

# The Political and Economic Geography of Southern Secession\*

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We study the economic and political determinants of the Southern secession movement of 1860-1861. While economic historians emphasize the importance of slavery to the South's economy as the primary factor behind the movement, we demonstrate the important role that political inequality among whites played in facilitating secession. In particular, secession was decided in state conventions, which allowed secessionists to exploit biases to representation and may have been pivotal in the key states of Alabama and Georgia. Our results suggest that the region's investment in slavery alone may not be sufficient to explain the electoral success of the movement in the biggest Lower South states.

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# Introduction

Given the devastation that the American Civil War brought upon the South, the factors that drove most Southern states to secede despite the risks of armed conflict have long been debated. While the consensus is that secession was driven by slaveholders due to their fears over the future of slavery following Abraham Lincoln's election,<sup>1</sup> there is relatively little systematic work on how this perceived threat translated into popular support for the movement. Economic historians tend to emphasize the centrality of slavery to the South's economy, paying less attention to the potential conflict between slaveholders and nonslaveholders over secession.<sup>2</sup> As explained by Ransom (2018, 374) "By itself, the accumulation of slave wealth goes a long way toward explaining why the South might be willing to take extreme measures—including secession and even war—to protect their property."

This interpretation of Southern secession is puzzling in light of the South's deep political and economic inequalities among whites at the time. Although slaveholders formed sizable minorities in a number of states, slaves were heavily concentrated in the hands of a small minority (10% of the adult white males owned nearly 90% of the slaves (Niemi 1977)). As a result, the average slaveholder in 1860 had approximately *fourteen* times the wealth of the average non-slaveholder (Wright 1978, 36).<sup>3</sup> In addition, large "uphill" areas with relatively few slaves were not highly integrated with the lowland plantation counties (Wright 1978, 39). Given these divisions, was the threat to the property of slaveowners sufficient to induce a majority among the Lower South electorate to support secession and risk a costly war?

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<sup>1</sup>See for example Freehling (2007), McPherson (2003), Potter (1976) and Stamp (1970).

<sup>2</sup>By 1860, the capital invested in slaves was roughly equal to the value of all farmland and farm buildings and slaves comprised more than half the agricultural labor force in the seceding states (Ransom 2001). On the importance of slavery for Southern agriculture at the time of crisis, see Goldin (1973), Gunderson (1974), Ransom and Sutch (1988), and Wright (2006); and for financial markets, see González, Marshall, and Naidu (2017).

<sup>3</sup>Based on the distribution of personal wealth (which included the value of slaves), Ransom (1989, 63-64) estimates a Gini coefficient of 0.71 for the whole South.

The main evidence on the popularity of secession comes from the existing returns for the elections of delegates to different state conventions as well as a series of related referendums. In the Lower South states for which complete results exist for the election of convention delegates (Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana), records show that secessionist candidates obtained narrow majorities of the total votes cast.<sup>4</sup> Based on these figures, some scholars have concluded that while these electorates were divided, a majority in the Lower South supported secession (e.g., Fogel 1994, 412-13; McPherson 2003, 235).

In this paper, we reevaluate the popularity of Southern secession by examining these elections more closely. In each of the six original Confederate states, the decision to secede was made by delegates in specially convened conventions. These delegates were elected from existing state legislative districts by plurality voting, a system that is prone to reduce voter participation in lopsided races (e.g., Eggers 2015).<sup>5</sup> Given the economic geography of slavery, a large share of counties had either a high or low share of slaves in the population, and thus tended to be non-competitive with large majorities either in favor or opposed to secession. This lack of local competitiveness was associated with a low number of effective votes, a high proportion of wasted votes, as well as low turnout, particularly in high slave-share counties that overwhelmingly supported secessionist candidates.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the use of conventions

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<sup>4</sup>In the largest Upper South states where voters had the opportunity to directly decide on holding a convention (North Carolina and Tennessee), secessionists were defeated in statewide referendums.

<sup>5</sup>Plurality voting is a system in which the candidate obtaining more votes than any other candidate is elected. In the secession conventions, most districts comprised a single county although a minority of delegates in Florida and Louisiana were elected out of districts merging two or more counties. Similarly, most districts were “single-member” which means there is only one representative per district. In the districts electing more than one representative, voters received the same number of votes as members elected (and thus approximate single-member plurality voting). For simplicity, we use the term “district” interchangeably with “county,” with the exception of cases in which we have to make a distinction between electoral districts and administrative counties.

<sup>6</sup>Effective votes are only those that are needed to obtain a simple plurality. Wasted votes are defined as votes having no effect in the election, which includes all votes for losing candidates and all surplus votes

reduced the share of the electorate whose support was necessary to achieve secession. In the Lower South states for which we have complete returns, we find that the effective number of votes from the counties electing secessionist candidates—which comprised more than 50% of the delegates to each convention—represented only 9% of the electorate of these states.

We also find support for the understudied role the conventions played in facilitating secession. Specifically, using a new dataset of representation in the conventions, which mirrored representation in the corresponding state legislature, we demonstrate that counties with more slaveholders and planters (defined as slaveholders owning 20 or more slaves) were systematically overrepresented. Thus, the system of representation used favored counties in which a greater proportion of the voters were slaveholders. Under a fair representation benchmark, we also show that this bias alone was potentially decisive in the key conventions of Alabama and Georgia.<sup>7</sup>

Historical works analyzing the role of conventions have suggested alternative mechanisms which could explain the success of the secessionists, despite significant opposition. While low slaveholder-share constituencies largely voted against candidates supporting secession, delegates could have changed their position once elected (see e.g., Williams, Williams, and Carlson, 2002). This agency problem is plausible given that voters did not possess the typical mechanism for holding representatives accountable; these were one-off elections without the possibility of reelection. We explore this possibility using a newly digitized dataset of roll-call votes in the different conventions and find that delegates largely followed the mandate given by their constituency. Specifically, most delegates elected as secessionist (cooperationist) supported (rejected) pro-secession motions, even after controlling for their personal slaveholdings. Hence, convention delegates effectively represented the economic interests of local constituencies.

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(votes received by the winning candidate above the simple plurality threshold).

<sup>7</sup>Not only were these two states at the geographic core of the original Confederacy, but were also its most populous members (both in terms of white and total population).

Our findings complement recent work on the political determinants of Southern secession. Examining slave markets in New Orleans during the crisis, Charles Calomiris and Jonathan Pritchett (2016) find that the secession of the Lower South had little effect on slave prices, which they interpret as evidence that slaveholders underestimated the resolve of Lincoln to engage in a full-scale war. While problems of information asymmetries are certainly fundamental to why the sectional crisis resulted in war, we address a related but different question. Namely, we explore how the political and economic inequalities among whites influenced the electoral support and success of the movement. As Calomiris and Pritchett argue, secessionists evaluated all contingencies and acted strategically under many uncertainties. We emphasize the level of opposition, mainly from low slaveholding constituencies, as an additional source of uncertainty. The decision to use conventions—and avoid statewide referendums—allowed secessionists to bypass this perceived opposition.

Lastly, we provide empirical support for historical studies on the representation of slave interests in the conventions (e.g., Wooster 1962; Johnson 1999) as well as works on the importance of conventions in explaining why a minority in favor of secession prevailed in the Lower South yet initially failed in the Upper South (e.g., Gary 2004). To the best of our knowledge, no existing empirical study addresses the issue of how conventions influenced political behavior during the crisis or how they reduced the proportion of the electorate needed for secession. We are also not aware of previous studies measuring the political inequality in these conventions and analyzing its relationship with economic inequalities among whites in the seceding states.

## **The Secession Crisis of 1860-61**

While tensions between states over slavery had long existed, the issue was largely suppressed from the national debate during most of the Second Party System (1828-1854). This system broke down in the 1850s when disagreement over the spread of slavery led the Whig Party to split (Potter 1976). Soon after the Whigs' demise, the Republican Party, whose primary

platform was to ban slavery in the Western territories, emerged in the non-slave states. Due to the much larger population of the Northern states, the Republican presidential nominee, Abraham Lincoln, was able to win a majority of electoral votes as a solely sectional candidate on November 6, 1860.

Soon after Lincoln's election, most slave states convened special sessions of their legislatures to determine their response to the new administration. By mid-December, six Lower South states separately passed legislation calling for a "convention of the people," a special unicameral legislative body convened specifically to consider their position in the Union. In addition to specifying the apportionment of delegates to these conventions, each legislature empowered these delegations with the ability to decide any measure necessary to protect the state's interests.<sup>8</sup>

In the months between the the passing of this legislation and the elections for delegates, two factions emerged. "Immediate secessionists" (hereafter, secessionists) advocated for their state to unilaterally secede. A separate faction, which became known as "cooperationists," was a coalition of unionists, moderates, and pro-slavery supporters who, at a bare minimum, opposed unilateral secession.<sup>9</sup> Their primary platform was that Southern grievances should be addressed as a bloc, which would lower the chances of conflict and strengthen their bargaining position (Crofts 1989; Potter 1976). Cooperationists also asserted that any decision by a convention would only take effect if voters ratified it via referendum (Freehling 2007, 464; Barney 2004, 198).<sup>10</sup>

Private correspondences between secessionist leaders reveal that they opposed a referen-

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<sup>8</sup>Elster (1995) classifies this type of convention as one in which the legislature places no "upstream constraints" on its remit.

<sup>9</sup>Additional labels for secessionists include "separate," "straight outs," and "disunion." Cooperationists were also called "conditional unionists," and "unconditional unionists."

<sup>10</sup>According to Potter (1976, 495), cooperationists "set, as a prerequisite to secession, such a high degree of unanimity that they seemed unwilling to secede at all...(therefore) secessionists regarded Cooperationists as Unionists."

dum on secession harboring doubts about the popularity of their movement. This is candidly explained by Alfred Aldrich, member of the South Carolina (hereafter, SC) legislature in a letter to one of the state's US Senators, James H. Hammond, about the strategy secessionist should follow: "I do not want to see another attempt to vote a revolution. The thing is absurd & can't be done...If the question must be referred back to the people...it will be an utter failure." A month later he reiterated his concerns: "I do not believe the common people understand it, in fact, I know they will not understand it; But whoever waited for the common people when a great move was to be made?" (Hammond Papers, LC)

Alternative mechanisms, such as holding a regional convention, were also seen as harming the prospects of the movement. Anticipating that a Southern majority would probably oppose secession, William Gist, the secessionist governor of SC, wrote on November 8, 1860, to Mississippi's governor "do not ask for a Southern Council, as the Border non-acting States would out vote us & thereby defeat action. Let your State immediately assemble in Convention" (as cited in Freehling 2007, 446).

The creation of a convention and the later unilateral declaration of independence, was the route followed by the first states to secede. For instance, the SC legislature voted on November 13, 1860 to hold elections for delegates on December 6 to a convention that would convene on December 17. This convention voted unanimously to secede from the Union on December 20. By the end of January, 1861, five more Lower South states (Florida-FL, Alabama-AL, Mississippi-MS, Georgia-GA and Louisiana-LA) had declared their independence following the same mechanism. These states later formed the Confederate States of America in early February of 1861. Soon after Texas (TX), approved a similar ordinance in a convention and joined the Confederacy in March of 1861.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>The process in TX was unique. Pro-Union Governor, Sam Houston, refused to call a special session of the legislature to create a convention. As a result, secessionists privately called for an extralegal convention. Questioning the legitimacy of this decision, unionists "failed to put forward a slate of candidates in the county elections of convention delegates" (Buenger 1983, 299). Hence, a sizeable share of the counties did not hold elections, at all, and roughly 25% percent did not send delegates to the convention (Wooster 1962).

The path of the Upper South states to joining the Confederacy was crucially different. In particular, voters in each state were given the opportunity via referendum to either determine whether to hold a convention or subject any secession resolution to a posterior ratification. For example, in North Carolina (NC) and Tennessee (TN) voters initially rejected the holding of a convention. This electoral defeat was anticipated by a secessionist leader in NC in a letter to one of the state's Congressmen by saying "You cannot unite the masses of any Southern state much less those of N.C. against the Union and in favor [of] slavery alone" (as cited in Crofts, 1989, 132). In this case, holding such a referendum was a compromise reached when secessionists could not obtain the supermajority required by the state's constitution to call a convention. This was seen as a defeat by those who hoped to rush the state "out of the Union without giving the people an opportunity to determine their fate" (Harris 1988, 37).

In Virginia (VA), the legislature called for a convention but also held a referendum on whether a convention's decision would require popular ratification. The inclusion of this provision caused a "heated debate" in the legislature (Wooster 1962, 141). Voters later approved the proposed posterior ratification by a wide margin. Although Missouri (MO) remained in the Union, the process was similar. According to Wooster (1962, 225), "as originally proposed, the convention bill would have provided for a convention with unlimited power, but (anti-secessionist)...were able to secure adoption of an amendment providing that any action changing the relationship of Missouri to the Union would not be valid until approved by the state's voters."

The federal government did not recognize the states' right to secede, and refused to surrender any federal property in the seceded states. Conflict began on April 12, 1861, with the firing on Fort Sumter in Charleston (SC), and Lincoln's subsequent call on April 15 for troops to suppress the movement. This altered significantly the costs and benefits of secession since avoiding war was no longer a possibility. Thus, in these states the choice of whether to secede or not after April 15, 1861, was then more about which side of the war voters and



representatives preferred their state to fight for.<sup>12</sup> In the weeks following, four Upper South states (AR, NC, TN and VA) also seceded primarily using the same mechanisms.<sup>13</sup>

## Conventions and Popular Support

We begin by using the election results for convention delegates to investigate how the system of representation influenced the participation of voters during the crisis. In the Lower South states for which there are complete and quantifiable records, secessionist candidates received approximately 50% of the popular vote in GA (Johnson 1972), 52% in LA (Dew 1970), and 56% in AL (Denman 1933).<sup>14</sup> These narrow majorities have led some scholars to conclude that there was majority support in the Lower South for secession (e.g., Fogel 1994; McPherson 2003).

In this section, we show that these vote aggregates are not an accurate measure of popular support, as the electoral system influenced the participation of voters and candidates. Using the 1860 presidential elections as a baseline, we first illustrate the massive decline in turnout in the election of secession delegates. We then characterize this decline by the level of electoral competitiveness. Specifically, voters residing in counties expected to be uncompetitive, such as those in high slave-share counties voting in favor of secession, had a lower incentive to turnout compared to a referendum in which all votes are counted equally towards an aggregate state tally. In addition, opposing candidates were less likely to enter races in

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<sup>12</sup>This is vividly expressed in a speech to the VA Convention by delegate, James Dorman on April 17. Despite voting against secession on April 4, Dorman said “The issue is now upon us; we must fight; and the question is, which side will we take...That side is the South” (Proceedings of the Virginia State Convention of 1861, 4:119).

<sup>13</sup>TN was the only Confederate state in which a state legislature passed a direct statute on secession.

<sup>14</sup>Incomplete records for MS suggest that this figure was 57% (Rainwater 1938). In the Upper South states having similar (pre-War) elections, existing records, though incomplete, reveal that secessionists were clearly a minority (see e.g., Crofts 1989).

counties in which there was little chance of winning. In sum, the electoral system used to select delegates had a large impact on turnout, particularly in the high slave-share counties won mostly by secessionists.

## Turnout

In light of the stakes being decided in the secession conventions, historians have noted that turnout in the elections for delegates was surprisingly low, particularly in the Lower South (e.g., Johnson 1999, Barney 2004, Freehling 2007). We quantify this decline by taking the 1860 presidential election turnout as a benchmark, which provides a lower bound for the number of eligible voters in each county. This election occurred less than two months prior to all the elections for delegates and provides a plausible counterfactual for the potential participation under a statewide referendum.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 1 shows the mean county-level support for secessionist (“Sec”) and cooperationist (“Coop”) candidates, respectively, as a share of 1860 presidential turnout. The third bar in each panel shows our measure of abstention (“Abst”), defined as the shortfall between the total number of votes cast for delegates and the total number of votes for president (as a share of the latter). Observations are weighted by the total number of presidential votes to account for the size of county electorates.<sup>16</sup> In our Online Appendix (Figure 1) we present these figures separately by state.

As shown, secessionist candidates obtained on average only 40% of the votes cast in the preceding presidential election. Moreover, on average there is an abstention of 23% in the election of delegates compared to the turnout observed in this presidential election.

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<sup>15</sup>Because of the electoral college, and the rules adopted by each state, presidential elections are akin to a referendum to determine which candidate obtains the state’s electoral votes. In a few counties where the presidential vote is unavailable we use the turnout of the most recent gubernatorial race.

<sup>16</sup>Specifically, each bar plots a weighted average of the form  $\sum w_i \left( \frac{v_i^D}{v_i^P} \right)$  where  $v_i^D$  is the respective vote in the election of delegates in county  $i$ ,  $v_i^P$  is the 1860 presidential vote and  $w_i = \frac{v_i^P}{\sum v_i^P}$ .

Figure 1 also shows these results when disaggregated by counties won by secessionist and cooperationist candidates, respectively. In the secessionist counties (middle panel), which combined elected slightly more than half of the delegates, there is an approximately 30 percentage point difference in the number of votes cast between the 1860 presidential and respective convention election. This is approximately twice the average abstention observed in the counties won by cooperationists (right panel), which together elected 46% of the delegates.<sup>17</sup>

[Figure 1 about here]

As a consequence of this steep decline in participation, particularly in counties won by secessionists, the majorities in these conventions were elected with only 27% of the votes cast in the preceding presidential election.<sup>18</sup>

An additional factor associated with the low turnout in the elections of delegates is the high number of districts with candidates running unopposed. This potentially had a negative impact on participation as the strategic choice by candidates of whether or not to run should affect the number of votes cast, as the opposition voters have no candidates to vote for. In total, 12 percent of the districts of these three conventions were uncontested. Of these, nearly three-fourths were won by secessionists. In the key states of AL and GA, candidates for either side ran unopposed in more than 13% of the districts. The share of uncontested races was more than twice as high for districts won by secessionist candidates (16% were uncontested) as for those districts won by cooperationists (6%).

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<sup>17</sup>The difference in means between the two groups is approximately 15 percent and is highly significant (*t*-statistic of -5.74).

<sup>18</sup>Specifically, the total number votes for secessionist candidates in the 130 districts they won equaled 67,181 which is approximately 27% of the total presidential votes cast in these districts in 1860.

## Local Competitiveness

While many causes have been offered for the decline in turnout, such as poor weather (Johnson 1999), voter intimidation (Barney 2004, 212-19; McCurry 2010, 49-54; Williams 2008), resignation that secession was inevitable (Barney 2004; Sinha 2003), and collective action problems inherent to the heterogeneous cooperationist coalition (Freehling 2007; Johnson 1999, 24), none has been able to account for the observed variation in participation across counties. While approximately 10% of counties experienced a decline in turnout of more than 50%, around 10% also witnessed an *increase* in turnout.

The electoral incentives at the local level partially explain this variation in participation. As is well known, the use of plurality voting to select representatives out of geographic districts is associated with low turnout (Jackman 1987), particularly in non-competitive districts (e.g., Eggers 2015).<sup>19</sup> This effect is relevant to the participation in the election of delegates given the high spatial concentration of slaves, especially in AL and GA. Namely, in districts having a high share of slaves the likelihood of electing a secessionist candidate was high. Similarly, the likelihood of electing a cooperationist representative was high in the lower slave-share districts. This implies that many of these local races were unlikely to be competitive. The electoral returns bear this out. The average margin of victory was 44%, and in only 14% of counties was the election decided by 10 percentage points or less.<sup>20</sup> As a result, the total number of effective votes (i.e., only those votes needed to win the election) across districts electing secessionist candidates was equivalent to only 11% of the turnout in the 1860 presidential election. To put this in perspective, the number of effective votes in districts won by secessionists (27,081) was less than half of the number of slaveholders living in these (60,964).

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<sup>19</sup>The standard argument is that non-competitive districts are perceived as “safe seats” where the election outcome locally is highly predictable. This discourages participation given some non-negligible cost of voting.

<sup>20</sup>The margin of victory in the secessionist districts was approximately 49% compared to 39% in the districts won by cooperationist candidates

In Figure 2 we provide systematic evidence of the positive association between local electoral competitiveness and turnout in these elections. Again, we use turnout in the 1860 presidential election as a benchmark. The left panel presents a partial regression plot with the residual values of the percentage change in participation on the y-axis against the residuals of a measure of district competitiveness on the x-axis.<sup>21</sup> The effect of several factors is partialled out. First, due to the salience of slavery to secession, we control for the share of the district’s population who were slaves. Similarly, we include total district population, as the likelihood of any voter being pivotal is decreasing in district size. Lastly, to control for unobserved state-level factors we include state fixed effects.<sup>22</sup>

[Figure 2 about here]

As shown in panel A, there is a positive and highly significant correlation between district competitiveness and the change in turnout between these elections. The slope coefficient of 0.51 (S.E. = 0.06) implies that a one-standard-deviation increase in the competitiveness of a district is associated with an increase in participation of approximately 16 percentage points. Compared to the mean decline in turnout in these states (28%) the magnitude of this increase is very substantial.<sup>23</sup>

Further evidence that the electoral system used to select delegates conditioned voter

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<sup>21</sup>Explicitly, the competitiveness of district  $i$ , state  $j$ , is measured as

$$1 - |\% \text{ vote for secessionists}_{ij} - \% \text{ vote for cooperationists}_{ij}|.$$

Thus a value of 1 represents parity between the two candidates/positions and as the index approaches 0 the district becomes more lopsided.

<sup>22</sup>Expectations about the overall support for the movement in the state may have negatively influenced participation. For instance, a legislator from SC argued that turnout was low among Unionist in low slave prevalence regions because “The Union men thought it was a foregone conclusion that the State would secede, & it was not worth their while to go to the polls” as quoted in Sinha (2003, 242).

<sup>23</sup>In this model, the incidence of slaves in the district is negatively correlated with the decline in turnout, slope coefficient of -0.34 (S.E.= 0.10).

behavior during the crisis comes from the Upper South states that held state referendums on questions pertaining to secession. In NC for instance, where voters decided not to hold a secession convention, turnout declined on average 5% compared to the 1860 presidential election. In a similar referendum in TN, turnout declined on average 12%.<sup>24</sup> Overall, the average decline in turnout in the referendums for which data is available (NC, TN, and VA) was below 10%. More importantly, since every vote in a referendum adds to the aggregate state tally, there should not be an association between local competitiveness and turnout. This is precisely what we find in panel B (right), Figure 2. As can be seen, the relationship between the closeness of the district-level result and the change in turnout after controls are taken into account is not statistically different from zero.

In our Online Appendix we explore the robustness of these conditional correlations. For example, we expand the set of controls and account for additional factors such as the pre-crisis level of electoral competitiveness proxied by the number of parties in the 1860 presidential election and the incidence of slaveholders in the district (see Online Appendix Figure 2). We also show that these results are not driven by any outliers, in fact once we exclude outliers the slopes are more precisely estimated (Online Appendix Figure 3).

## **Did Abstainers Oppose Secession?**

Our evidence suggests that if the Lower South states would have allowed referendums—either asking whether a convention should be held or to ratify a convention’s choice—overall turnout would have increased and perhaps even a majority would have voted against secession. This counterfactual is consistent with a historical literature downplaying the popularity of the movement and arguing that only a minority in each state supported it (e.g., Escott 1992,

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<sup>24</sup>In VA, where voters overwhelmingly approved a referendum (100,536 vs 45,161) on whether a secession decision by the proposed convention would only go into effect if ratified by a popular vote, turnout was 88% of the presidential votes.

Freehling 2007, Potter 1942).<sup>25</sup>

Historical accounts provide suggestive evidence that abstainers in the high slave-share counties opposed secession (McCrary, Miller and Baum 1978) and did not vote because of intimidation by secessionists (e.g., Barney 2004, Sinha 2003, Williams 2008).<sup>26</sup> For instance, a cooperationist in MS said “I knew many who were in favor of the Union, who were intimidated by threats, and by the odium attending it, from voting at all” (as cited in Barney 2004, 269). Similarly, a cooperationist in TX wrote that secession was achieved by the coercion of a “ferocious minority...I only dared protest as strongly and I thought prudent... accordingly I did not vote” (as cited in Freehling 2007, 459). Hence, some historians have claimed that the elected pro-secession majorities in the Lower South states reflected substantial voter fraud and intimidation (e.g., McCurry 2010, Merrit 2017).

The argument that abstention was systematically influenced by coercion fits broadly with the more conventional view that the slaveholding elite used “the traditional powers of their planter oligarchy” to overcome the will of the majority during the crisis (Donnelly 1965, 81).<sup>27</sup> While these tactics may have helped slaveholders to obtain pluralities in the high slave-share districts, it would have been much more costly, if not impossible, to employ

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<sup>25</sup>As Potter (1942, 208) claims, “At no time during the winter of 1860-1861 was secession desired by a majority of people in the slave states...secession was not basically desired even by a majority in the lower South.”

<sup>26</sup>McCrary, Miller and Baum (1978) use ecological models to infer which voters in the 1860 Presidential election supported secession or abstained. They find that more than half of those in Alabama who voted for John Bell, the pro-Union Constitutional Union Party’s candidate, abstained in the elections for convention delegates. These abstaining voters overwhelming came from the high slaveholding districts of Southern Alabama. Based on this, the authors claim that a clear majority of the abstainers in these districts almost certainly opposed secession.

<sup>27</sup>As Acemoglu and Robinson (2008) argue, this (*de facto*) power of slaveholders could be explained not only by their control over the economic system but also by their greater education and ability to act collectively.

broadly in the lower slave-share districts.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, since secessionists only needed to win pluralities in districts comprising a majority of delegates, the geographic scale of where they may have needed to employ these tactics was significantly reduced. That is, the conventions localized political competition and significantly lowered the share of voters needed in order to obtain a majority of delegates.

## **The Political Advantage of Slave Owners**

While it is clear that the conventions influenced political behavior, we now explore how the conventions independently facilitated secession. First, we investigate how the system of representation used in the Lower South conventions favored higher slaveholding constituencies. Namely, the apportionment of delegates, which was based on the apportionment of state legislatures, systematically over-represented counties with a high concentration of slaveholders. In addition, despite being a majority, non-slaveholders tended to be concentrated in counties electing a minority of delegates. This system, which allowed a minority of voters to elect a majority of delegates, was employed in each Lower South state. Lastly, the use of conventions allowed secessionists to avoid statewide referendums, which voters used to reject pro-secession proposals in the Upper South. These overlooked factors help explain the disproportionate influence of slaveholders during the crisis.

### **Political Inequality in the Conventions**

An important source of distortion in the representation of slave interests originated in the apportionment rules of the conventions. We demonstrate this using a measure based on the number of delegates per district. This information was coded from the individual pieces of legislation passed in late 1860 and early 1861 stipulating how each convention delegates

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<sup>28</sup>As the relatively high turnout and lopsided victories in favor of cooperationists indicate (see Figure 1), these tactics were either not used or were ineffective in the counties with relatively few slaveholders.



would be elected. In each state, the delegates were elected out of the existing electoral districts for one or both chambers of the state legislature. For instance, representation in the FL, GA, LA, and SC conventions equaled the combined number of representatives and senators apportioned to the state legislature. In AL and MS, the delegates were elected using only the basis of apportionment for each states lower house.

Following Ansolabehere, Gerber and Snyder (2002), we use a metric which is relative to the “fair” level of representation in each particular state (the Relative Representation Index-*RRI*). Formally, this measure is:

$$RRI_i = \frac{D_{j(i)}/N_{j(i)}}{D_j/N_j}, \quad (1)$$

where the subscript  $j(i)$  indicates that district  $i$  is located in state  $j$ .  $D$  is the number of delegates and  $N$  denotes the voting population. This index creates a common metric across conventions by normalizing the representation of each locality by the voting power specific to each state. Individuals in districts with an index of less (more) than 1 were under-represented (over-represented) in their convention. A value close to one corresponds to a level of representation consistent with the “one person, one vote” principle.

To estimate the electorate, we take the adult white male (AWM) population as a proxy for the number of registered voters and subtract the adult white foreign-born males. This latter group was largely ineligible for failing to meet citizenship or residency requirements (Keyssar 2001).<sup>29</sup> These variables are constructed from the 1860 Census.<sup>30</sup> We focus the analysis on the founding members of the Confederacy (AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, and SC), whose choice to secede was made solely by elected representatives in state conventions. In

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<sup>29</sup>This adjustment tends to make little difference, as the ratio of our measure of the electorate to the adult white population is more than 95% in three-fourths of the counties in our sample.

<sup>30</sup>Orleans Parish (LA) is the only county (parish) in our sample which was divided into several electoral districts. For these sub-county districts we use the number of registered voters as listed in the 1859 State Census. See the Data Appendix for a detailed explanation and sources.

our Online Appendix we show the close association between legislative and convention over-representation in these states (Online Appendix Figure 4).

In Figure 3 we present two scatterplots exploring the relationship between the incidence of slaveholders in the electorate and the relative representation of counties in the conventions. Namely, these figures show two partial regression plots with the residuals of the convention *RRI* (in natural logs) on the y-axis against the residuals of the share of slaveholders in the electorate on the x-axis. The latter captures the breadth of slaveownership among each county’s electorate. We take the natural log of the *RRI* to reduce the weight of outliers and the right skew of this variable. Both models include state fixed effects; therefore the slope coefficients have a within-state interpretation. Each marker corresponds to a single district in the corresponding state.

[Figure 3 about here]

In the left panel we first show a parsimonious model which controls only for (ln) total county population and state fixed effects. The estimated slope coefficient on the local incidence of slaveholders is positive and highly significant. The point estimate of 1.68 (S.E.=0.15) in figure A implies that holding all other things equal, a district where half of its voters are slaveholders will have a predicted *RRI* score 25% greater than that of the average district in the sample (where slaveholders comprised roughly one third of the electorate). This difference represents approximately 42% of the standard deviation observed in the empirical distribution of the *RRI* for these conventions. The difference in relative representation with a district one standard deviation below the mean, where slaveholders represented 19% of the electorate, is more than 65%.

In the right panel we control for population density which is usually associated with legislative malapportionment and is positively correlated with slavery.<sup>31</sup> To calculate this measure we take the county size and 1860 boundaries from the Atlas of Historical County

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<sup>31</sup>For multi-county districts in FL and LA, we calculated weighted averages based on total county/parish population.

Boundaries (Newberry Library, Chicago). In addition, to account for the possibility that over-representation is driven by land wealth, which is also positively correlated with slave labor incidence, we include the district’s farmland value per acre as a control.<sup>32</sup> As is evident from figure B, the positive association between over-representation and the share of slaveholders in the electorate is largely unchanged when these covariates are partialled out.

In our Online Appendix we explore the robustness of these correlations. First, we expand the set of controls to include other economic characteristics of constituencies (e.g., land inequality). Second, we use alternative measures for the local-level importance of slavery: the share of the electorate who were planters, defined as slaveholders owning 20 or more slaves (Wright 1978). Lastly, we perform a sensitivity analysis excluding outliers and taking each convention separately. Overall, the positive and highly significant association between slaveholders and over-representation is robust to the inclusion of additional controls and across specifications (Online Appendix Figures 5-8).

## The Political Geography of Slavery

Political scientists have demonstrated that in electoral systems with plurality voting the degree to which representation reflects the preferences of the electorate depends on the spatial distribution of voters (Cox and Katz 2002). This was particularly relevant in the election of convention delegates, as secession divided the electorate across slave-ownership lines (see e.g., Lipset 1960; Key 1984; Johnson 1999). In particular, the concentration of slaves meant that slaveholders were spatially distributed such that despite being a minority overall they could obtain pluralities in enough districts to elect a majority of delegates.

[Table 1 about here]

In Table 1, we illustrate this electoral bias. In column 1, we report the average district

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<sup>32</sup>Although slaves were concentrated on the most valuable lands (Wright 2003), our slaveholders-proportion variable is less correlated with mean farm values ( $r=0.39$ ).

non-slaveholder-to-slaveholder ratio in each of the original Confederate states.<sup>33</sup> Although slaves constituted nearly 50% of the total population in these states, there were on average more than 2 non-slaveholders for every one slaveholder. We then sort counties from lowest to highest slave share and create two groups, each containing half of the state's non-slaveholders. In the low slave-share districts (column 2), which elected 33% of the convention delegates, there were on average approximately 5.1 non-slaveholders for every slaveholder. Column (3) shows that in the remaining counties there were on average only 1.4 non-slaveholders for every slaveholder. As reported in column (4), nearly 80% of the slaveholding population lived in these highest slave-share counties. The electoral advantage of this is shown in column (5), as these most enslaved counties selected on average more than two-thirds of the delegates. This uneven spatial distribution of slave ownership was particularly pronounced in the three Lower South states with the largest white populations (AL, GA and LA).

Finally, in columns (6) and (7) we combine these demographics with the apportionment of each convention. Specifically, we construct a set of “minimal winning districts,” defined as a subset of the most enslaved districts electing a simple majority of delegates. As shown in column (6), nearly half of the AWM of these districts were slaveholders and while they contained approximately 46% of the electorate in these states (column 7), they had 64% of its slaveholders and 78% of its planters. Hence, it is not surprising that these localities overwhelmingly elected secessionist candidates. Indeed, as we show in the next section, nearly 90% of the delegates from these counties voted for secession in their convention. Since secessionists only needed local majorities in these minimal winning districts, the choice of secession could have been made by slaveholders alone. To wit, in the three states for which we have electoral returns, the districts won by secessionists had nearly as many slaveholders (60,964) as there were votes for pro-secession candidates (67,181).

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<sup>33</sup>We calculate the number of non-slaveholders by subtracting the slaveholders from the AWM population of each county. While rare, there were instances of non-AWM who were slaveholders (e.g., widows). Yet, the census data does not allow us to differentiate them.

## Was the Bias in Representation Pivotal?

While the evidence indicates that secessionist leaders believed that using conventions and avoiding referendums was crucial to the success of their movement, can we conclude from the existing electoral returns for delegates that the bias to representation was pivotal to the election of pro-secession majorities? We now explore this question using a simple basis for fair representation to construct a counterfactual delegation for the three conventions for which we have district-level electoral returns.

To conduct this analysis, we simplify matters by using the rules of apportionment employed in each state. This means, for instance, that we use the total number of delegates the legislatures specified for each convention (e.g., 100 delegates in AL, 301 in GA and 130 in LA). We then reapportion each convention closest to the “one (adult white) man, one vote” principle. Specifically, we calculate the state’s electorate per delegate, and assign delegates to each electoral district based on the size of their electorate. In each state, we use the existing electoral districts. For AL and GA, counties were not combined to make electoral districts and thus each delegate was wholly elected out of a single county (i.e., there were no split or multi-county districts). Hence, we reapportion delegates entirely from one county to another. The choice of the Louisiana legislature to select delegates out of both the existing lower and upper house districts complicates the analysis. For one, most senate districts were composed of multiple counties. Furthermore, the delegates elected out of senatorial districts comprised only 32 of out the convention’s total delegation of 130. As a result, our counterfactual exercise in this state primarily entails equalizing representation between the delegates elected out of house and senatorial districts. Lastly, to calculate the counterfactual delegation for each convention, we assume that voters would have voted the same under this new apportionment (i.e., voting behavior is invariant to the number of local representatives).

Our findings are presented in Table 2. For each convention, we divide counties into quartiles sorted from the highest slaveholder-proportion to the lowest. Thus, Q1 (Q4) consists of counties whose electorate had the highest (lowest) proportion of slaveholders within each

state. Columns 1 through 3 report the share of the state’s slaves, slaveholders, and electorate each quartile contains. Column 4 reports the number of delegates these counties were actually apportioned and column 5 the number of these who were elected as secessionists. For example, in Alabama, the top quartile of slaveholder-proportion counties contained more than half the state’s slaves, nearly 44% of the its slaveholders, 22% of its electorate and were apportioned 27% of the delegates. As shown in column 5, all of these delegates were elected as secessionists. Column 6 reports the total number of delegates this group would receive under fair apportionment. In column 7, we use the electoral returns to calculate the number of counterfactual delegates who would have been elected as secessionists. The top quartile loses six delegates to reapportionment and, as a result, the total number of elected secessionist delegates declines from 54 to 50 (out of 100).<sup>34</sup> Table 2 shows a similar pattern in our counterfactual GA convention: the highest slaveholder-proportion counties lose seats. As a result, secessionist delegates actually become a minority in this crucial state.

[Table 2 about here]

In LA, because the senatorial apportionment was more biased against low slave-share districts, this analysis did result in a roughly 5% increase in the number of cooperationist delegates. Yet, the slim secessionist majority in the low slave-share and underrepresented Orleans Parish (i.e., New Orleans), a surprising outcome largely attributed to low turnout among anti-secessionists (e.g., Gary 2004, McCrary, Miller and Baum 1978), is probably the reason why our counterfactual analysis does not result in a cooperationist majority in this state.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>This does not include the two delegates from Shelby, where there was a dispute about late arriving ballots. These two delegates were elected as cooperationists yet the secessionist majority in the convention refused to seat them and instead voted to seat the county’s pro-secession candidates (Barney 2004, 298, Denman 1933, 121). Using our apportionment, which would have provided a 50 to 48 majority for the cooperationists, the winning candidates from Shelby would likely have been seated (and hence enlarged the narrow majority against secession).

<sup>35</sup>Due to its size, Orleans Parish was the only county divided into distinct electoral districts. Using the

While the lack of county-level returns for delegates means that we can only perform this analysis in three states, these calculations demonstrate the importance of the biased system of representation in manufacturing the observed majorities in at least two conventions. Furthermore, the analysis for Louisiana shows how the separate influences of the convention on turnout incentives and representation each contributed to the observed secessionist majorities in this state.

## Representation in the Conventions

Since the choice on secession was transferred from the voters to representatives, a relevant question is whether delegates effectively represented the interests of their constituents. In particular, delegates could have been more responsive to their own personal interest in slavery than to the one of the constituents.<sup>36</sup> Although historical works have explored this question (notably Wooster 1962), no previous work, to our knowledge, has systematically examined the voting behavior of delegates or tested whether they faithfully represented the economic interests in slavery of their constituents. We explore this potential agency problem using a comprehensive list of votes in various conventions and test whether the delegate-level support for secession was conditioned by the slave ownership structure and the expressed preferences of their constituents towards secession.

Using the official journal of each convention, we coded all roll-calls where we could infer the revealed position on secession and match each delegate to their constituency. We restrict the analysis to votes that occurred prior to the firing on Fort Sumter (April 15, 1861) and to the Lower South conventions for which there are relatively complete county-level electoral returns (AL, GA, and LA). As a robustness test, we also use votes from two conventions in

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same logic provided in Section 3, a lack of electoral competition within these districts—5 of its 11 districts had a margin of victory of at least 30%—could have negatively influenced turnout incentives.

<sup>36</sup>As cited in Johnson (1999, p. 108-111), many secessionists privately expressed confidence that in the conventions “some of those who were elected as coo-men may turn out very good secessionists.”

the Upper South (AR and VA) which voted *against* secession. In sum, our analysis comprises five independent legislative bodies.

Each coding includes the vote on the final secession ordinance. While pre-ordinance motions were not identical across states, in the Lower South conventions the substance and sequence of the votes is similar. The first entailed a motion on whether the state had the right and obligation to secede given the threat of Lincoln’s election. Cooperationists would then offer as an alternative to organize a Southern-wide convention to bargain with the North as a unified regional bloc. When this was voted down, cooperationists would then put forth a resolution conditioning secession to a ratification referendum. In two of the three Lower South conventions analyzed (AL and LA), this popular ratification was proposed and voted down.<sup>37</sup> In total, we coded 17 motions and resolutions involving 725 delegates and 2407 individual votes. The resolutions, their description, and the final vote tally in each is presented in the Online Appendix (Table 2).

We use two different measures to estimate the weight of constituencies on the voting behavior of delegates. First, we use the incidence of slaveholders in the electorate which captures the potential local support for secession based on the economic interest of voters. We also use a more direct measure based on the observed electoral support by creating a dummy for whether secessionist candidates obtained a majority in the district.<sup>38</sup> This indicator allows us to capture in a simple way the “mandate” given to delegates in each convention, and whether delegates represented this in the convention.

The incidence of slave labor (and hence slaveholders) is potentially correlated with local features which could have directly altered the cost and benefits of secession. Hence, we control for a number of economic factors such as farmland value per acre and population density. Similarly, local commercial connections and access to markets could have shaped the

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<sup>37</sup>In the Upper South conventions, fewer pre-final votes took place since a majority used procedural methods to prevent secession resolutions from reaching the floor.

<sup>38</sup>For multi-member districts we take the highest number of votes for each position to classify the district.



willingness to secede (Noe 1994), which we proxy by the length of steamboat-navigated rivers and railroads (normalized by area) in 1860 (as measured by Atack 2015)). Slave prevalence is also associated with wealth inequalities and thus our slaveholders share measure could pick up the effect of non-slave based inequality. To address this, we control for land inequality using a Gini index similar to the one employed by Nunn (2008). We also include for the (ln) total population of the district as a control to account for scale effects.

Lastly, we control for delegate-specific characteristics that may have influenced their position on secession and overridden the importance of their constituents' interests. Primarily, a delegate's personal economic interest in slavery may crucially influence his vote. To account for this, we control for the number of slaves each delegate owned using the Slave Schedule of the 1860 Census.<sup>39</sup> We complement this measure with other personal characteristics using the biographical information collected by Wooster (1951; 1954; 1956). This information includes the age, occupation, birth place, and the value of real property, it is available for 3 of the 5 conventions analyzed.<sup>40</sup> Summary statistics of all the variables are presented in our Online Appendix.

## Results

We investigate the relationship between the delegate-level support for secession and the share of slaveholders in their constituents using a series of linear probability models where the dependent variable is an indicator for either a “*yea (1)*” or a “*nay (0)*” on each motion

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<sup>39</sup>Each record was located manually using Ancestry.com.

<sup>40</sup>Ideally, we would also control for the ideology and partisanship of delegates, yet systematic information on the party affiliation of representatives is not available nor do we have previous voting records in other legislatures to construct an ideology score.

(*yea* represents the pro-secession position).<sup>41</sup> In addition to the characteristics described above, we include a full set of motion fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the delegate level so they are robust to heteroskedasticity and serial correlation.<sup>42</sup>

[Table 3 about here]

Table 3 presents the estimates for the three Lower South conventions for which we have complete county-level returns (AL, GA and LA). In all odd columns we first present a simple bivariate model with no controls. We then include the same set of county and delegate-level controls to make the estimates comparable (even columns). The estimated coefficient on the share of slaveholders in the electorate is positive and highly significant in all conventions. The magnitude of these coefficients is also large. For instance, the estimate of 1.75 (S.E. = 0.18) for AL in column 1 implies that a delegate from a district in which 47% of its voters are slaveholders (one standard deviation above the mean) is predicted to have approximately 0.28 more chance of voting for secession than a delegate elected from an average district (where 30% of the voters are slaveholders). As shown in column 2, the inclusion of controls has little impact on the magnitude of this relationship.<sup>43</sup>

In columns 3-4 we use the dummy indicating whether the delegate was elected under a secessionist platform as the main explanatory variable. As shown, this variable almost perfectly predicts the voting behavior in AL convention; a delegate elected as a secessionist

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<sup>41</sup>These models are interpreted as an approximation of a general latent utility model of the form

$$\begin{aligned}
 u_i^*(\phi) &= \beta \mathbf{w}_i^\phi + e_i^\phi \text{ for } \phi \in \{0, 1\} \\
 y_i &= 1 \{u_i^*(1) > u_i^*(0)\},
 \end{aligned}$$

where  $\{\mathbf{w}_i^\phi\}_i$  is a set of covariates and  $\{e_i^\phi\}_i$  a set of errors such that  $e_i^1 - e_i^0 | (\mathbf{w}_i^1, \mathbf{w}_i^0) \sim F$ . The pdf of  $F$  is continuous and symmetric around zero. See Snyder and Heckman (1997)

<sup>42</sup>Hence, our inferences are robust to any form of serial correlation arising from time-invariant personal characteristics of delegates not included such as ideology and racial prejudice.

<sup>43</sup>Interestingly, the number of slaves owned by delegates is not a significant predictor in this model.

in this convention is predicted to have 0.91 more chance of casting a pro-secession vote compared to a delegate elected as a cooperationist (column 4). This indicates that even though these were one-off elections, electoral promises were kept and delegates followed their mandate. The estimates for GA (columns 5-8) and LA (columns 9-12) are smaller but significant and overall consistent. The 0.84 (S.E = 0.37) for LA convention in column 10 for instance implies that a one standard deviation increase in district slaveholders share is associated with an increase in the likelihood of casting a pro-secession motion by 11%. A delegate in this convention elected as a secessionist is approximately 50% more likely to vote for secession compared to one elected as a cooperationist (columns 11-12).

In our Online Appendix we explore the robustness of these results. First, while the vote on the final ordinance tended to be lopsided, pre-ordinance votes were generally closely contested which suggest that the final votes contained a significant degree of strategic behavior by delegates.<sup>44</sup> To account for this, we perform a sensitivity analysis excluding the final vote from the sample. As expected, the estimated correlation between slaveholders share and support for immediate secession is generally bigger and more precisely estimated (Table 5). Second, we augment the set of controls to account for additional economic, political, and cultural factors which could be associated with slavery. For example, we control for other potentially relevant economic characteristics, such as the size of the manufacturing sector, which could be negatively correlated with slavery and alter the benefits of separation. We also include additional delegate-level controls such as age and occupation (farmer, lawyer, and planter) dummies. Overall, the association between local slave incidence and support for immediate secession is robust to the inclusion of these additional controls (Tables 6).

Lastly, to explore the generalizability of these results we use the votes in two Upper South

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<sup>44</sup>The leader of the cooperationists in the AL convention, Jeremiah Clemens, articulated this in a speech prior to the final vote: “I believe your Ordinance to be wrong—if I could defeat it I would; but I know I cannot. It will pass, and, when passed, it becomes the act of the State of Alabama...[A]lthough as a member of this convention I opposed your Ordinance...my name shall stand upon the original vote, and side by side with you I brave the consequences. I vote in the affirmative (*New York Times*, January 28, 1861).”

conventions (AR and VA) which elected a minority of secessionist delegates. Although we do not have information on the platforms of these delegates, the estimated coefficient when using slaveholders share is positive and highly significant indicating that the effective representation of local economic constituencies in the conventions was not confined to the Lower South (Online Appendix Table 7).

## Conclusions

In this paper, we investigate the economic and political determinants of secession in the Lower South. First, we demonstrate that the choice to use state conventions significantly lowered the share of the electorate whose support was necessary to achieve secession. Second, we show that the representation of counties in these conventions was biased in favor of high slave-share regions. Furthermore, this bias may have been pivotal to the election of secessionist majorities in the key states of Alabama and Georgia. This evidence suggests that the perceived threats to slave property was likely insufficient to drive a majority of voters in the Lower South to support a radical policy such as secession. Our findings also help reconcile works emphasizing that the rents to slavery were enjoyed by a small minority (e.g., Ransom 2018) with the historical literature emphasizing the opposition to this movement among nonslaveholders (e.g., McCurry 2010).

Our findings, of course, do not preclude the possibility that armed conflict over slavery would have occurred even in a context of better representation and checks on state conventions. As economic historians have shown, slavery was thriving and there were no signs of its impending economically-determined demise (e.g., Fogel 1994). If thwarted democratically, secessionists likely would have turned to irregular measures to protect this institution (as the extra-legal convention in TX demonstrates).

Yet, coups and other non-democratic methods would have only exacerbated the underlying class tensions along slave-ownership lines within Southern society. In fact, the successful push for secession from slaveholders in a divided population may have ultimately undermined

their political goal. As historians have argued, internal dissension, and in particular, deep class conflicts, contributed to the military defeat of the South (see e.g., Beringer, Jones and Still 1991; Escott 1978; Williams 2008). For instance, more than 10% of the soldiers from the Confederate states fought for the Union and desertion, especially of soldiers from the upcountry, became an increasing problem as the war dragged on (Freehling 2001).<sup>45</sup> The representative institutions of the South allowed a small elite to bring their states to war but could not force the yeoman and poor whites to fight indefinitely for their cause.

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<sup>45</sup>For instance, Bearman (1991) found that in NC, soldiers from uphill regions were nine times as likely to desert as those from the heavily enslaved Piedmont.

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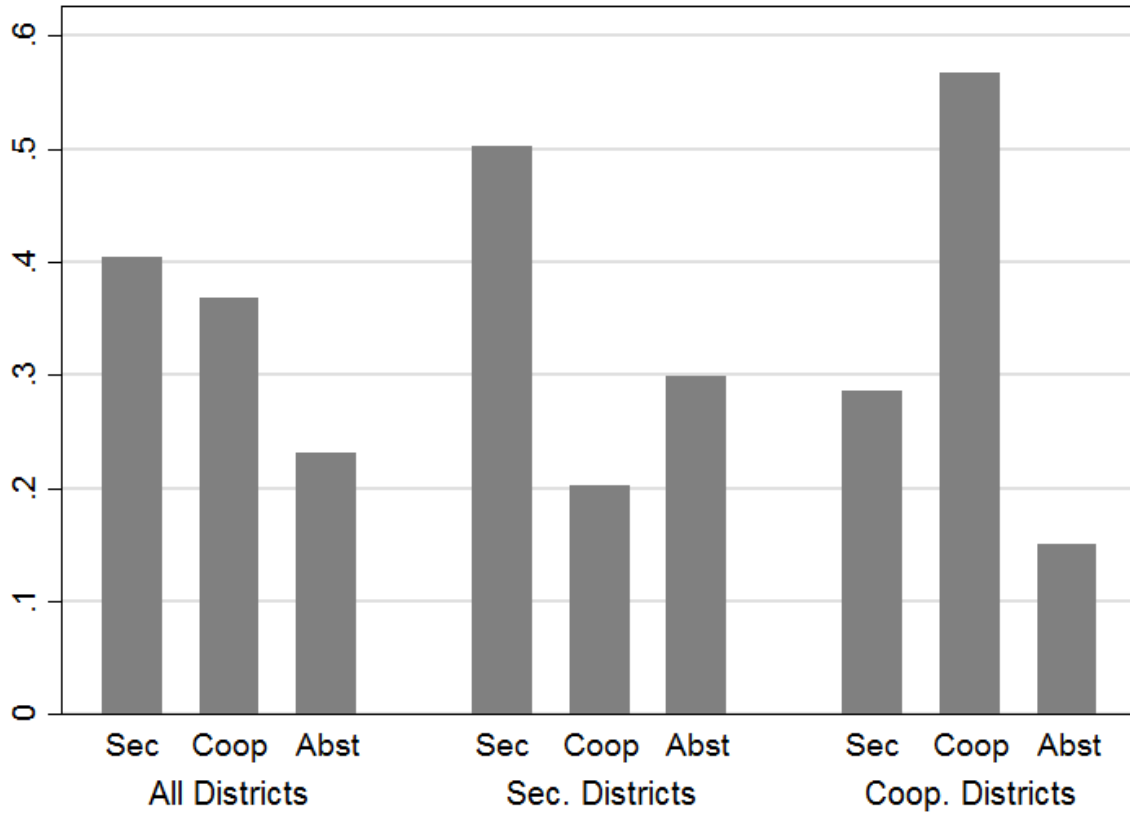
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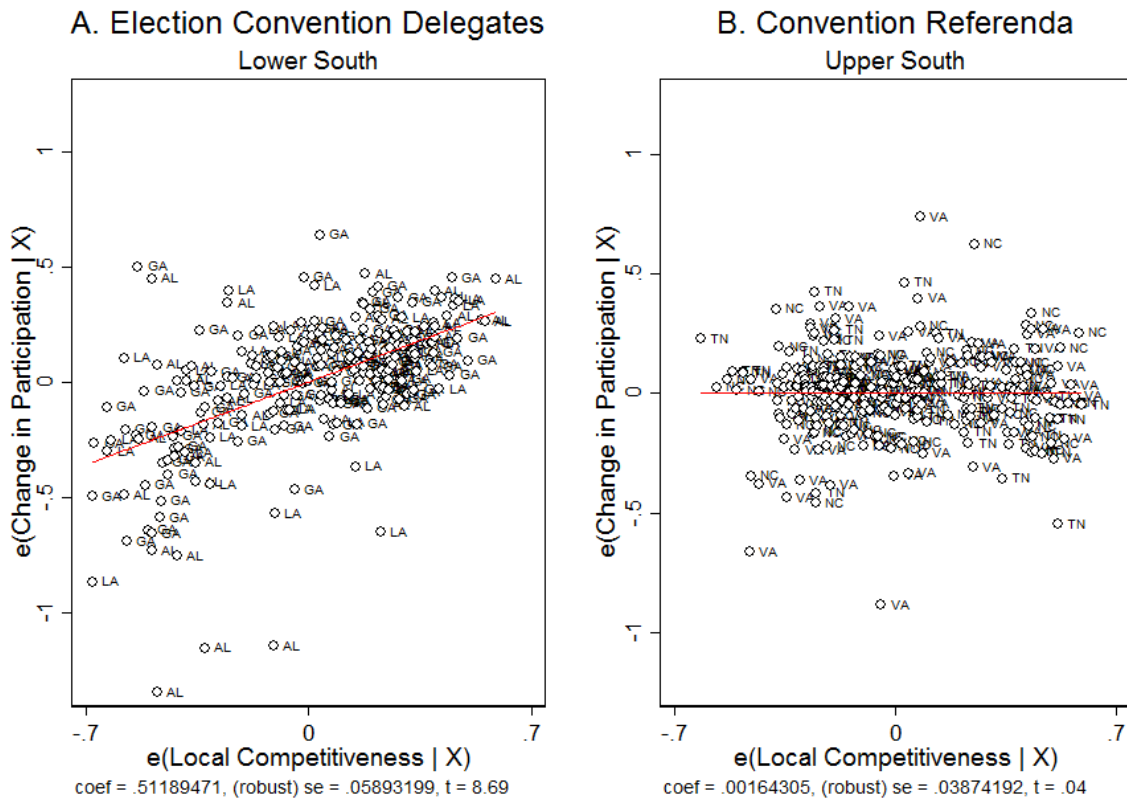
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Figure 1  
 Participation and Competitiveness, Election of Convention Delegates



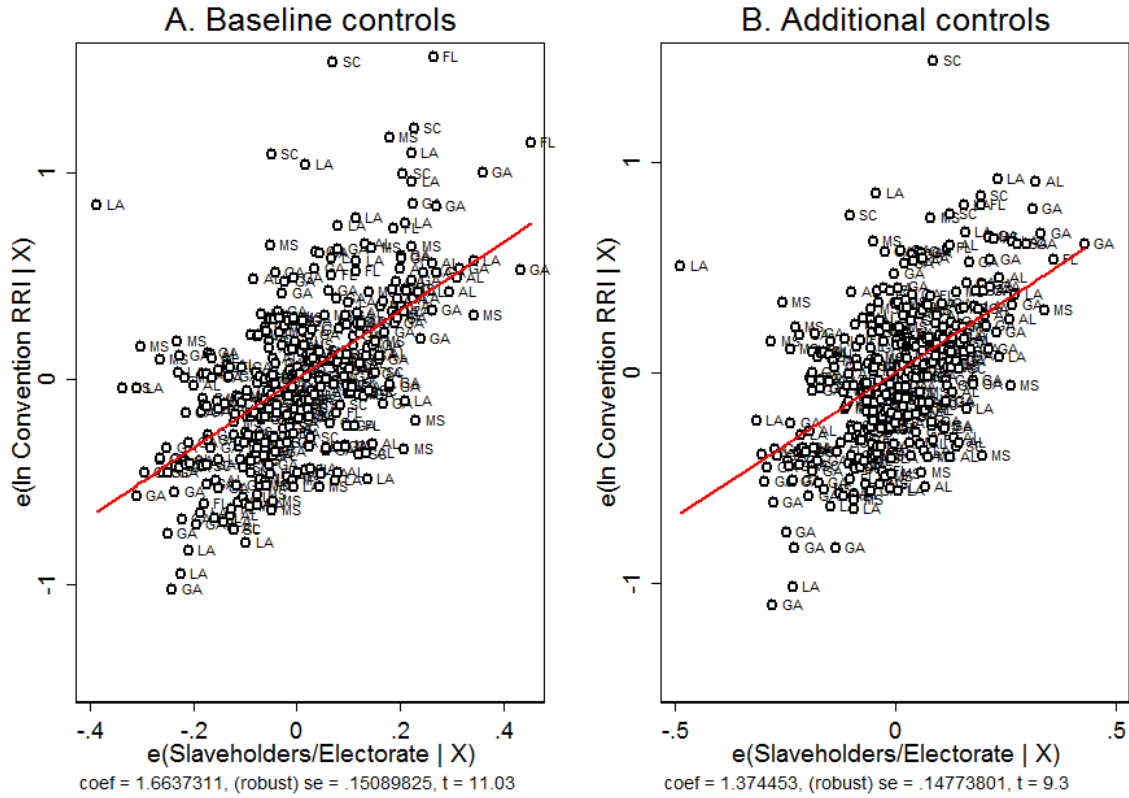
Notes: Each bar represents the average district-level votes in the elections for convention delegates in AL, GA, and LA as a share of 1860 presidential turnout (weighted by the latter). “Sec” and “Coop” is the vote received by secessionist, and cooperationist candidates, respectively. “Abst” is the average percentage point difference in the total number of votes cast between the 1860 presidential and convention elections. Middle panel only takes the sample of districts in which the highest vote was obtained by a secessionist candidate(s). Right panel are districts in which cooperationist candidates obtained the highest vote.

Figure 2  
 Change in Participation and Local Electoral Competitiveness



Notes: Partial regression plots with the residuals of the change in voter participation between i) the elections for convention delegates in AL, GA and LA (figure A), or, ii) the secession referenda in NC, TN and VA (figure B), and the 1860 presidential election, against the residuals of district competitiveness measured as  $1 - \text{abs}(\text{district-level margin of victory})$ . In each model we partial out the effect of slave population (over total district population) and  $(\ln)$  total district population. Both models include a full set of state fixed effects and allow for arbitrary heteroscedasticity at the district-level. Plots produced in Stata with the added-variable plot command (avplot).

Figure 3  
 Convention Representation and Slaveholders Incidence



Notes: Partial regression leverage plots with the residuals of the  $(\ln)$  convention *RRI* against the residuals of the slaveholding population over the district's electorate. The electorate is defined as the AWM population minus the adult white male foreign-born population. Each dot represents a single district. Model in panel A partials out the effect of total district population in 1860 and state fixed effects. Model in B controls in addition for  $(\ln)$  mean value of farms per acre and the  $(\ln)$  population density (total population/district area). Estimated standard errors allow for arbitrary heteroscedasticity at the district-level. Plots produced in Stata with the added-variable plot command (avplot).

Table 1  
Spatial Distribution of Slave Ownership, 1860

	Non-Slaveholders to Slaveholders			% of State Slaveholders	% Convention Delegates	Non-Slaveholders to Slaveholders	% of State Electorate
	All Districts (1)	Low Slave Share (2)	High Slave Share (3)	High Slave Share (4)	High Slave Share (5)	Minimal Winning (6)	Minimal Winning (7)
Alabama	2.5	5.7	1.6	77.6	64	1.3	46.2
Florida	2.6	4.6	1.9	74.5	61.6	1.5	49.4
Georgia	2.2	5.2	1.4	78.1	62.1	1.2	44.8
Louisiana	3.5	11.6	2.1	85.3	84.3	1.1	41.5
Mississippi	1.7	2.9	1.2	70.6	60.2	1.1	46.2
South Carolina	1.5	2.5	1.2	73.1	74.7	1.0	49.8
All	2.3	5.1	1.4	78.2	67.2	1.2	45.9
Districts	375	141	234	234	234	174	174

*Notes:* The ratio of non-slaveholders to slaveholders (columns 1-3, 6), the share of slaveholders (column 4), and the share of voters (column 7) is calculated from the 1860 Census. The set of “Minimum Winning” districts (columns 6-7) is the smallest set of counties electing a simple majority of delegates in each convention, sorting counties from highest to lowest slave share (slave population/total county population).

Table 2  
Counterfactual Apportionment by Slaveholder-Share Quartiles

	% of State Slaves	% of State Slaveholders	% of State Electorate	Convention Apportionment	Secessionist Elected	Counterfactual	
						Convention Apportionment	Secessionist Elected
						(6)	(7)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Alabama							
<i>Q1</i>	53.6	43.4	21.8	27	27	21	21
<i>Q2</i>	26.5	27.6	23.9	23	16	24	15
<i>Q3</i>	15.7	20.1	29.4	28	7	30	9
<i>Q4</i>	4.2	8.9	24.9	22	4	25	5
Total				100	54 (54%)	100	50 (50%)
Georgia							
<i>Q1</i>	46.5	35.9	21.6	79	48	66	41
<i>Q2</i>	34.3	36.1	28.9	80	47	86	52
<i>Q3</i>	13.7	17.9	23.1	70	34	71	31
<i>Q4</i>	5.5	10.1	26.4	72	23	78	24
Total				301	152 (50.5%)	301	148 (49.2%)
Louisiana							
<i>Q1</i>	36.9	25.7	16.6	32	26	21	17
<i>Q2</i>	25.1	27.1	22.1	31	18	36	21
<i>Q3</i>	22.2	28.6	30.1	30	14	46	21
<i>Q4</i>	15.8	18.6	31.2	37	24	27	17
Total				130	82 (63.1%)	130	76 (58.5%)

Notes: Quartiles in each state are obtained sorting counties by highest-to-lowest slaveholder share in the electorate. Columns 1-3 report the share of each state's slaves (1), slaveholders (2) and electorate (3) in each group. Columns 4 and 5, respectively, show the number of actual delegates apportioned to the counties in each quartile (4) and number of these in which Secessionist candidates were elected (5). Columns 6 and 7, respectively, report the counterfactual number of delegates apportioned to each county under fair apportionment (6), and then the number of secessionist candidates elected under this apportionment (7) using the same observe patterns in the election of delegates.

Table 3  
Slavery and Support for Secession, Lower South Conventions

	AL				GA				LA			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Slaveholders Share	1.749*** (0.181)	1.851*** (0.345)			0.695*** (0.153)	0.651*** (0.209)			0.635*** (0.233)	0.843** (0.369)		
Pro-secession district			0.928*** (0.026)	0.907*** (0.039)			0.726*** (0.032)	0.673*** (0.041)			0.513*** (0.053)	0.434*** (0.075)
Motion Fixed Effects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
County Controls	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Delegate Slaveholdings	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Delegates (clusters)	100	100	97	97	297	292	295	290	128	125	129	125
Roll Call Votes	5	5	5	5	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4
Observations	496	496	481	481	886	871	880	865	501	489	505	489
$R^2$	0.330	0.499	0.875	0.881	0.077	0.279	0.569	0.612	0.098	0.307	0.341	0.384

Robust standard errors clustered at the delegate level in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ . Dependent variable in all columns is the delegate-level likelihood of a pro-secession vote in the different conventions. County controls include: (ln) total district population, population density, land inequity measured by a Gini index, farm land value (per acre), and the extension of railroads and steamboat-navigated rivers. Delegate slaveholdings refers to the (ln+1) number of slaves owned by each delegate according to the 1860 Slave Schedule, US Census. All models include a full set of motion fixed effects. See Data Appendix for detailed description of the motions used and sources.