})/(\text{percentage oppose})]$.

4.1 Support for disunion delegates in February

In line with expectations, we find that greater levels of Democratic support, proxied by votes for Breckenridge in the 1860 presidential election, are correlated with greater support for Disunion delegates. This would also be true if support for Harris in the 1859 gubernatorial election were used in place of the Breckenridge votes.

We also find that greater production of cotton in a county was associated with greater support for Disunion delegates, but counties that produced greater levels of tobacco were less favorable toward the Disunion delegates. These contrasting results for the impact of agricultural factors are not due to multicollinearity issues; cotton and tobacco production across counties are only correlated at -0.20 and dropping cotton from the regression does not affect the finding of a statistically significant negative coefficient for tobacco.⁸

At first blush, this might suggest the agricultural driving force behind secession support suggested by some scholars is only partially supported. Actually, though, the agricultural connection is not as straightforward as typically presented. The top producers of cotton were in the Deep South and had already seceded, but the only two states producing more tobacco than Tennessee were Virginia (upper south) and Kentucky (border south), neither of which had seceded by the February 1861 ballot. Thus the impact from the agricultural-economic tie to other southern states is actually fully supported by the regression analysis. Cotton-producing counties showed greater support for secession, which shows a connection with the other cotton-producing states because those states had already seceded, whereas the tobacco counties showed less support for secession, which shows a connection with the other tobacco states because those states had not seceded.

Recall that support for the Disunion delegates was overall highest in the West region. Controlling for the other factors, counties in the West still showed higher levels of support for Disunion delegates than counties in the East or Middle.⁹

None of the other variables (slaveholders, wealth, urban) are found to be statistically significant. Dropping any or all of the significant variables does not lead to significance for any of these. In bivariate regressions, only the urban variable is significant (positive coefficient) but significance is lost as soon as the regional dummies are included. Thus we are confident in stating that county support for secession among larger slaveholding, wealthier, or urbanized counties was not significantly different from other counties in the February 1861 vote.

4.2 Support for separation in June

After rejecting in February both the call for a convention and sending disunion delegates to such a convention were it to have passed, Tennessee voters returned to the booth in June to vote directly on secession from the union, and also for joining the Confederacy. As described above, in the intervening four months several events occurred including the drafting and ratification of the Confederate Constitution, the expansion of the Confederate states from seven to ten, and the eruption of hostilities between the Union and Confederacy. Since the two votes in June were so similar, it

⁸ Using the Democratic vote share for governor instead of the presidential share would result in a statistically insignificant negative coefficient for tobacco but not affect any other results.

⁹ An *F*-test confirms the coefficient on West is significantly greater than the coefficient for Middle.

appears that only rarely did a voter consider supporting secession without also supporting joining the Confederacy. As such, we present regression results in the middle column of Table 2 only for the Separation vote. Our specification remains the same as before.¹⁰ However, note that Virginia, one of the two leading tobacco producing states, had joined the Confederacy a month prior to the June vote while Kentucky, the other primary tobacco producing state, had not joined.¹¹ Thus, tobacco farmers in Tennessee might now be split in their economic allegiance.

Each of the variables found to be statistically significant for the February vote was also significant, and in the same direction, in the June vote, with the exception of tobacco production.¹² In particular, this includes Democratic Party support and cotton production. As for the importance of tobacco production, given the split allegiance of the other tobacco states (VA and KY) the lack of significance for tobacco production is not unexpected. Tobacco-producing counties in Tennessee no longer had a strict economic tie to the Union, and did not for the Confederacy. In addition, counties with more slaveholders and urban residents are now found to favor secession as well. Finally, as was shown in Table 1, although every region showed greater support overall for secession, the largest increase occurred in the Middle counties, which overtook the West for most support. These two regions overwhelmingly supported seceding from the Union, whereas the East remained strongly committed to rejecting the Confederacy (although by a smaller margin than in February). Significance of the regional dummies suggests substantially higher secession sentiment remains in the Middle and West after controlling for the other factors. Although the magnitude of the West dummy is slightly greater than for the Middle, an *F*-test suggests the difference is not statistically meaningful. Finally, the wealth of a county remains an unimportant factor in explaining secession votes. It is not statistically significant even in a simple bivariate regression.¹³

The significance of the urban and Middle region variables may well represent the growing influence of newspapers and local politicians calling for secession after the notion of a state convention was voted down in February, and other subsequent key events occurred as described above (Partin, 1935; Queener, 1948). We have no adequate measure to directly capture any variation in access to these editorials and speeches across counties and thus can only hypothesize what other factors the urban and Middle region variables may be capturing. On the other hand, the finding that counties with more slaveholders were significantly more supportive of secession is not at all unexpected; rather it is more surprising that this effect did not hold in the earlier February vote, especially given its prominence among almost every historian of Tennessee in the Civil War era. However, these results for the differing effect of

¹⁰ Cheatham (Middle) is the only county reporting returns for the June vote but not for the presidential or gubernatorial elections. No returns were reported for the February vote either.

¹¹ A secession convention was held by representatives of 68 of the 100 counties in Kentucky later that same year (November, 1861). Their Ordinance of Secession was recognized by the Confederacy but never formally accepted by the state government (Copeland, 1997).

¹² Replacing the Democratic vote share in the presidential election with the Democratic vote share in the gubernatorial election results in a positive coefficient for tobacco although it is not statistically significant and thus does not alter the interpretation given. No other variables are affected in terms of sign or significance.

¹³ An alternative interpretation to the unimportance in wealth is that average wealth in the county does not properly capture individual differences in wealth across counties due to distributional asymmetries.

slaveholding across the two votes are entirely consistent with Crofts' (1989) empirical findings.

As shown by the R^2 measure, the specification explains more than twice the variation for the June separation vote than for the February delegates vote. Moreover, differences between the two regressions are not an artifact of the six additional county votes in June. Limiting the Separation regression sample to the same 74 counties having data for the February Disunion delegate vote yields almost identical t -statistics as those reported in the table. These results suggest that many of the factors often given for secession sentiment in Tennessee better explain the success of the June separation vote than the earlier February vote regarding which delegates to send to a potential secession convention.

4.3 Differences in county support across the two votes

County-level support across the February and June votes is correlated at a modest .33, but is statistically significant (t -statistic = 3.00) in a bivariate regression. This is shown graphically in Fig. 1. Table 3 shows that the significance of the correlation was driven exclusively by the East region. There is no systematic relationship between the two votes in the Middle and West regions. Furthermore, county support for Disunion delegates in February is not statistically significant when added as an additional explanatory variable to the June Separation vote.

To better assess the differences across the votes, the final column of Table 2 reports regression results using the difference in county support for the two votes as the new dependent variable. The results largely corroborate the simple comparison of significance levels across the two votes. Variables that were significant only for the June separation vote (slaveholders, urban, middle region) are significant factors in explaining the greater support for secession in June compared to February; the lone

Fig. 1 County-level scatter plot of support for secession votes

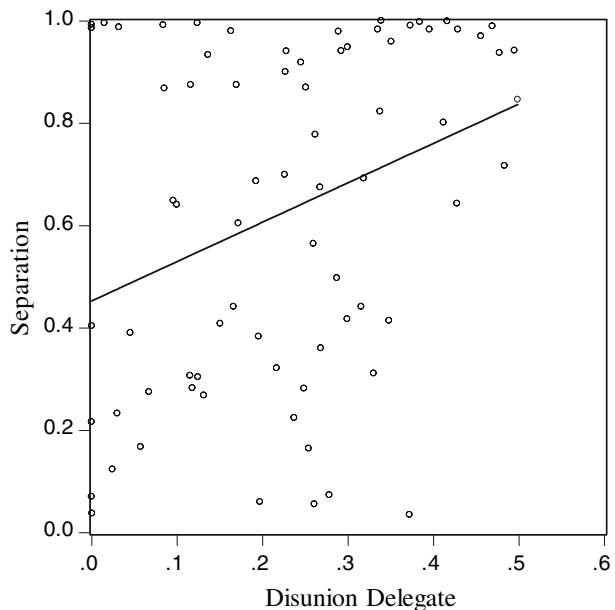


Table 3 Correlations across secession votes

	State	East	Middle	West
Correlation	0.33**	0.35*	0.08	0.03
<i>T</i> -statistic	3.00	1.89	0.43	0.11
<i>R</i> ²	0.11	0.13	0.01	0.01

** significant at 5%

* significant at 10%

variable not significant for either vote regression (urban) is not significant in explaining differences across the votes either; and two of the variables significant for both votes (cotton, west region) are not significant in explaining greater support in June, suggesting that the size of their marginal impact remained roughly the same. Thus, even though West region counties showed a much greater increase in support overall than East region countries, these differences are fully captured by the changing marginal impact of the other factors.

The impact of overall Democratic support in a county (proxied by the Breckenridge vote), while a significant factor in both votes, was significantly greater in the June vote. This stands in contrast to Crofts, who found that party allegiance played less of a role in June than it had in February.

Finally, although tobacco was significant only in the first vote, the relatively increased (less negative) support for secession in June is not statistically significant for the vote difference. This suggests the lack of significance of tobacco production for the June vote was due to greater imprecision in measuring the magnitudes of the marginal impact but the average effects were roughly equivalent across the votes. Indeed, the standard error for the tobacco coefficient is roughly double for the June vote compared to the February vote. Given the conflicting economic ties to the other tobacco states in June this is not surprising.

5 Conclusions

In his multi-state study, Crofts wrote that:

“A variety of other socioeconomic variables, in addition to the percentage of slaveowners in a county, were subjected to computer analysis during the course of this study. It became apparent, however, that slaveowning regularly muscled aside most other socioeconomic factors in explaining the variance of secession crisis voting. Such potentially interesting considerations as the percentage of small farms in a county, per capita investment in manufacturing, and concentrations of various religious denominations usually produced trivial increases in explained variance when entered into multiple regression equations that included slaveowning.” Crofts (1989, 377)

However, we find a variety of other factors not considered by Crofts to also be important in explaining Tennesseans’ ultimate decision to secede and in explaining their shifting views on secession between February and June 1861.

It is doubtless the case, as historians have noted, that the adoption of the Confederate Constitution in March, along with the bombardment of Fort Sumter and

Lincoln's call for 75,000 troops to squash the rebellion in April, were pivotal in shifting Tennessee voters from supporting the Union in February to joining the Confederacy in June. However, as our study has shown and historians have not fully appreciated, these actions had different effects on various groups of Tennesseans.

In particular, not only did greater relative numbers of slaveholders and Democratic party supporters in a county show higher levels of support for secession in June than in February, but so did more urbanized counties. In each of these cases, then, factors either became significant for the first time in June (slaveholders and urban) or were even more important in June than in February (Democratic Party support). On the other hand, one factor (tobacco production) that was significant in February turned out not to be significant in June. Thus, tobacco production was a significant factor in determining opposition to secession in the former vote but had no significant effect in the latter vote. Finally, another factor (cotton) exerted a steady influence on both the February and June votes. The heavier cotton-producing counties showed greater support for secession throughout this period. Finally, even after controlling for other factors, significant regional differences in support for secession were evident in both votes, with voters in the Middle region increasing their support for separation in June more than voters in the East or West regions, although West region voters supported both the Disunion delegate vote in February and the separation vote in June at significantly higher levels than East region voters.

Several general conclusions can be advanced on the basis of these findings about the relative influence of particular economic interests, political attitudes, and class differences. Regarding the role of economic interests, county votes for secession appeared to be influenced at the margin by their economic interests in farming. Greater production of cotton generated more support for secession, presumably because heavy cotton counties sought to stay aligned with the other cotton-producing southern states that had seceded. Greater production of tobacco initially reduced support for secession, presumably because heavy tobacco counties sought to stay aligned with the border states of Virginia and Kentucky which grew tobacco but had not (yet) seceded at the time of the February vote; but it did not significantly affect the June vote when one of the border states had by that point seceded while the other remained in the union. Therefore, although it has traditionally been assumed that cotton and tobacco interests were aligned, in actuality they differed substantially. Our results are consistent with the notion that both types of producers followed their economic interests, but their interests led in different directions. In addition, the number of slaves per capita in a county had a significant effect only in the June vote after the Confederate Constitution had been ratified, explicitly protecting slaveholder interests. Thus it appears that voting on secession reflected a strong economic connection.

General political attitudes also tended to play a role. Counties with greater recent support for the Democratic Party showed higher levels of support for secession in both votes, with the impact being even greater in the second vote. Urbanized counties, which tended to be less conservative in accepting change, also were more likely to support secession but this effect was found to be significant only after hostilities between the Confederacy and Union were manifested. Finally, class alignments did not appear to be of particular importance as wealthier counties did not show a significant connection to the rest of the southern aristocracy, which had fomented secession throughout much of the rest of the south.

It is important to note, however, that our results here might not translate directly to which voters would have been more likely to vote with their own feet by physically relocating to other Confederate states had the June vote failed. Transaction and transportation costs might have made moving costlier for those who most supported secession. For example, slaveowners would have had to move a greater number of people and cotton producers had economic ties to their land. By voting on leaving the union in a direct democracy setting, rather than simply relocating themselves, these voters could save the costs of moving while still reaping the benefits of joining the Confederacy.

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