

**Is Democracy Impossible?: Riker's Mistaken  
Accounts of Antebellum Politics**

by Gerry Mackie

Research Fellow  
Social and Political Theory Program  
Research School of Social Sciences  
Australian National University  
Canberra ACT 0200  
Australia

+612 6125 3740, office  
+612 6125 0599, fax  
[gmackie@coombs.anu.edu.au](mailto:gmackie@coombs.anu.edu.au)

February 2001

**Introduction.** In his *Liberalism against Populism*, an interpretation of the results of social choice theory, Riker (1982) makes an apparently powerful case against the very intelligibility of majoritarian democracy. Because different voting systems yield different outcomes from the same profile of individual voters' preferences, he argues, democracy is *inaccurate*. The claim is made by way of examples that establish logical possibility. However, for real-world distributions of individual preference orders – individual orderings are at least mildly correlated with one another rather than random – the reasonable voting rules tend to converge on the same outcomes (Mackie 2000).

Next, Riker continues, given a fixed voting system, then democracy is *meaningless*: the outcome of voting is manipulable, and it is not possible to distinguish manipulated from unmanipulated outcomes because of the unknowability of private intentions underlying public actions. I criticize Riker's doctrines concerning the knowability of other minds in Mackie (1998), expand on that in Mackie (2000), and shall not repeat those arguments here.

The spirit of Riker's meaninglessness argument is most simply conveyed by presenting Condorcet's paradox of voting. Suppose that there are three persons, 1, 2, and 3, deciding by majority vote among three alternatives A, B, and C, and that individual preference orders are as displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Condorcet Paradox of Voting**

1	2	3
A	B	C
B	C	A
C	A	B

As most political scientists know, with that particular profile of individuals' preferences, alternative A has a majority of votes against B, B a majority against C, and C a majority against A, so that no alternative beats all others, and "collective preference" cycles meaninglessly from one alternative to the next. The Condorcet paradox of voting is a special case of the Arrow possibility theorem; the Arrow theorem shows more generally that, assuming all logically possible individual orderings over alternative social states, no method of aggregating individuals' transitive preference orderings guarantees a collective preference ordering that is transitive. Therefore, even the same method of aggregating individuals' fixed choices may yield different group choices, as the choice arbitrarily or manipulatively cycles from one alternative to the next. Associated with the possibility of cycling are the possibilities of unfairly manipulating the outcome by means of strategic voting, agenda control, and introduction of new alternatives or dimensions to the issue space. Riker's central hypothesis is that democratic voting is in pervasive disequilibrium.

His liberal interpretation of voting accepts that democratic voting and discussion are inaccurate and meaningless. The only democracy that withstands the scrutiny of "modern political science" (Riker and Weingast 1988, 396) is the liberal institution of

regular elections that permits both the rejection of tyrannical rulers and the “circulation of leadership” (1982, 253), preferably supplemented by the liberal constraints of divided government.

The kind of democracy that thus survives is not, however, popular rule, but rather an intermittent, sometimes random, even perverse, popular veto. Social choice theory forces us to recognize that the people cannot rule as a corporate body in the way that populists suppose. Instead, officials rule, and they do not represent some indefinable popular will. (Riker 1982, 244)

I cannot adequately discuss Riker’s influential theory in a single paper. Here, I will concentrate on Riker’s cycling claims, particularly those related to the U.S. Civil War, as they are the most celebrated element in his attack on democratic governance.

In a review article on the subject of cycling, Enelow (1997) writes that, “cycling and majority rule is one of the most heavily researched areas of public choice” (149), yet, citing only Riker, he acknowledges that “basically, the empirical literature testing the theory we have described consists of a small set of examples” (160). There are also some studies that look at the frequency of cycles in unbiased samples of votes or attitudes: they show that cycles are rare and trivial. If I succeed in showing that Riker’s examples of grand manipulation are mistaken, then the hypothesis of pervasive political disequilibrium must die from lack of evidence.

**Frequency Studies.** In Mackie (2000) I collect and summarize all articles I could locate in the political science literature that estimate the frequency of cycles from a proper sample or universe of votes or attitudes. In order to calculate the frequency of cycles one needs voters’ rankings over all candidates in an election, such information is not usually collected, and thus there are few such papers. Chamberlin, Cohen and Coombs (1984) found no cycles in five different presidential elections of the American Psychological Association (APA). Niemi and Wright (1987) looked at thermometer ratings (respondents rate 0 to 100 when 0 means very unfavorable and 100 very favorable) of 14 politicians who were potential or actual candidates for the 1980 American presidential election, from a nationally representative sample of U.S. voters, and found that the probabilities of cycles were 0.04 or less. Some very good data from candidate elections in private organizations in Great Britain were analyzed by Feld and Grofman (1992). Only 0.5 (one-half of one) percent of the linearly ordered triples in the sample universe were cyclic; 24 of the 36 elections had no cycles whatsoever, the largest percentage of cycles in any election was 2.0 percent; and almost all cycles were among alternatives adjacent in Borda scores (meaning that they were among close alternatives). Radcliff (1993) reports high unidimensionality derived from studies of American presidential elections from 1972 to 1984: 77 to 85 percent single-peakedness in years with three major candidates in the primary and general elections (at 75 percent unidimensionality the expectation of a cycle is less than one percent, and at 80 percent the expectation is almost zero, Radcliff 1994); and 50 percent in 1980 when there were five major candidates. Van Deemen and Vergunst (1998) continue the elusive quest for the empirical cycle. From the Dutch parliamentary election studies of 1982 (13 parties),

1986 (12 parties), 1989 (9 parties), and 1994 (9 parties) they have survey data on respondents' preferences over the alternatives. If preference rankings were random then there would be about a 50 percent chance of cycles. There are, however, no cycles in their data, not anywhere in the rankings, not in any of the elections.

Riker later (1990b, 179) granted that, "Poole and Rosenthal . . . have shown with large empirical studies of congressional voting that, in the absence of grand manipulation, a considerable part of political life is unidimensional." Poole and Rosenthal (1997) dedicate their book to Riker, their "teacher, friend, and colleague." Their spatial analysis of *all* roll-call votes in the 1st through 100th Congresses of the United States shows that about 85 percent of all votes can be accounted for in two dimensions. Moreover, "Except for two periods of American history, when race was prominent on the agenda, whenever voting could be captured by the spatial model, a one-dimensional model does all the work" (227). The first and overwhelmingly important dimension is what we popularly understand as the standard left-right dimension. The second dimension explains only about two percent of the 85 percent captured. The second dimension varies from Congress to Congress, and varies from public works to currency to tariffs and other issues; but was most salient as slavery in the period before the Civil War (the 37th Congress in 1850 most poorly fit the spatial model) and as race relations in the civil rights era of the 1950s and '60s. Testing for third, fourth, and greater dimensions on the whole does not explain meaningfully more than the two-dimensional model. Since the mid-1970s, the Congress has become increasingly and is now almost wholly unidimensional (Poole and Rosenthal 1999). A unidimensional issue space implies no cycles; and the mostly unidimensional issue space discovered by Poole and Rosenthal implies almost no cycles.

Originally, I suspected that this unidimensionality was somehow a product of the American two-party system and thus not evidence for a strong tendency to unidimensionality in politics. The Poole-Rosenthal (1999) methods, however, have recently been applied to votes in the European Parliament (1989-1997), the British Parliament (1841), the French National Assembly (1951-1956), the Czech Parliament (1993-1997), the Polish Parliament (1995), and the United Nations General Assembly (1946-1996). The percent of votes correctly classified by a single dimension of analysis ranges from 85.9 in the U.N. (1954-1969) to 94.2 in the Czech Parliament. The Czech Parliament is a multiparty system, and the United Nations comprises the diverse interests of six billion people. It is possible that the apparent unidimensionality is an artifact of the Poole-Rosenthal methodology.

Budge (1993) and coworkers examined all party manifestoes or platforms from 1945 to 1981 in 23 democratic countries and applied factor analysis. They found that one dimension, the standard left-right dimension, best explained the data. After reporting the findings of Poole and Rosenthal and of Budge, Riker (1993, 4) acknowledged that "issue spaces tend to be one-dimensional over time." He responded that second dimensions would be of relevance, presumably with respect to possibilities of manipulation, in the short run.

Riker (1982, 122-123) acknowledges there is a tendency to similarity among preference orders that reduces the likelihood of cycles: “there is good reason to believe that debate and discussion do lead to ... fundamental similarities of judgment.” However, the possibility of manipulation increases the likelihood of cycles, he argues. The net result: there are few cycles on unimportant issues, but more cycles the more important the issue is to the manipulators. More precisely,

quite a wide variety of rather mild agreement about the issue dimension guarantees a Condorcet winner . . . not all voters need display the agreement to obtain the guarantee. . . . agreement about dimensions renders uncontrived cyclical outcomes quite rare. . . . intransitivities only occasionally render decision my majoritarian decisions meaningless . . . at least when the subjects for political decision are *not* politically important. When, on the other hand, subjects are politically important enough to justify the energy and expense of contriving cycles, Arrow’s result is of great practical significance. . . . on the very most important subjects, cycles may render social outcomes meaningless. (Riker 1982 128)

These qualifications are inconsistent with the stridency of much of the rest of his 1982 text, and I suspect that they are a late emendation or revision.

On his own terms, Riker’s claim of meaninglessness stands only on incidents of grand manipulation. Even if, as Riker maintains, all cyclical manipulations are difficult to detect, he must be able to demonstrate some instances from the rich universe of politics, especially since cycles are supposed to be associated with the most important issues on which we would have the most information. Otherwise, his claim would have nothing but the glory and the shame of an unverifiable proposition. If there are only a handful of such incidents, then Riker’s claim that democracy is meaningless fails, and it utterly fails if the handful do not withstand scrutiny.

If there is a cycle, then a killer amendment can succeed by strategic voting. Poole and Rosenthal (1997, 147) “found very few bothersome needles in our haystack of 37,000 roll calls.” The three instances of successful killer amendments identified in the political science literature, according to Poole and Rosenthal (1997, 162), are the three recited by Riker in *Liberalism against Populism* (1982), known as the Wilmot Proviso, the Depew-Sutherland Amendment, and the Powell Amendment, and each does have to do with race, often the second dimension in American politics, they claim. With almost 50 years of controversy, and strong professional incentives for unveiling grand manipulations, these are the three that we have from the universe of American Congressional roll-call votes to support the proposition that democracy is meaningless. I am able to show that Riker’s accounts of these three events are mistaken. The jewel in the crown of Riker’s examples of grand manipulation (not related to Congressional rollcalls) is his famous allegation of a cycle in the 1860 American presidential race that resulted in the arbitrary election of Lincoln and consequently the Civil War. I will show that his account of that election is clearly mistaken and that there was no such cycle.

While it is possible to assert individual instances of cycling in the real world, we have seen that whenever we have some universe of data from which to judge the frequency of cycles we find that they are rare and trivial. Next, we shall see that all claims of grand manipulation fail to survive scrutiny.

**Anecdotal Cycling Claims.** Elsewhere (Mackie 2000), I have shown that every major claim of cycling and related manipulation made by Riker, and every other developed and published cycle claim I could locate in the literature, is mistaken in one way or another. This work is summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. Summary of Cycling and Manipulation Claims and Mackie Findings**

#, Cite	Subject	Mackie Finding
1 APSR 1958	Agricultural Appropriations	No cycle in sincere preferences (Riker recognizes strategic votes); best alternative won.
2 LAP APM	Agenda Experiment, Flying Club	Asymmetric institutions (in this case agenda control and information control) yield asymmetric outcomes.
3 LAP APM	Powell Amendment	Riker and others allege cycle in 1956 vote; assume irrational voters. Votes, debates, and inferences in 1956 and 1957 show that school aid would have failed with or without Powell's desegregation amendment. No cycle; best alternative won. Adds to Krehbiel and Rivers.
4 LAP	17th Amendment	Eleven errors of fact; assumes irrational voters. No cycles, not in 1902, not in 1911. 17th amendment would have failed with or without a voting-rights rider. Passed in late 1911 due to changed composition of the Senate. Confirms conjecture of Green and Shapiro.
5 LAP	Wilmot Proviso	Cycle alleged among Mexican war appropriations, antislavery amendment and status quo. Based on egregious misreading of Congressional Globe. No cycle, best alternative won.
6 LAP	Lincoln Election	No cycle. Free soil was primary issue in 1860, and the further north the more antislavery: latitude was attitude. Riker 1982, 230, line 2 mistaken: many Lincoln voters ranked Douglas ahead of Bell. Complemented by Tabarrok and Lee. (Douglas was best alternative, not selected due to antimajoritarian design of electoral college.)
7 LAP	Antebellum Period	Eruptions of slavery issue not due to arbitrary manipulation of multidimensional issue space. Dimensions highly constrained (Poole and Rosenthal). Eruptions related to disruption of political balance

		following territorial acquisitions (Weingast).
8 APSR 1984 APM	Morris at the Con Con	Alleged cycle arises from treating similar alternatives as identical. If alternatives properly individuated, then no cycle.
9 APM	Lincoln at Freeport	Mistaken details; “magic bullet” interpretation of Freeport debate now rejected by American historians. Douglas did face a dilemma, but it was one forced upon him by the changing preferences of the Northern and Southern populations, not by Lincoln’s discourse.
10 APM	The Masters	Not examined. Based on fiction.
11 APM	Pliny	Shows that agenda control was defeated by strategic voting: best alternative won.
12 APM	Vote Trading	Not examined. Trade fairly represented opinion?
13 APM	Abstention	Idiosyncratic.
14 APM	Gerrymander	Undocumentable.
15 APM	Magnuson	Many details mistaken, does not fully understand the parliamentary situation. Magnuson’s bill supported by vast majority; an explicit deal was made to pass Gravel’s more radical amendment in the Senate, and to withdraw it in Conference, in order to gain Nixon’s attention, and exactly that happened.
16 APM	Reed, Cannon	Not examined. Majorities enabled?
17 Blyden burgh	Internal Revenue 1932	Repeatedly flawed logic; inconsistently applied inferences of preference orders. No cycle, best alternative won.
18 Bjurulf and Niemi	Scandinavian Parliaments Hospital	Half of voters absent; evidence of strategic voting; if only 2 out of 37 voters were strategic then equilibrium in sincere preferences, and best alternative won.
19 Bjurulf and Niemi	Scandinavian Parliaments Tel and tel	Claim that strategic voting led to rejection of best alternative. Based, however, on unwarranted assumption that some voters were irrational.
20 Bjurulf and Niemi	Scandinavian Parliaments Rifle club	Agenda control countered by creative response such that best alternative prevailed in long run.

21 Neufeld, et. al	Muscle Shoals	Cycle only apparent and due to bungled strategic voting that authors recognize; sincere preferences in equilibrium; best alternative won.
-----------------------	---------------	---

APM = *The Art of Political Manipulation* (Riker 1986), APSR (1958) = Riker (1958), APSR (1984) = Riker (1984), Bjurulf and Niemi (1978), Blydenburgh (1971), LAP = *Liberalism against Populism* (Riker 1982), Neufeld, et. al (1994)

It's not possible in this brief space to justify my claimed findings. I present a sample, however, dealing with Riker's accounts of the antebellum period (prior to the U.S. Civil War). Abridgements of more extended work in Mackie (2000), on the Wilmot Proviso, on the election of Lincoln, and on antebellum politics generally, follow.

**The Wilmot Proviso.** In 1846 President Polk requested an emergency appropriation in effect to commence the acquisition of the northern half of Mexico. The Wilmot Proviso was an amendment moved by Northern Democrats in the House of Representatives to prohibit slavery in the lands to be acquired from Mexico. Riker's primary claim of disequilibrium is that there was a cycle among legislators' preferences on the status quo, the acquisition appropriation, and the appropriation proposal with the antislavery amendment. The problem with Riker's claim is that he misreads the vote in the congressional record. A corrected reading shows that there was no cycle.

Northern Democrats were annoyed by the Southern tilt of the Democratic President Polk, says Riker, and opportunistically reintroduced the slavery issue into national politics. The motives of the Northern Democrats are evidenced by Polk's diary: this "remarkably astute observer, intimately acquainted with events and personalities honestly assessed the slavery issue as opportunism on both sides," Riker continues (1982, 224). Wilmot did not care about slavery, he only wanted to protect free labor from slave competition, and the Wilmot Proviso was devised to protect the Northern Democrats against Whig agitation on the slavery issue, according to Riker. The Mexican war was underway, and Polk sought a special two million dollar appropriation in order to bribe the Mexican army to accept a war settlement favorable to American interests. Wilmot moved as an amendment to Polk's appropriation a provision prohibiting slavery in any territory acquired from Mexico. Almost all Northerners voted for the proviso and almost all Southerners voted against it, whether Whig or Democrat. The Whigs, by the way, were the more commercial party, and the Democrats were the more agrarian party, and both parties were bisectonal. The outcome involved disequilibrium, says Riker.

There are three alternatives under consideration:

*OA*, the *Original Appropriation* proposed by Polk

*WP*, the original appropriation as amended by the *Wilmot Proviso*

*SQ*, the *Status Quo*, no appropriation



First, according to Riker, by revealed vote a majority in the House ranked  $WP > OA$ . The Wilmot amendment to Polk's appropriation carried. This conclusion is correct (but Riker's warrant is not, we shall see). Second,  $OA > SQ$ , by inference, says Riker: it's reasonable that the Democrats, a majority in the House, would support their President Polk's request. This conclusion is correct. In the August 8, 1846 deliberations leading up to the Wilmot Proviso several motions to table  $OA$  failed; and in a clean vote on  $OA'$  without any Wilmot Proviso on March 3, 1847,  $OA' > SQ$  by a recorded vote of 115 for, all but two of those for Democrats, to 82 against including only ten Democrats (*Congressional Globe*, March 3, 1847, 573; *Voteview*, 29th House Roll-Call #637). Third, by inference, says Riker,  $SQ > WP$ : a coalition of first, all southerners, Democratic or Whig, would oppose  $WP$  because it contained the prohibition of slavery, and second, the northern Whigs would oppose  $WP$  because it contained an appropriation for a war that the Whig Party opposed. We have  $WP > OA$ ,  $OA > SQ$ , and  $SQ > WP$ , or  $WP > OA > SQ > WP$ , a cycle.

Riker further estimates the ranking of the three alternatives by each of eight natural factions in the House, which taken together again confirms the cycle, he says. The ranking estimates, however, are pure fantasy, because Riker's inference that  $SQ > WP$  is directly contradicted by the revealed votes in the record. Riker wrongly believes that the vote he reports of 79 ayes and 93 nays was on adopting *the amendment* to the original appropriation,  $WP > OA$  ("Display 9-1, "The Vote on the Motion to Lay on the Table the Motion to Engross the Wilmot Proviso," 1982, 226). In fact, the vote that he refers to was on passing the *amended appropriation*,  $WP > SQ$ . There is no doubt that Riker's estimates of rankings of the eight natural factions is based on mistakenly reading  $WP > OA$  for  $WP > SQ$ . His listing of the factions' rankings (227) clearly builds from his Display 9-1 of the misinterpreted vote. The Display asserts that 93 legislators ranked  $WP > OA$  and 79 ranked  $OA > WP$ , when in fact 93 legislators ranked  $WP > SQ$  and 79 ranked  $SQ > WP$ . The estimates assert, for example, that seven Northern administration Democrats rank  $OA > WP$  and 51 Northern Free Soil Democrats rank  $WP > OA$ , when in fact the vote he references would have his seven Northern Democrats voting  $SQ > WP$  and his 51 Northern Democrats voting  $WP > SQ$ .

If it is shown by five revealed votes that  $WP > SQ$ , then, I submit, a weakly warranted inference that  $SQ > WP$  must be mistaken. If we correct Riker's error we have  $WP > OA$ ,  $OA > SQ$ , and  $WP > SQ$ , or  $WP > OA > SQ$ , and no cycle whatsoever.

**Table 3. Datum And Warrant, Wilmot Proviso**

Riker	R. Warrant	Mackie	M. Warrant
$WP > OA$	Revealed Vote	$WP > OA$	Revealed Vote
	"Motion to Lay on the Table the Motion to Engross the Wilmot Proviso," 8 August 1846*		Two voice votes, 8 August 1846; one recorded vote, 15 February 1847.

OA > SQ	Inference  “All Democrats, 60% of the House, supported the administration on the war”	OA > SQ	Revealed Vote  Three recorded votes, 8 August 1846; one recorded vote, 3 March 1847.
SQ > WP	Inference  All southerners, D or W, opposed the WP, and Northern Whigs opposed the war	WP > SQ	Revealed Vote  Three recorded votes, 8 August 1846; two recorded votes, 15 February 1847.
Full Rank	WP > OA > SQ > WP		WP > OA > SQ

\*Riker’s claim of  $WP > OA$  is correct, but his warrant is not. He erroneously believes that the vote he cites is on  $WP > OA$ , when in fact it is on  $WP > SQ$ .

Yes, the great cycle that initiated the disequilibrium that culminated in the Civil War is all based on a simple misreading of the record. The vote he reports is not on tabling engrossment of the Wilmot Proviso ( $WP > OA$ ) but is on tabling engrossment of the Wilmot-amended appropriation ( $WP > SQ$ ). Riker (1982, 290) cites to *Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 1218. He says (225) that the Wilmot Proviso was voted on eight times on August 8, 1846, but the largest and crucial vote was on a motion to lay on the table a motion to engross, which was defeated by 79 to 93. There is not any motion to engross nor any vote resembling 79 ayes to 93 nays on page 1218 of the record. There is a vote to table engrossment on page 1217 of the record, with 78 ayes and 93 noes (*Voteview* 29th House, Roll-Call #456). Quite clearly this vote is on the whole bill, as are three further votes with the same effect of endorsing  $WP > SQ$  on p. 1218 (one unrecorded and two recorded, *Congressional Globe*, August 8, 1846, 1218; *Voteview*, 29th House, Roll-Calls #457 and #458). The whole controversy replayed again on February 15, 1847, when  $WP > SQ$  by a vote of 115 to 106 (*Congressional Globe*, 425; *Voteview*, 29th House, Roll-Call #582). All together that makes five revealed votes showing that the House of Representatives ranked  $WP > SQ$ .

Theoretically, any reader should be able to detect the nonsensical error embodied in Riker’s claim that  $SQ > WP$  even without going back to check the reference to the records of Congress, yet for twenty years many intelligent people have repeated this story without reporting the error. I feel that it is my reluctant duty to report a problem with public-choice style of explanation. This style of explanation is often not immediately intuitive yet is gilded with an abstract formalism that suggests that something important and believable is being said. I am not the first to suggest that there is no necessary

relationship between formalism and profundity, and that it is just as possible that such models obscure as that they reveal.

**The Election of Lincoln.** By way of background, Riker's overarching hypothesis is that the slavery dimension of concern was suppressed by the Democratic Party manipulative elite with the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The main dimension of contention between the Democrats and the Whigs, both bisectional parties, was economic, broadly speaking the Democratic coalition was agrarian and the Whig coalition was commercial in orientation. Another manipulative elite, the northern wing of the Whigs, the weaker party in this period, sought to find an issue that would split the Democrats and thereby allow the northern Whigs to organize a newly dominant coalition. The Wilmot proviso in 1846 was their first effort to contrive a cycle, and the election of Lincoln in 1860 was their last and most successful effort at contriving a cycle.

In this section we first examine Riker's analysis of the 1860 presidential election. Riker estimates the preferences among the population over the four candidates. These estimates show both that there was a cycle among the top three candidates and that different hypothetical voting rules would yield different outcomes. This is the perfect illustration of Riker's contentions that democracy is meaningless and arbitrary and that manipulation is probable on grand issues. In Mackie (2000) I relate the histories and the ideologies of the four parties in the runup to the 1860 election. The ideologies of the four parties suggest a unidimensional and noncyclical distribution of preferences, with the question of slavery in the territories being the primary dimension of dispute in the election. County-level, state-level, and region-level aggregates further support the hypothesis of noncyclicity. Riker's demonstration of meaningless and arbitrary outcomes depends on an unwarranted estimate that Bell, the candidate of the Upper South who received two percent of the vote in the North, was ranked second by more than 63 percent of Lincoln voters. If, as was far more likely, Douglas, the candidate of the Lower North, was ranked second by more than 37 percent of Lincoln voters, then most voting methods considered yield the same ranking, and all yield the same winner: Douglas.

There were four major candidates in the American presidential election of 1860. They were Abraham Lincoln, the nominee of the six-year old northern political alliance known as the Republican Party; Stephen A. Douglas, the candidate of the northern wing of the Democratic Party; John Bell, from the recently formed Constitutional Unionist Party, an attempt at a conservative centrist coalition with its base in the upper south; and John C. Breckenridge, Vice President in the outgoing Buchanan administration and candidate of the renegade southern wing of the Democratic Party. The election of Lincoln as president in 1860 was a replay of the disequilibrium of the Wilmot proviso, says Riker (1982, 228). Lincoln won by a plurality of about 40 percent, he continues, and so one must suspect a cycle. Riker displays 15 of the possible 24 rankings possible for strong preferences over four candidates and then estimates the total number of voters across the nation for each of the 15 likely rankings (each ranking total is the sum of regional subtotals that he does not display). From the voting data we know only the first-ranked choices of the voters, so, as Riker explains, his estimation of the rankings over the remaining three choices in each of the 15 cases is intended as an informed historical

judgment (he calls them “guesses,” but presumably they are not arbitrary or he would not have bothered to present them). Fair enough. The estimation of full rankings then permits the calculation of hypothetical outcomes by alternative voting rules. The results seem to confirm Riker’s thesis that democracy is arbitrary and meaningless. Different voting rules lead to different outcomes, and pairwise comparison (the Condorcet criterion) discloses the presence of a cycle. Here are Riker’s results:

Plurality: Lincoln > Douglas > Breckenridge > Bell

Pairwise Comparison: (Douglas > Lincoln > Bell > Douglas) > Breckenridge

Borda Count: Douglas > Bell > Lincoln > Breckenridge

Approval Voting (two votes): Bell > Lincoln > Douglas > Breckenridge

Approval Voting (three votes): Douglas > Bell > Lincoln > Breckenridge

Riker concludes that with five methods of voting Douglas wins twice, Bell once, Lincoln once, and they are in a cycle and hence tie once. “Clearly, if my guesses are even roughly right, there was complete disequilibrium in 1860” (1982, 229).

Riker’s demonstrations of disequilibria in the Wilmot proviso and in the election of 1860 are the primary evidence for his influential theory of political disequilibrium and are widely accepted and repeated in the political science discipline today. We have seen that he was in error about the Wilmot proviso and now we shall see that he was in error about the election of 1860 as well.

His Display 9-2, “Possible Preference Orders in 1860, by Candidate of First Choice and by Region,” which lists his estimates of full preference rankings for the entire electorate, is daunting to the reader. Except for a few words about the regional breakdown of each ranking in the display itself, there is no textual justification for the ranking estimates. They are presented as authoritative, and one could only check them by deep immersion in the history of the period. Fortunately, we need not sweat through all 15 rankings to detect the error, because it occurs in the first two rankings he lists. These two categories are the estimated full rankings of all those whom we know ranked Lincoln first. Moreover, the two rankings contain 40 percent of the voting population of the entire country, so if there is a major error among them then we need go no further. Riker’s first group is 450,000 voters who prefer Lincoln > Douglas > Bell > Breckenridge and they are made up of one-fourth of New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwest Lincoln voters; and all southern Lincoln voters. The second group is 1,414,000 voters who prefer Lincoln > Bell > Douglas > Breckenridge, and they are made up of three-fourths of New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwest Lincoln voters; and all border and western Lincoln voters. The problem is with these two estimates. The large majority of Lincoln voters did not rank Bell second, as Riker claims, they ranked Douglas second, and once we understand this error Riker’s demonstration collapses.

For ease of exposition, henceforth ignore Riker's inclusion of southern, border, and western Lincoln voters in the two rankings under consideration, as they represent about five percent of his total in the two rankings and don't change anything in either his analysis or mine. Reconstructing Riker's data, he has it that about 1,794,000 voters in the free north (excluding the northern slave state Missouri, border states, and Oregon and California in the west) voted for Lincoln, and he is correct enough on that. His further claim is that of those, one-fourth or about 450,000 ranked Douglas second, and three-fourths or about 1,346,000 ranked Bell second. I claim that it is the reverse, that most, let's say 60% or more, of Lincoln voters ranked Douglas second, and few, say 40% or less, ranked Bell second.

Mackie (2000) provides historical background to the 1860 election. The major controversy in the country was the extent to which slavery would be allowed in the vast territories, the so-called "free soil" question. The platforms of the four parties manifest a monotonic north to south gradation of position on the free soil question, the primary dimension of dispute in the election. Lincoln and the Republicans declared all territories closed to slavery; Douglas and the Northern Democrats held to the compromise doctrine of popular sovereignty, that each territory would decide the question without federal direction; Bell and the Constitutional Unionists implicitly considered the territories open to slavery but a matter for political negotiation; and Breckenridge and the Southern Democrats declared all territories open to slavery on implicit threat of secession.

Presumably Riker's inference that Bell was the second choice of most Lincoln voters was based on the thought that the Constitutional Unionists contained many former Whigs, and that Whiggish Lincoln voters in the North would go for Whiggish Constitutional Unionists rather than for Douglas from their ancient enemy the Democratic Party. That did not happen and to understand why we have to pay special attention to the Constitutional Unionist Party and its platform (Mackie 2000 provides data on all party platforms).

The *Constitutional Unionists* said that platforms are misleading and divisive, and theirs was brief and basic. They recognized "no political principle other than the Constitution of the Country, the Union of the States, and the Enforcement of the Laws" (emphasis omitted, Morison 1971, 1127). Their platform sounds platitudinous, and because of that and their poor showing in the election some commentators neglect to locate them ideologically. *Who* they were and what they did *not* say is more important than the little they did say in the platform document. Here we turn to Dumond's close study (1931, 92-96). The convention did not seek to establish uniformity of opinion on the free soil question, leaving that to every individual's judgment. The party would scrupulously avoid mention of the tiresome topic of slavery; although its state affiliates might take particular stands. Where Douglas sought an ambiguous formulation on the free-soil question, the Constitutional Unionists sought none. Their platform pledged them, however, to "the just rights of the people and of the States *reestablished*, and the Government *again* placed in that condition of justice, fraternity, and equality which, under the example of the Constitution of our fathers, has solemnly bound every citizen of the United States . . ." (emphasis added). Dumond emphasizes that the pledge of union is

not unconditional, rather, continued union is conditioned on the reestablishment of states' rights and equality between the sections as found in the original constitutional compromise. It is the original constitutional compact that requires loyalty, not present-day misinterpretations or usurpations by the north.

Outside the platform, the Constitutional Unionists denounced Douglas's doctrine of popular sovereignty, and believed that Congress must protect the property rights of slaveowners in the territories, the southern position on free soil. They also denounced the Breckenridge Democrats for threatening secession; but did not deny the right to secede should compromise fail. The practical difference between the two southern factions was that Breckenridge's Democrats considered the election of a Republican president sufficient to justify secession, while Bell's Constitutional Unionists thought that resistance would only be justified by an overt act against southern interests by a northern administration. The southern former Whigs who were the largest faction in the organization of the Constitutional Unionists *aspired* to attract northern former Whigs, but they largely *failed*, because they did not appeal to northern sentiments on free soil. The southern orientation of the Constitutional Unionists was no secret to northern voters: the Constitutional Unionists received two percent of the vote in the free states, 13 percent of their vote nationwide. Riker's position that three-fourths of Lincoln voters in the north ranked Bell second is not only undefended, it goes against the evidence.

I maintain that voter preferences in the 1860 election were for the most part single-peaked and unidimensional. Riker maintains that the preferences of Lincoln voters were not single-peaked because they ranked Bell second and Douglas third. Riker does not have direct data for his assertion that Lincoln voters ranked Bell second; it is an inference, and one not defended in his text. I labor in Mackie (2000) to show that it is ideologically and geographically implausible that the majority of Lincoln voters ranked Bell second. Aggregate data will further support my position. Anyone can accuse an inference from an aggregate to its individual members of being an instance of the poorly-named *ecological fallacy*. If the aggregate of first-place votes shows *A* first, *B* second, and *C* third, that does not *necessarily* mean that individuals who rank *A* first rank *B* second. All *A*-voters could rank *C* second; from the aggregate data *alone* we are not entitled to a *certain* inference that *A*-voters rank *B* second. If, however, we have independent evidence that *A*-voters rank *B* second, then aggregate data bolster the conclusion that *A*-voters rank *B* second. The ecological fallacy is not a fallacy, but rather a logical possibility. It is a possibility and not an inevitability. The independent evidence I present on ideology supports my proposed inference from aggregate rankings to individual rankings. Why would a voter in the north choose Lincoln? High among the reasons must be Lincoln's appeal to northern interests including his position on free soil; otherwise one of the other candidates would do. If such a voter were denied the choice of Lincoln, who would his second choice be? Why not Douglas, who is the next most adjacent on issues of northern interest? And if Douglas were not available where next would the typical northern voter turn? He would turn to Bell, the candidate of the upper south, of course, not to Breckenridge the candidate of the deep south. A zealous critic could claim that this is not enough; but please notice that my hypothesis – that Douglas

the candidate of the lower north ranked second among Lincoln voters in the north rather than Bell the candidate of the upper south – is supported by some evidence, while Riker's opposite hypothesis is supported by none. Riker is attempting to support his controversial and apparently counter-empirical doctrine of political disequilibrium; and the burden of proof is on one who would defend his extraordinary claim.

A look at a map of the county-level winners in the 1860 presidential elections (McPherson 1993, 128) shows that latitude is attitude. The upper north voted for Lincoln (more free soil), the lower north voted for Douglas (less free soil), the upper south voted for Bell (less slave soil), and the lower south voted for Breckenridge (more slave soil). Nationally, Douglas and Bell did less well than Lincoln and Breckenridge and thus the east-west swathes of Douglas and Bell in the center are each thin and those of Lincoln and Breckenridge at the extremes are each thick. The strongly unidimensional (north to south) map of first-place county winners supports the hypothesis that preferences were generally single-peaked.

If voter preferences were ideologically oriented to the free soil question and hence single-peaked, then we would expect upper northern voters to rank  $L > D > Bl > Br$ . Aggregates at the state level (displays omitted) show that in the north Lincoln was first everywhere and Douglas generally finished second. Douglas finished second everywhere in the north except for in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Bell finished second in Massachusetts, but that was because the Vice Presidential nominee on the Constitutional Union ticket was Edward Everett of Massachusetts who got a favorite-son vote in his home state. In Pennsylvania, in a last-minute attempt to deny Lincoln a majority in the electoral college and salvage local campaigns, Douglas and Breckenridge forces formed an anti-Lincoln fusion candidacy with Breckenridge as the nominal candidate, and even then stubborn voters continued to vote for Douglas and Bell. New York had a fusion of Douglas and Bell forces with electoral-college votes pledged two-thirds to Douglas and one-third to Bell. Rhode Island had a fusion ticket under Douglas. My ideological prediction that Bell would finish third in the north is not supported: he finishes third in three states and *fourth* in eight states. This is the candidate that Riker would have us believe is ranked *second* by northern Lincoln voters. Breckenridge often did better than Bell because he enjoyed organizational support from the outgoing Buchanan machine, including many of the northern Democratic legislators and most of the local patronage appointees. In this region, 55 percent of voters favored Lincoln, 35 percent Douglas, eight percent Breckenridge, and two percent Bell,  $L > D > Br > Bl$ .

The two free western states should follow the northern pattern. Lincoln finishes first in both. In California, Bell finishes fourth. In Oregon Breckenridge finishes second, but this is because his vice presidential candidate, Lane, was a senator from Oregon. For the lower north on ideological grounds I predict that voters would first support Douglas, then Lincoln the other northern candidate, then Bell from the upper south, then Breckenridge from the lower south. Douglas is first in Missouri, but against the schematic expectation Lincoln is last in this northern slave state. In New Jersey there was an anti-Lincoln fusion candidacy of Douglas, Bell and Breckenridge, under the flag of Douglas, and Douglas won. Not showing at the state level of aggregation, and

connecting Missouri to New Jersey from east to west, are Douglas's strengths in southern Illinois, southern Indiana, southern Ohio, and the fusion candidacy under Breckenridge's name in Pennsylvania. In the lower north region, limited to two states, Douglas obtained 42 percent of the vote, Lincoln 27 percent, Bell 21 percent, and Breckenridge 11 percent. For the upper south the ideological prediction is that Bell would be first, followed by the other southern candidate, Breckenridge, then Douglas, then Lincoln. Expectations for the upper south are satisfied in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, and are imperfectly satisfied in the states of Delaware and Maryland. Overall in the upper south region, Bell received 45 percent of the vote, Breckenridge 43 percent, Douglas 11 percent, and Lincoln two percent. South Carolina, true to form, did not let its citizens vote for president, a choice reserved for the political elite. Texas had an anti-Breckenridge fusion slate under the banner of Bell. The lower south satisfies expectations. Overall in the lower south, Breckenridge got 55 percent of the vote, Bell 38 percent, Douglas seven percent, and Lincoln was not on the ballot. The largest exception among all regions to the ideological single-peakedness prediction places Bell fourth in the north rather than in second where Riker needs him to be.

Finally, let's look at the section-level aggregate of votes. Riker does not provide a source for his election data, nor does he explain his calculations, nor is his arithmetic consistently reliable. Thus, it is not possible to infer what Riker's source document was, and the numbers I use (derived from Burnham's regional totals, 1955, 246-256) are quite close (one or two percent) to what can be reconstructed from Riker but are not identical. There were about 3,450,000 voters in the north (excluding the western states California and Oregon but including the slave state Missouri). Of these, 53 percent voted for Republican Lincoln, 36 percent voted for Northern Democrat Douglas, eight percent voted for Southern Democrat Breckenridge and four percent voted for Constitutional Unionist Bell:  $L > D > Br > Bl$ .

After my first analysis of the issue, Tabarrok and Spector (1999) appeared, an intriguing, useful, and a more technically sophisticated analysis of the 1860 election. Tabarrok and Spector had Riker's rankings over the four candidates. They also queried 100 Civil War historians as to their views on the rankings, and 15 responded with opinions about the percentage of voters of various rankings over Lincoln, Douglas, Bell, and Breckenridge. For voters who ranked Lincoln first, the historians' median opinion was that 60% ranked Douglas second and 40% ranked Bell second. Of the 15 historian respondents, 12 had a view contrary to Riker's, each of those 12 believed that 50% or less of Lincoln voters ranked Bell second. Two of the three respondents who seem to agree with Riker's estimate (that Bell ranked second among more than 63% of Lincoln voters) are also those who make the most extreme estimate in either direction (90% and above for Bell). Tabarrok and Spector constructed a median historian's profile, and compared it to Riker's. As I said, I believe that many commentators, a number of historians included, fail to locate the Constitutional Unionists ideologically and geographically, and my estimate of their support among Lincoln voters would not exceed 10%, however, nothing in the analysis here depends on my apparently extreme view on the question. The plane of possible outcomes in Tabarrok and Spector's positional-vote space, using



Riker's profile, is large, and permits a large variety of rankings by way of varying the weights of a positional voting rule – from plurality to Borda count to antiplurality and everything in between. The positional vote plane using the median historian's profile is small, and “Douglas wins . . . under any positional voting system which gives significant weight to second- or second- and third-ranked preferences” (278); Lincoln wins by plurality count, which gives no weight to any preferences except for the first-ranked. Condorcet pairwise comparison is cyclic with Riker's profile, but with the median historian's profile Douglas beats Bell by 15.1%, Bell beats Lincoln by 0.033% (three-hundredths of one percent), and Lincoln beats Breckenridge by 25.4%.

The ideological data, aggregate data at the county, state, and sectional levels, and the opinion survey of antebellum historians support the hypotheses that Douglas and not Bell was second-ranked among Lincoln voters, and that preferences were for the most part single-peaked across the country.

What does this revision do to Riker's demonstration that democracy is arbitrary because different voting methods result in different outcomes and that democracy is meaningless because cycles will be contrived on major issues such as the future of slavery? The first thing we must do is to correct Riker's original claims. He claims that the Borda count ranks  $D > B_I > L > B_r$ . This is not correct, the Borda count from his figures indicates  $D > L > B_I > B_r$ . He also states that the “actual” method and outcome was the plurality ranking  $L > D > B_r > B_I$ . That is not quite correct, as the actual outcome was determined by the electoral college where the ranking was  $L$  (majority)  $> B_r > B_I > D$ . Customarily, the electors vote on the instructions of their states and if they deadlock, then the top three candidates go to the House of Representatives where each state delegation casts one vote, and if the House deadlocks then the top two candidates go to the Senate. It is important to know that this arrangement, and not national-level plurality rule, was the voting scheme that motivated the candidates' decisions. That gives us a corrected version of Riker's findings:

Electoral College: Lincoln (majority)  $>$  Breckenridge  $>$  Bell  $>$  Douglas

Plurality: Lincoln  $>$  Douglas  $>$  Breckenridge  $>$  Bell

Pairwise Comparison: (Douglas  $>$  Lincoln  $>$  Bell  $>$  Douglas)  $>$  Breckenridge

Borda Count: Douglas  $>$  Lincoln  $>$  Bell  $>$  Breckenridge

Approval Voting (two votes): Bell  $>$  Lincoln  $>$  Douglas  $>$  Breckenridge

Approval Voting (three votes): Douglas  $>$  Bell  $>$  Lincoln  $>$  Breckenridge

Riker has one-fourth of Lincoln voters ranking Douglas second and three-fourths of Lincoln voters ranking Bell second. Bell got two percent of the vote in the states ranking Lincoln first, but let's be generous and adopt the median historian's view that Bell was the second choice of 40 percent of Lincoln voters and that Douglas was the second choice of 60 percent of Lincoln voters. What happens then to the arbitrarily

different outcomes and the meaningless cycle? They disappear! A pairwise comparison matrix is displayed in Table 4. Riker's figures are in roman type. The cells showing how many preferred Douglas to Bell, and how many preferred Bell to Douglas, are revised to reflect my proposed reversal of the proportions of Lincoln voters second-ranking Douglas and Bell. My revised totals are in italic.

**Table 4. Pairwise Comparison Matrix, 1860 Election**

	<b>L</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Bl</b>	<b>Br</b>	<b>Borda</b>
<b>Lincoln</b>		2165	2542	2968	7675
<b>Douglas</b>	2516		2265 -718 + 1076 = 2623	3658	8439 8797
<b>Bell</b>	2139	2416 +718 – 1076 = 2058		3090	7645 7287
<b>Breck.</b>	1713	1023	1591		4327

*Note:* Riker's estimates in Roman type, Mackie's revision in italic type.

The consequences are straightforward. By pairwise comparison, we have  $D > L$ ,  $L > Bl$ ,  $L > Br$ ,  $D > Bl$ ,  $D > Br$ ,  $Bl > Br$ ; and that reduces to  $D > L > Bl > Br$ , which is not a cycle. The Borda count is still  $D > L > Bl > Br$ . Approval voting with two votes changes from what it was to  $D > L > Bl > Br$ . Approval voting with three votes remains  $D > Bl > L > Br$ . Here is a summary of the finally corrected outcomes.

Pairwise Comparison: Douglas > Lincoln > Bell > Breckenridge.

Borda Count: Douglas > Lincoln > Bell > Breckenridge.

Approval Voting (two votes): Douglas > Lincoln > Bell > Breckenridge.

Approval Voting (three votes): Douglas > Bell > Lincoln > Breckenridge.

With plurality runoff, Lincoln and Douglas would go to the runoff and Douglas would win (a runoff between first-round losers Bell and Breckenridge has Bell as the winner, yielding the overall ranking  $D > L > Bl > Bk$ ). All five of these voting methods select Douglas as the winner. Except for approval voting with three votes (in this example equivalent to antiplurality), the rules identify the same ranking  $D > L > Bl > Bk$ . That antiplurality is an exception is not a surprise, since antiplurality is an even more inaccurate voting rule than is the plurality rule. Antiplurality means that everyone votes

against her least-favored candidate, and it is inaccurate because all other ranking information is ignored.

The champion of Riker may still have doubts and, all evidence to the contrary, still insist that many Lincoln voters ranked Bell second. How sensitive is Riker's assertion of a cycle? He says that 25 percent of Lincoln voters ranked Douglas second and 75 percent ranked Bell second. Riker's cycle assertion is fragile: if merely 30 percent of Lincoln voters rank Douglas second and 70 percent Bell then Riker's cycle vanishes. How sensitive is the assertion of different outcomes from different voting rules? If the second ranking of Lincoln voters is 33 percent for Douglas and 67 percent for Bell, then that is enough for pairwise comparison, Borda count, approval voting with two votes, antiplurality, and plurality runoff to pick Douglas as the winner. If 37 percent of Lincoln voters ranked Douglas second and 63 percent ranked Bell second, then that is enough for pairwise comparison, Borda count, approval voting with two votes, and plurality runoff to converge on the same ranking:  $D > L > B > Br$ . So Riker's case depends on the assertion that more than 63 percent of Lincoln voters in the north ranked Bell, the candidate who had obtained two percent of the votes in the North, second. That is too fragile to carry a case for pervasive political disequilibrium, a hypothesis which, as we have seen, is otherwise unsupported.

But Lincoln won the election, not Douglas! the Rikerian might reply. In Mackie 2000 I explain why Douglas lost both the plurality vote and the electoral college, and further, I hypothesize that the tragic outcome arose from strategic miscalculations by the actors. With plurality rule, by Duverger's "law," we should expect two candidates, not four. The voting rule was not pure plurality rule, however, but amalgamation by state to the electoral college, and if no majority in the electoral college, then the top three candidates go to the House where each state has one vote, and if the House deadlocks effectively the top two candidates go to the Senate. This bizarre voting rule elicited four candidacies: most of Bell's supporters and many of Breckenridge's expected to deny a majority in the electoral college and thereby throw the vote to the House or the Senate where the south would do better than with the electorate. A democratic theorist need not defend the clumsy electoral college, which was hastily designed with antimajoritarian intent. A pure plurality rule in the 1860 election would probably have elicited the candidacies of Douglas and Lincoln (or similar candidates), with Douglas (or otherwise the more centrist candidate) the victor. The Rikerian might also reply that the displays in Tabarrok and Spector (1999), with the more single-peaked median historian's profile, still show, albeit to a much lesser extent, that different outcomes might arise from different voting rules. That would be to ignore a caution that those authors issue: "had the voting system been different, candidate and party strategies would have been different" (262). My interpretation under the median historian's profile is that Douglas would have won under most positional rules; Lincoln apparently wins under plurality rule with four candidates but if the election had been pure plurality rule eliciting two candidates Douglas would have beat Lincoln; or, if we wanted to keep the four candidates, Douglas would have won a plurality runoff election.

**Riker's Theory of Dimensional Manipulation.** Riker's account of the evolution of the slavery issue up to the Civil War is an illustration of his theory of manipulation and the natural selection of issues. The survey he hopes will establish the existence of manipulative agenda control on a grand scale. The political losers, he argues, successfully and luckily introduced a new issue or dimension so as to generate cycles or disequilibrium that they resolved with the Civil War thereby fixing their coalition as supreme in American politics for several generations. I accept part of Riker's story. From 1800 to 1860 there was an intersectional coalition of agrarian expansionists – Jeffersonian Republicanism and then Jacksonian Democracy – that frequently controlled the federal government. There was also a less successful commercial coalition, first organized as the Federalists, later organized as the intersectional Whig Party, and finally organized as the Republicans, which constrained the agrarians but less frequently controlled the federal government. The commercial party desired high tariffs to protect industry, the agrarians low tariffs to obtain cheaper imports and promote exports; the commercial party wanted internal improvements such as canals and railroads, the agrarian party did not directly benefit from commercial development; and so on. The multitude of issues imperfectly dividing the coalitions, and their evolution over time, are more intriguingly complex than this caricature, but we can't afford to go into detail here (see Ashworth 1995, 366-492 for a thick discussion up to 1850). I also accept that from 1800 to 1860 politics was often organized along two dimensions, a usually stronger dimension of economic conflict and a usually uncorrelated and much weaker dimension often involving sectional conflict.

Riker's argument is that the losing commercialists sought with one or another issue to split the winning agrarians. They tried the slavery issue several times and finally hit the jackpot with it in 1860. They used their victory in the Civil War to establish a new institutional equilibrium favorable to their coalition and unfavorable to the losers of that war. In Riker's theory (1982, 200) it is the "skill, energy, and resources" of leaders, rather than the preferences of the population, that accounts for political change. For purposes of the theory it is as if the distribution of preferences were fixed from 1800 to 1860; the engine of change is differences in politicians' abilities to manipulate the agenda inside multidimensional issue space. Why does Riker assign causality to political leaders? Because of the episodic nature of the crises over slavery. Slavery existed for 200 years, and was settled by the constitutional convention for 30 years when the first crisis, the Missouri controversy, arose in 1819. No economic factors account for the rise and fall of the slavery issue in the two years of the Missouri controversy, underlying sentiments were the same before and after, by elimination that leaves political leadership as the explanatory variable, according to Riker. The slavery issue subsided and lay quiescent until the controversy over the gag rule in the 1830s and then ripened into the episodic crises of the Wilmot Proviso in 1846, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, and the election of Lincoln in 1860.

There is an alternative explanation, however. Weingast (1998), Riker's former student, explains that national crisis erupted whenever the sectional equilibrium in the Senate was threatened. For purposes of apportionment of representation in the House and

the electoral college the South enjoyed a 3/5 vote for every slave owned, it had an effective sectional veto over selection of the president, it was the majority faction in the majority party, it was overrepresented on the Supreme Court, and it also enjoyed blocking power in the Senate. The U.S. Senate is made up of two Senators from every state, and from 1792 to 1858 the number of either free or slave states almost never exceeded one another by more than one; as the country expanded there was a deliberate effort especially by the south to maintain an equal sectional balance in the Senate (Weingast 1998, 154). Antislavery measures often passed the majoritarian House only to die at the hands of the southern veto in the antimajoritarian Senate (Weingast 1998, 168). In 1819 it was proposed to admit Missouri as a slave state, raising the question of whether the remainder of the vast but unsettled Louisiana Territory would be open to slavery. Northerners opposed admitting Missouri as a slave state for one reason because it was well north of the existing slave states; southerners opposed requiring Missouri to be a free state in part because it was settled by southerners. The eventual compromise, passed with many southern and fewer northern votes, was to admit slave Missouri as an exception above that latitude but otherwise close the remainder of the Louisiana Territory north of 36 degrees 30 minutes to slavery; also Maine was brought in as a free state to balance Missouri in the Senate. The next sectional crisis arose over the Wilmot proviso starting in 1846, which emerged just as the United States was almost doubling its territory with the Mexican and Oregon acquisitions. California was admitted as a free state in 1850, giving the North an edge of one in the Senate, and under old expectations the South would be due the admission of a slave state. Blocked by the Missouri Compromise, the South had no practical opportunity for the organization of a new slave state, however. That is why the Democrats at the height of their power in 1854 passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The plan was to encourage admission of Kansas as a slave state (and Nebraska as a free state many years later), but Kansas was north of 36 degrees 30 minutes and could not be organized as a slave state unless the Missouri Compromise was repealed. Thus, another crisis. Minnesota and Oregon were admitted as free states in 1858 and 1859 respectively, making for an imbalance of 18 free states and 15 slave states in the Senate. By 1860 the South had lost not only the Senate, but the Presidency, and then came the Civil War. Yes, there is a political explanation for the succession of episodic slavery crises, but it is the threat to sectional equilibrium in the Senate, not as Riker would have it the arbitrarily variable activation of dimensions by political operators.

Poole and Rosenthal (1997), also Riker's students, set out to measure the dimensionality of all roll-call votes in the U.S. Congress. As we have seen, they found that for all such votes, 83 percent are explained by one dimension and another two percent are explained by a second dimension. The first dimension usually captures party loyalty and the second dimension usually differentiates the members by region within each party (46-51). Before the rise of the second, Democrat and Whig, party system in the middle 1830s the second dimension frequently involved public works. From 1837 through 1850 the second dimension frequently involved slavery or public lands. The Congress of 1851 and 1852, after the Compromise of 1850, is spatially chaotic, completely disorganized in dimensional terms. By the Congress of 1853 and 1854

slavery had become the first dimension of politics and remained so into the Civil War. Furthermore, the major vehicle for realignment in the antebellum period was replacement of legislators, not changes in legislators' positions (90), which I interpret to mean that the change was responsive to the electorate's wishes. Independently from Poole and Rosenthal and their roll-call data, Fogel (1989, 321) identifies the Congress of 1851-1852 as a period of transition. The political agenda of the prior decades was obsolete and a new agenda was yet to emerge. That Congress was split into a multiplicity of factional groupings who only occasionally coalesced – neither party nor section was influential. The primary political issues in 1851-1854 were local, responses to the turmoil of mass immigration, urbanization, and early industrialization in the North.

Poole and Rosenthal also trace the history of roll-call votes on slavery issues (91-100). In the first 14 Congresses there were only 43 roll-call votes on the issue and only weak party or sectional patterns. Almost three-fourths of the roll-call votes on slavery between 1817 and 1831 took place in the 15th (1817-1818) and 16th (1819-1820) Congresses. Historians call this the Era of Good Feelings; controversy over foreign wars had died away, the Jeffersonian-Republicans had adopted some of the Federalists' economic policies, because of the demise of the Federalists there was no partisan divide, and President James Monroe was reelected in 1820 with only one symbolic vote opposed in the electoral college. The Missouri controversy played out in 1819 and 1820, and slavery votes fit well into one dimension (indeed is the only issue with a high degree of fit), but otherwise the spatial model is quite weak in this period, the 17th Congress (1821-1822) being the worst-fitting to the model in American history. Poole and Rosenthal state that the collapse of the party system during the Era of Good Feelings "did not occur because slavery was the new, destabilizing dimension" (1997, 95). The collapse of the first, Republican and Federalist, party system came about because the foreign-policy and economic issues that structured it were no longer of importance. Slavery rose as a Congressional issue with the Missouri controversy but fell with the Missouri Compromise. The second, Democrat and Whig, party system arose along an economic dimension but slavery never completely vanished as an issue, according to Poole and Rosenthal. The bulk of slavery votes came after 1835, they say, and slavery voting fell increasingly along a second dimension. "By 1853, this economic dimension collapsed and was replaced by the slavery dimension" (95). I suggest rather that after 1853 the slavery dimension merged with the economic dimension. What attraction did the Democratic Party hold for the northern agrarians? Originally, they were drawn to the Jacksonian coalition because it promised greater democratic equality and liberty (for white males) than did the aristocratic commercialists (see Fogel 1989, 316-319). Democrats advocated territorial expansion and the cheap sale of federal land to promote those values, Whigs opposed territorial expansion and advocated that federal land be sold at high prices in order not to depress the price of the land they owned or inflate the price of the labor they controlled. During the Congress of 1853-1854 the Democrats abandoned their defining cheap-land policy because their southern wing had concluded that it politically advantaged the North. In the same Congress the Democrats abrogated the boundary of the Missouri Compromise, and thereafter slave settlers and free settlers clashed in the territory of Kansas. Meanwhile, over the objections of some of its

formerly Whig members, the Republican Party took up the cause of cheap land. Northern agrarians were drawn to the new party that promoted their democratic equality and liberty, the Republicans.

Poole and Rosenthal's findings suggest that tensions over slavery increased over a long period, that the realignment within Congress was sudden, and the realignment was initiated well before the Republican Party became a force in politics (99). I interpret Poole and Rosenthal's data to mean that there was *not* a common multidimensional issue space from 1800 to 1860 and thus that variations in political outcome from 1800 to 1860 were not due to the arbitrary manipulation of that space by political conspirators. Poole and Rosenthal show clearly that there was a strong party dimension and a weak sectional dimension and that by 1853 the sectional dimension became strong and in its wake restructured the parties along sectional lines. It was not, however, the Slave Power Conspiracy nor the Black Republicans (phrases of the respective sectional conspiracy theorists) who brought about the realignment, rather it was changes in the preferences of the political population. "By the 1850s, slavery was not a new issue but a very old one that had *become more intense* in both the North and the South" (emphasis added, 91). Weingast (1998, 163) too holds that northern opposition to slavery *increased* over the antebellum period. According to Potter (1976, 38-41), during the colonial period there was little difference between the sections concerning the morality of slavery, although slavery was far more prevalent in the South. The ideals of the Revolutionary War inspired both North and South to condemn slavery as evil; emancipation and colonization societies were as common in the Upper South as they were in the North. But as the profitable cotton economy expanded and slavery with it, the economic and ideological center of the South shifted from Virginia to South Carolina. By 1832 the southern antislavery movement had vanished and an ideology of slavery as a positive good had arisen. Meanwhile, slavery had been gradually abolished in the North. Sectional opinion on slavery further polarized in the 1840s and 1850s.

In short, the conventional hypothesis of preference change far better accounts for developments in the antebellum period than Riker's hypothesis of manipulation of multiple dimensions by political elites.

**Conclusion.** The Arrow theorem disclosed the logical possibility of a majority cycle, of perpetual political instability. But we observe stability rather than instability in democratic politics. Riker (1958) initially responds that cycles are common but rarely detected. Simulations show and empirical studies corroborate, however, that cycling is an empirical improbability. Riker then concedes that uncontrived cycles are quite rare, but that on major issues actors will contrive cycles by introduction of new alternatives. Actors also engage in strategic voting, agenda control, and the introduction of new dimensions in order to contrive multidimensional disequilibrium, according to Riker.

In order to be persuaded to abandon the concept of the public good and the idea of democracy as in some sense the expression of the people's will, most people would require that it be robustly demonstrated that manipulation of outcomes be frequent, harmful, and irremediable. Riker's position is that it is either theoretically impossible or

empirically difficult to detect such manipulation. He is able, however, to produce spectacular anecdotes that show harmful manipulation on major issues, including a demonstration that the biggest event in American history was the consequence of a contrived cycle. I have worked through each of his examples (Mackie 2000, an abridged sample presented here), only to find that each is mistaken, and thus Riker's case fails on its own terms. In summary, according to Mackie (2000), theoretical considerations about the distribution of preference orders suggest that cycles are most unlikely; empirical studies show that cycles are of no practical importance; finally, every developed and published example of a political cycle has now been refuted. Thus, after fifty years of scholarship, from the first publication of Arrow's theorem, no one has satisfactorily demonstrated the existence of a normatively troubling cycle in the real world. That almost all the claims to demonstrate a cycle came from the pen of one man should have served as a warning signal.

The antidemocratic interpretations of social choice results inspired by Riker, widely endorsed in the discipline of political science, are unsupported by evidence and must be abandoned.



## REFERENCES

- Ashworth, John. 1995. *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic*, vol. 1, *Commerce and Compromise: 1820-1850*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bjurulf and Niemi. 1978. "Strategic Voting in Scandinavian Parliaments." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 1(n.s.):5-22.
- Blydenburgh, John C. 1971. "The Closed Rule and the Paradox of Voting." *Journal of Politics* 33:57-71.
- Budge, Ian. 1993. "Issues, Dimensions, and Agenda Change in Postwar Democracies: Longterm Trends in Party Election Programs and Newspaper Reports in Twenty-Three Democracies." In Riker 1993.
- Chamberlin, John R., Jerry L. Cohen, and Clyde H. Coombs. 1984. "Social Choice Observed: Five Presidential Elections of the American Psychological Association." *Journal of Politics* 46:479-502.
- Dumond, Dwight Lowell. 1931. *The Secession Movement: 1860-1861*. New York: Macmillan Company.
- Enelow, James M. 1997. "Cycling and Majority Rule." In *Perspectives on Public Choice: A Handbook*, ed. Dennis C. Mueller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feld, Scott L., and Bernard Grofman. 1992. "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Cycle? Evidence from 36 Elections." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 4:231-237.
- Fogel, Robert William. 1989. *Without Consent or Contract*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Mackie, Gerry. 1998. "All Men are Liars. Is Democracy Meaningless?" In Jon Elster, ed., *Deliberative Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. *Is Democracy Impossible? A Preface to Deliberative Democracy*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago.
- McPherson, James M. 1993. *Ordeal by Fire*, vol. 1, *The Coming of War*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Morison, Elting. 1971. "Election of 1860." In *History of American Presidential Elections: 1789-1968*, volume 2, eds. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Fred L. Israel, and William P. Hansen. New York: Chelsea House.

- Neufeld, John L., William J. Hausman, and Ronald B. Rapoport. 1994. *Political Research Quarterly* 47:423-438.
- Niemi, Richard G., and J.R. Wright. 1987. "Voting Cycles and the Structure of Individual Preferences." *Social Choice and Welfare* 4:173-183.
- Poole, Keith T., and Howard Rosenthal. 1997. *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll-Call Voting*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. "D-NOMINATE After 10 Years: A Comparative Update to *Congress: A Political Economic History of Roll Call Voting*." Available at <http://voteview.gsia.cmu.edu>.
- Poole, Keith T., Howard Rosenthal, and Boris T. Shor. 1999. *Voteview for Windows 2.0.0: Roll Call Displays of the U.S. Congress, 1789-1988*. Available at <http://voteview.gsia.cmu.edu>.
- Potter, David M. 1976. *The Impending Crisis: 1848-1861*. New York: Harper.
- Radcliff, Benjamin. 1993. "The Structure of Voter Preferences." *Journal of Politics* 55:714-719.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. "Collective Preferences in Presidential Elections." *Electoral Studies* 13:50-57.
- Riker, William H. 1958. "The Paradox of Voting and Congressional Rules for Voting on Amendments." *American Political Science Review* 52:349-366.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1982. *Liberalism Against Populism: A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1984. "The Heresthetics of Constitution-Making: The Presidency in 1787, with Comments on Determinism and Rational Choice." *American Political Science Review* 78:1-16.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1986. *The Art of Political Manipulation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. "Introduction." In *Agenda Formation*, ed. William H. Riker. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990b. "Political Science and Rational Choice." In *Perspectives on Positive Political Economy*, eds. James E. Alt, and Kenneth A. Shepsle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Riker, William H., and Barry R. Weingast. 1988. "Constitutional Regulation of Legislative Choice: The Political Consequences of Judicial Deference to Legislatures." *Virginia Law Review* 74 (2):373-402.
- Tabarrok, Alexander and Lee Spector. 1999. "Would the Borda Count have Avoided the Civil War?" *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 11:261-288.
- Van Deemen, Adrian, and Noel P. Vergunst. 1998. "Empirical Evidence of Paradoxes of Voting in Dutch Elections." *Public Choice* 97:475-490.
- Weingast, Barry R. 1988. "Political Stability and Civil War: Institutions, Commitment, and American Democracy." In *Analytic Narratives*, eds., Robert H. Bates, Avner Greif, Margaret Levi, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, and Barry R. Weingast. Princeton: Princeton University Press.