

# **From *Pluribus* to *Unum*?** **The Civil War and Imagined Sovereignty** **in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America**

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# Introduction

- ▶ Contestation over structure of sovereign authority occupies a central role in political development
- ▶ Historically, war settled these debates and resulted in institutionalization of the victor's vision
- ▶ Sovereignty requires both institutionalization *and* recognition/acceptance

# War and imagined sovereignty

- ▶ Question: How does war shape the popular imagination of sovereignty?
- ▶ Possible effects: how and for whom
  - ▶ Abandonment among losing side
  - ▶ Reinforcement
  - ▶ Emboldening among ideological entrepreneurs

# Out of many, a contested one

- ▶ Evidence: Singular (is/are) usage in 19<sup>th</sup> century America
- ▶ Results: Powerful Civil War effect among ideological entrepreneurs only
- ▶ Contribution: Ideational foundations of stateness

# Abandonment: war and institutional imposition

- ▶ War settles the institutional question
- ▶ Given facts on the ground, losing side may reconcile itself to winning side
- ▶ Parallels to logic of adaptive preferences
- ▶ Expectation: ideological abandonment among losing side

## Valence: ideological justifications

- ▶ Wars demand sacrifice in terms of blood and treasure
- ▶ Leaders justify sacrifice through ideological appeals
- ▶ Heightened moral salience of the issues
- ▶ Expectation: increased ideological commitment

# Entrepreneurial: disruption as opportunity

- ▶ Wars are highly visible, disruptive, traumatic events
- ▶ Uncertainty and shock provide opportunity for ideological entrepreneurs
- ▶ Expectation: increased ideological commitment among ideologues

# Contested sovereignty in 19<sup>th</sup> century America

- ▶ “Neither wholly federal nor wholly national”
- ▶ Sectional divisions over slavery intensified sovereignty debate
- ▶ Southern vision: state sovereignty preceded the Union
- ▶ Northern vision: national, organic conception of sovereignty



# Case-specific hypotheses

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Direction</b>
Abandonment	Post-war	South	National sovereignty
Valence			
Strong & weak:	War outbreak	North	National sovereignty
Strong only:	War outbreak	South	States' rights
Entrepreneurial	War outbreak	Republicans	National sovereignty

# Imagining Sovereignty

- ▶ Civic language provides window into imagined sovereignty
- ▶ "United States *are*" → "United States *is*"  
Santin, Murphy, and Wilkens 2016; Myers 2008
- ▶ Plural: sovereignty resides in the states  
Singular: sovereignty resides in national government

# Conceptual validity

- ▶ Historians attribute meaning to grammatical shift  
*Wilentz 2005, Foote 1990, McPherson 1988*
- ▶ 19<sup>th</sup> century observers linked grammar to sovereignty
- ▶ The Confederacy was plural

# Identifying the singular or plural

- ▶ Subject-verb agreement: is/are, has/have, was/were  
Santin, Murphy, and Wilkens 2016; Myers 2008
- ▶ Two challenges
  - ▶ "United States" must be the subject
  - ▶ Uncorrected ("dirty") OCR
- ▶ Examples
  - ▶ "The commissioners who represented the **United States are** now dead." ✗
  - ▶ "Now, the **United Steves has** not ovvp,e(Lany land in that part of the State of Ten-nessee..." ✓

# Textual sources

- ▶ Newspaper corpus, 1800–1899

Gale-Cengage 2021; Readex 2021

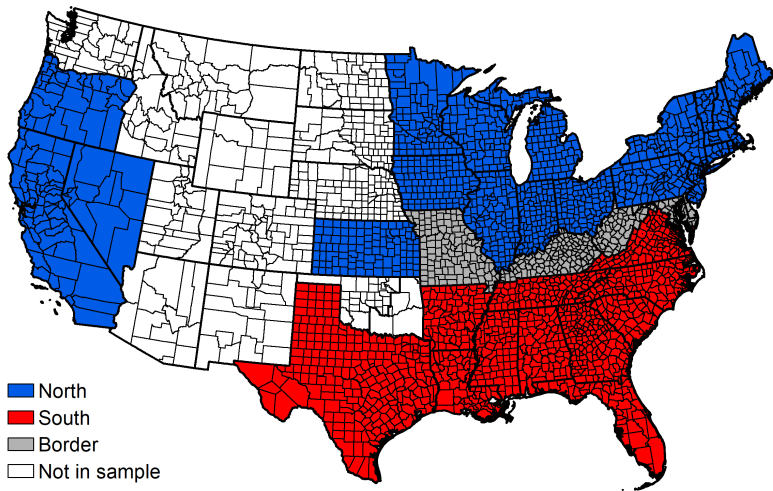
- ▶ Political and non-political content
- ▶ Excellent coverage permits testing of abandonment hypothesis

- ▶ Congressional speech corpus, 1851–1899

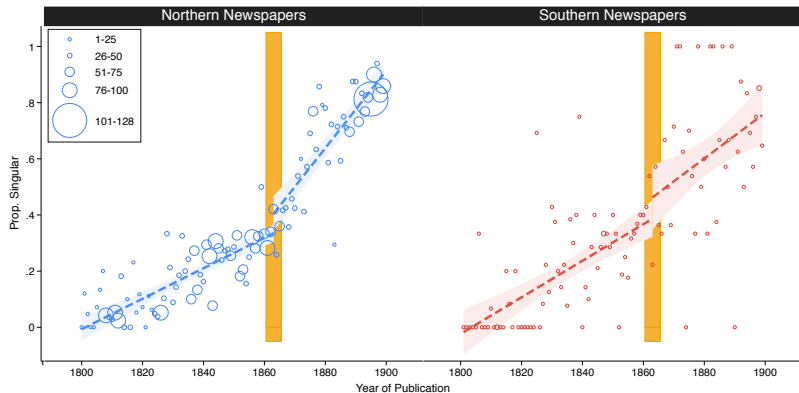
Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Taddy 2018; Phillips 2015

- ▶ Speech linked to specific individuals
- ▶ Useful for adjudicating between valence and emboldening mechanisms

# Sample



# Singular usage in newspapers, 1800–1899



Acceleration around 1860

# Estimating the effect of war by section

- ▶ Outcome of interest: change in slopes pre/post war by region
- ▶ Specification: section x period x year
- ▶ Unit of analysis: subject mention
- ▶ Estimation: linear probability model with errors clustered by city
- ▶ Observations: 5,292 mentions in 4,931 unique documents

Equation



# Inferential challenges in the newspaper data

- ▶ Confounders
  - ▶ Modernization → orientation toward national unit
  - ▶ Local political economy differences shaped views on U.S. national authority
- ▶ Areal unit assignment: locality defined as the county
- ▶ Newspaper content must be locally generated

# Testing the abandonment hypothesis

Description	Estimate	se	p
<u>Southern Newspapers:</u>			
Singular Usage in 1865	0.399	0.047	0.000
1866 - 1865 change	0.111	0.070	0.116
Pre-1866 Time Trend	0.007	0.001	0.000
Post- minus Pre-1866 Trend	-0.000	0.003	0.946

## Testing the valence hypothesis (strong)

Description	Estimate	se	p
<u>Southern Newspapers:</u>			
Singular Usage in 1860	0.351	0.041	0.000
1861 - 1860 Change in Singular Usage	0.091	0.061	0.140
Pre-1861 Time Trend	0.006	0.001	0.000
Post- minus Pre-1861 Trend	0.001	0.003	0.681
<u>Northern Newspapers:</u>			
Singular Usage in 1860	0.314	0.031	0.000
1861 - 1860 Change in Singular Usage	0.023	0.039	0.561
Pre-1861 Time Trend	0.005	0.001	0.000
Post- minus Pre-1861 Trend	0.009	0.002	0.000

# Case-specific hypotheses

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Direction</b>
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# Inferential challenges in the speech data

- ▶ **Attributing speech to speakers**
  - ▶ Stenographic improvements and professionalization of reporting corps in 1840s
  - ▶ Verbatim transcription as of 1851  
Library of Congress 2020; McKinney 2002; Byrd 1988; McPherson 1942
- ▶ **Entry/exit of speakers**
  - ▶ Turnover + grammatical subject restriction
  - ▶ Controls for life experiences and social milieu

# The valence (weak) vs. entrepreneurial hypotheses

Description	Estimate	se	p
<u>Northern Whigs / Republicans:</u>			
Singular Usage in 1860	0.237	0.106	0.024
1861 - 1860 Change in Singular Usage	0.235	0.104	0.024
Pre-War Time Trend	0.015	0.019	0.447
Post- minus Pre-War Trend	-0.014	0.019	0.445
<u>Northern Democrats:</u>			
Singular Usage in 1860	0.395	0.116	0.001
1861 - 1860 Change in Singular Usage	0.030	0.132	0.818
Pre-War Time Trend	0.026	0.019	0.156
Post- minus Pre-War Trend	-0.014	0.019	0.445

# Entrepreneurial evidence in the newspaper data

- ▶ Do followers of ideological entrepreneurs internalize the single sovereignty?
- ▶ Cannot observe partisanship, but can observe voting behavior in 1864
  - ▶ Republican incumbent: Abraham Lincoln
  - ▶ Democratic challenger: George McClellan
- ▶ Expectation: More rapid adoption of singular among Lincoln counties

# The valence (weak) vs. entrepreneurial hypotheses

Description	Estimate	se	p
<u>McClellan Counties</u>			
Singular Usage in 1860	0.367	0.023	0.000
1861 - 1860 Change in Singular Usage	-0.006	0.027	0.824
Pre-1861 Time Trend	0.007	0.000	0.000
Post- minus Pre-1861 Trend	0.005	0.001	0.000
<u>Lincoln Counties</u>			
Singular Usage in 1860	0.341	0.034	0.000
1861 - 1860 Change in Singular Usage	0.003	0.038	0.929
Pre-1861 Time Trend	0.006	0.001	0.000
Post- minus Pre-1861 Trend	0.010	0.002	0.000



# Case-specific hypotheses

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Direction</b>
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# Conclusion

- ▶ Contributions
  - ▶ Mismatch between institutional, ideational foundations of sovereignty
  - ▶ Role of ideological entrepreneurs in mediating ideational impact of warfare
  - ▶ New evidence on debate about Civil War as transformational moment
- ▶ Implications
  - ▶ National solidarity elusive
  - ▶ Postwar governance likely to be challenging

# Thank you!

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