

Partisan and Regional Voting in the Antebellum House

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Abstract

Using newly-gathered data on vote types in the antebellum House, I study the extent to which we see evidence of organized partisan activity in the roll call record for the antebellum House. I examine rates of party unity votes, majority rolls, and majority disappointments on final passage, amendment, and procedural votes in the 20th through 36th Congresses (1827-1861). These measures provide stronger bases for identifying the absence of partisan efforts than for identifying their presence, so only limited inferences can be drawn from them. Nonetheless, the results strongly indicate the absence of the types of organized parties found in the modern House, while also hinting at limited forms of partisan organization on some types of procedural votes. In addition, I examine regional roll rates across this era; the results strongly suggest that Northerners enjoyed persistently higher legislative success than Southerners.

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It is something of an article of faith among congressional scholars that, to the extent that parties influence congressional decisions, they do so more by agenda setting than by party discipline—that is, party leaders’ primary form of influence lies in shaping the choices that the chamber votes on and the circumstances under which those choices are considered, rather than in compelling party members to vote in line with the leaders’ wishes.¹ From this perspective, parties are teams of somewhat like-minded legislators who develop team leadership positions and team organizational infrastructure that facilitate the team’s efforts to claim a bigger share of legislative spoils than would be the case in the absence of the organized team effort (Aldrich 2011, Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005, Rohde 1991). At their most successful, majority party teams are akin to legislative “cartels” that control a chamber’s output for the benefit of party members (Cox and McCubbins 1993).

Literature on party agenda influence focuses mostly on the House of Representatives in the period since 1890, when the House adopted the “Reed rules”—the set of reforms that put in place many key elements of the procedural infrastructure underlying modern majority party agenda setting (Binder 1997, Dion 1997). Less is known about the extent to which parties successfully manipulated the House agenda prior to the Reed rules, or about how it might have achieved any such manipulation. But, clearly, partisan organization prior to the Reed rules was less extensive, and partisan manipulation of the agenda less successful, than in the modern House.

¹ See Smith (2007) for an overview of literature on these types of influence, which Smith labels “indirect” (agenda setting) and direct (discipline) party effects. See Krehbiel (1993, 1998) for the foremost critiques of party literature.

One obstacle to better understanding of legislative parties' efforts in the earlier period is that many data used in studies of the modern Congress are not available, or have not been compiled into easily usable form, for the earlier period. This paper is about one such type of data that I have compiled for the antebellum era (more specifically, the 20th through 36th Congresses, which runs from 1827 through 1861) —the type of vote for each House roll call; in other words, whether each vote was a vote on passage of a bill, adopting an amendment, adjournment, reconsidering the previous vote, etc. . These data are similar to David Rohde's vote type data for post-World War Two congresses (Rohde, multiple years), and open the door to many types of antebellum-era analysis that require discriminating different vote types from one another.

This paper, however, is a first step that includes no such analysis. In it, I present some summary statistics and measures generated from the data, as a means both of illustrating how these data might be used to generate roll-call-based measures across certain types of votes as a means of exploring antebellum agenda setting, and of highlighting some interesting patterns that emerge from the data. The paper's primary intended value added is thus the presentation of more systematic and detailed quantitative data from this period than have previously been available, which might serve as the impetus for additional research. I examine these data and discuss some possible implications. But the paper yields little in the way of hard conclusions, other than perhaps by demonstrating in more quantitative terms than previous research that many aspects of modern legislative parties' behavior were absent at this time.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, I sketch the nature of majority party agenda setting in the modern House, then compare it to agenda setting in the antebellum period as a means of identifying types of votes that potentially served as important antebellum agenda setting tools. In the third section, I examine a variety of measures generated for each of the vote

types in each of the congresses, such as unity votes and roll rates, as a means of suggesting ways that the data might be used to study agenda setting. In the fourth section, I illustrate another possible use by examining regional (i.e., Northern and Southern) roll rates across vote types. I conclude with a brief discussion of caveats and future research.

Modern and antebellum parties

Modern parties

The literature includes many variants on the argument that, in the modern House, the majority party shapes outcomes by manipulating the legislative agenda. Here, I sketch the variant that gives the most expansive view of majority-party power: Cox and McCubbins's (1993, 1994, 2005) the cartel model, which posits that party caucuses in the House are analogous to economic cartels, such as OPEC, in which a collection of economic producers in an industry work collectively to manipulate market outcomes in order to achieve greater profits for cartel members than would be the case in the absence of the cartel action. In the House, majority party caucus members work together to manipulate chamber decisions in order to achieve greater political outcomes for caucus members than would be the case in the absence of the partisan cartel.² Because caucus members have differing policy preferences and other goals, however, group

² "Political outcomes" is shorthand for different outcomes valued by legislators. Cox and McCubbins (1993) initially emphasized the value of party labels, while later (2005) noting that majority party members enjoy a larger share of many valued resources, such as committee chairs and pork-barrel spending, than do minority party members.

efforts are often prone to collective action problems, leading parties to develop leadership positions and other forms of caucus organization meant to help mitigate such problems.

Different aspects of a cartel that are crucial to its success, two of which I emphasize here. First, the party must establish what Jenkins and Stewart (2013) label an “organizational cartel.” This means that caucus members must coordinate their actions to a degree sufficient for the party to fill important House positions—such as the Speaker, committee chairs, and committee positions—such that those positions are held by caucus members who are likely to exercise the positions’ power in ways that serve the caucus’s goals.

Second, the caucus must manipulate legislative decisions via a “procedural cartel.” This means that the caucus “agents” mentioned above must engage in agenda setting. That is, they must shape the set of choices over which party members vote, in ways that minimize the need for caucus members to cast highly visible votes that would displease constituents, thereby avoiding latent collective action problems and allowing the party to achieve its goals.

The primary agenda setting mechanism is special rules from the Rules Committee, each of which puts a bill on the floor, and often also regulates the offering of amendments or other aspects of floor consideration. From an agenda setting perspective, a special rule can play three key functions: first, it puts a bill on the floor for consideration. Second, it can ensure that caucus members do not have to vote on amendments that would either split the party (and perhaps undermine the party’s legislative goals), or force some party members to cast highly visible votes that would displease constituents. Third, it can remove or reduce obstacles to a bill’s passage, such as by waiving points of order or reducing the amount of time allowed for debate.

Similarly, another agenda-setting mechanism is the ability to decide the resolution of points of order. A point of order is a claim that a particular course of action violates the

chamber's rules and procedures, and should not be allowed by ruling on a point of order, the presiding officer can either remove obstacles to a bill's passage, or allow obstacles to remain.

Agenda setting via special rules or points of order requires that the majority caucus exhibit two types of floor voting cohesion. First, it must ensure that it wins votes that allow it to include the Rules Committee and the presiding officer as part of the organizational cartel. Second, it must win votes that put in place special rules, and votes that uphold presiding officers' point-of-order rulings when they are appealed. Unsurprisingly, in the modern House the majority party usually wins such votes, and does so on clear party-line votes.

Antebellum parties

The antebellum House's decision making processes were very different from those of the modern House. At the outset of the Republic, the chamber had almost completely lacked formal organization, partisan or otherwise (Galloway 1976). But, after rapid institutional development across its first few decades, the legislative process of the mid-1820s included some familiar features, such as a standing committee system, a politicized Speakership, suspension of the rules by two-thirds vote, and limits on debate.

Similarly, parties as we now know them did not exist early on, but by the mid-1820s various factions began to align into Jacksonians and anti-Jacksonians, which was the genesis of the Democratic and Whig parties of the second party system. This period thus makes a convenient starting point for studying the extent of antebellum party cooperation.

It is clear for a variety of reasons that cartels as described above did not exist at this time. One macro-level indication that there was no cartel is found in party roll rate patterns from the time. Examining final passage votes on H.R. bills from the 45th through 105th Congresses (1877-

1997), Cox and McCubbins (2005, Table 5.1) show that the majority party is rarely rolled, whereas the minority party is rolled far more often. One tantalizing aspect of their data, however, is the first six Congresses in their time series. Majority rolls were markedly higher in all but one of the six than in subsequent Congresses—and the Reed rules went into effect in 1890, early in the seventh Congress in the time series (the 51st Congress).

In earlier work, (Den Hartog 2004), I extended their time series back to the First Congress and found a dramatically different picture prior to 1877, as shown in Figure 1. The figure shows majority and minority party roll rates—the proportion of final passage votes resulting in rolls of the party. Whereas the majority party roll rate in the modern era tends toward zero, majority roll rates between 1827 and 1861 (20th through 36th Congresses) bounced wildly around, often hovering around 25 percent.

Figure 1 here

Also, in their impressive recent work on this era, Jenkins and Stewart (2013) blend quantitative and qualitative analyses to demonstrate that efforts to build an organizational cartel were underway, but were often prone to collective action problems—especially divisions between regional factions of each party—and met with only intermittent success prior to the 1860s, when organizational cartels became firmly entrenched. They also note, like Cox and McCubbins (2005), that the procedural cartel became entrenched only with the advent of the Reed rules in the 1890s.

Another reason is that the antebellum legislative process did not provide even a cohesive majority party with agenda setting tools as effective as the modern system built around special rules. In fact, much of the legislative-process infrastructure underlying the modern procedural cartel described above did not exist prior to the Civil War. Specifically, the Rules Committee did

not take on its current form—as a standing committee with the ability to modify the order of business through special rules requiring only majority approval on the floor—until the 1880s (Roberts 2010). Some of the key agenda setting functions of special rules in the modern system—scheduling, limiting amendments, waiving points of order—thus could not have worked then as they work now.

The default (i.e., regular order) procedure for scheduling (i.e., deciding which bills reached the floor) was to take them up in the order that they were reported from committee. The primary mechanism for deviating from this regular order was a motion to suspend the rules and establish specific business as a “special order” either immediately or in the future, in much the same way that special rules put bills on the floor in the modern system.³ In the process, suspensions often also displaced measures that would have been considered under regular order. As is still the case, however, motions to suspend the rules required two-thirds approval, thereby placing a large constraint on a majority party’s scheduling abilities that modern majorities do not face on special rules; even a highly cohesive majority might be unable to schedule bills via suspension in the antebellum era.

Another limitation was that suspension did not restrict floor amendments or waive points of order in the same way that special rules do in the modern House. One of the antebellum mechanisms appears to have had the most potential for limiting amendments is motions to table, much as in the modern Senate (Goodman 2006, Marshall, Prins, and Rohde 1999). Another is rulings on points of order and appeals of such rulings. In the data section that follows, I thus examine roll-call-based measures across votes on final passage, adoption of amendments,

³ Eventually, special orders evolved into special rules (Bach 1990, Roberts 2010).

suspensions of the rules, appeals of chairs' rulings, and motions to table, which seem to be some of the places where we are most likely to find evidence suggesting the levels of party agenda setting success.⁴

Data

In this section, I examine patterns of roll call vote data using a variety of measures that help illuminate the antebellum legislative process and give some insight into whether and what types of party activity occurred at the time. I look for variation across time, but also across final passage, amendment, and three types of procedural votes (suspension, tabling motions, and appeals of chairs' rulings).⁵

⁴ This list, however, excludes many vote types that would need to be included that either *did* serve, or might have served, agenda setting purposes. In particular, procedural filibustering—typically in the form of forcing multiple roll call votes on privileged motions, such as the motion to adjourn—sometimes played an important part in agenda setting (Alexander 1916, Binder 1997, Koger 2010). Any complete accounting of agenda setting in the period needs to include these other potential agenda tactics.

⁵ Data on types of votes were coded from the dictionaries for roll call vote files at the Voteview website (voteview.com), supplemented in some cases by the House Journal.

Overview of types of votes

Figure 2 presents summary statistics on the types of votes for each Congress in the time series. Figure 2a shows the number of votes for each type, while Figure 2b shows the proportion of all votes that fell into each vote type category.⁶

Figure 2 here

The number of final passage votes (labeled “fpv” in this and subsequent figures) appears as a step function; with the exception of 33 votes in the 21st Congress (1829-1831), it is fairly consistent at around 20 votes per Congress until the 27th Congress (1841-1843), when it jumps to 70, followed by fluctuation between 25 and 63 leading up to the Civil War.⁷ The number of amendment votes is at its lowest in the 21st Congress and its highest in the 22nd Congress, after which it is fairly level, with a slight downward trend, across the rest of the period. Excepting the two aforementioned Congresses, the number averages in the range of 50-60 votes. With the exception of the 21st Congress, there are more amendment votes than final passage votes through

⁶ Across the 9015 roll call votes from the 20th through 36th Congresses, the most frequent vote types were tabling motions (19.4 percent), suspensions of the rules (12.6 percent), adoption of amendments (12.5 percent), adjournment (10.5 percent), and final passage of bills (6.7 percent). No other vote type constituted more than five percent of the total number of votes.

⁷ The set of final passage votes used in the following analyses includes votes on House *and* Senate bills. This differs from Cox and McCubbins (2002, 2005) and Den Hartog (2004), which use only final passage votes on House bills. Also, the year listed for each Congress is the year in which it started. Neither the earlier studies nor this paper includes joint resolutions from either chamber in roll rate calculations.

the 26th Congress, when the number of final passage votes spikes. After that, the numbers of these two vote types track each other fairly closely. Suspension votes are close to nil in the first two Congresses, then rise steeply and steadily to a peak of 146 votes in the 26th Congress. After that the number recedes, and from 1845 through 1861 it tracks the numbers of final passage and amendment votes fairly well, though there are usually more suspension votes. Appeals are the least frequent type of vote; in most of Congresses they are in the single digits, and only in the 26th and 27th Congresses does the number exceed 18 (34 and 22, respectively). Tabling motion votes follow a much different pattern: they begin to increase in the mid-1830s, spike sharply in the 27th Congress, and remain by far the most numerous vote type through the end of the time series.⁸

Figure 2a shows the same data, with votes on each vote type expressed as a proportion of the overall number of votes in each Congress. Obviously, this will not change the ordinal frequency of each vote type in a Congress, but it does frame the over-time variation in each type in the context of broader changes in the amount of House business. From this perspective, final passage votes are fairly constant over time, with a dip across the 1830s, while amendment votes vary widely over the first four Congresses, then remain fairly constant. The patterns on suspension and appeals votes are similar to in Figure 2a, and the mid-time-series increase in tabling votes is more smoother and looks less like a step function.

⁸ An important caveat is in order—because the data coding used for this paper does not differentiate tabling motions that propose tabling an amendment from tabling motions that propose tabling an appeal of a chair’s ruling, the data surely underestimate the number of votes related to rulings on points of order.

In the following sections, I drop appeals votes from the data I present; given that the data are congress-by-congress proportions of each vote type that meet certain criteria (e.g., “the majority party was rolled”), the small number of appeals votes across the time period makes proportional data on appeals very lumpy, with far more variance than among the other vote types.

Party unity votes

The first measure that I present is party unity votes—that is, votes on which a majority of one party vote against a majority of the other party. One value of party unity votes as a measurement is that they can show the incidence of clear partisan divisions, as we would expect to often find in the presence of deliberate partisan coordination. A limitation, however, is that clear partisan divisions do not necessarily reflect organized party efforts, since party unity votes can also result from party members simply voting their preferences in some circumstances.

Thus, inferences from party unity votes must be made with care. My take is that, in and of themselves, they are suggestive of partisan coordination, but at best constitute only circumstantial evidence. On the other hand, there are two ways in which they might provide stronger (though still circumstantial) evidence. First, if for a particular vote type they occur infrequently, that strikes me as substantial evidence that there was at best limited effective, organized partisan use of such votes for agenda setting purposes. Second, if we see higher incidences of party unity votes on procedural votes than on substantive (i.e., final passage or amendment) votes, that is a substantial clue that there was something different—and different in a party-related way—about procedural votes.

Rather than defining party unity votes as a bare majority of one party versus a bare majority of the other, I define it as at least 70% of one party voting against at least 70% of the other. This cuts out votes on which each party is fairly evenly divided internally, for which bare-majority unity votes likely exaggerate the partisan divide on a vote. Cutting out such close votes is particularly desirable for the antebellum period, in which both parties were significantly divided between northern and southern factions—the higher threshold helps to ensure that a vote one which one faction votes one way and the other votes the other way are not treated as instances of unified party behavior.

Figure 3 here

Figure 3 shows the proportion of votes on each type of vote that were party unity votes.⁹ A clear pattern is that, across all vote types, party unity voting is lower initially, rises in the latter half of the 1830s as the Democratic and Whig parties become more organized, holds fairly steady through the late 1840s, declines sharply in the early 1850s as the Whigs implode and regional divisions become pronounced, then bounces back sharply in the second half of the 1850s as the Republicans emerge to replace the Whigs.

Another pattern that jumps out is that, from 1831 through 1849, final passage votes were less likely than amendment, suspension, or tabling votes to be party unity votes. This divergence disappeared briefly in the 32nd Congress, after which the pattern is for tabling motions to be more

⁹ In the following analyses, I draw data on party affiliation from the roll call vote files at voteview.com, supplemented by partisan affiliation information from Martis (1989). Also, in the 31st, 34th, and 36th Congresses, no party held a majority of seats; in these cases, I treat the party holding the most seats as the majority party.

likely to be party unity votes, with the other three types tracking each other closely. A similar but subtler pattern is that party unity is much more likely on the procedural votes than on final passage votes for *every* Congress through the 30th (1847-1849)—and, with the exception of only the 32nd Congress (1851-1853), tabling votes maintained this pattern across the entire time series. This fits the pattern in which parties try to manipulate the agenda through procedures and thus, as discussed above, suggests but does not demonstrate some level of organized partisan cooperation. On the other hand, party unity on amendment votes is often similar (albeit more variable) through 1851; given the frequent interchangeability of tabling motions and amendment votes, this suggests that either majority parties maintained high party discipline on amendment votes—which seems unlikely—or majority party members saw them as similar kinds of votes and voted their preferences in each case. The higher level of unity voting on tabling votes in the latter half of the 1850s, though, is harder to square with an across-the-board-preference-voting explanation. Of course, one thing of obvious interest that we cannot glean from party unity voting is which side is winning these votes—the data do not rule out the possibility that the majority party loses many of these votes. I now turn to measures that tell us more about who wins and loses.

Majority rolls

Majority party roll rates can provide another indication of organized party efforts. As with party unity votes, they should be treated with care since they might merely reflect preferences. Unlike party unity votes, though, they can tell us about rates at which the majority caucus “loses” on votes. They might reflect a divided party—but, on substantive votes at least, a roll is a telling indicator that the modern cartel practice of precluding party-splitting substantive

votes was not yet in place. On procedural votes, rolls can tell us that the modern practice of procedural cooperation was absent.

Figure 4 here

Figure 4 shows majority party roll rates for each type of vote. As noted before, the frequency of majority rolls on final passage votes is enormous compared to the frequency in the modern House, and constitutes strong evidence that nothing approaching a cartel was present at the time. Three other patterns also stand out. First, across most of the time period, majority roll rates on final passage and amendment votes are relatively similar, and track each other especially closely from the 30th Congress (1847-1849) onward. Second, roll rates on tabling motions are often lower than, sometimes similar to, and rarely higher than, roll rates on substantive votes; this indicates that it was relatively rare for something to be tabled against the majority's wishes, and is another clue hinting at organized party efforts in at least some of these Congresses. Third, majority rolls on suspension votes are rare, though they sometimes occur; but this probably tells us little about majority cooperation, since suspension votes required two-thirds support to pass—and, therefore, to roll the majority.

As noted, a limitation of the party roll measure is that it sometimes identifies votes on which a party is fairly evenly split as a case in which the caucus had a clear preference. We can narrow our look at rolls by focusing on party unity votes, and calculating roll rates only on those votes. Figure 5 presents such roll rates.

Figure 5 here

The data are noticeably choppier in this chart than in prior charts, due largely to the smaller denominator for each vote type (party unity votes on that vote type). The patterns for procedural votes look fairly similar to those in the previous figure; the patterns for substantive

votes also look similar enough that, accounting for extra variance resulting from the smaller denominators, they might be seen as the same. Regardless, the most compelling aspect of the picture is the persistent frequency of majority rolls, even after we have eliminated votes on which the party is more evenly divided. Rolls in the latter category might be explained away as cases in which we are imposing a party preference when one did not meaningfully exist. But rolls on unity votes are instances in which the caucus members express a broadly-shared preference, but they still lose—this seems to be unequivocal evidence that the “unconditional” majority negative agenda control that Cox and McCubbins (2002, 2005) identify in the modern House did not exist in the antebellum period.

Disappointments

Finally, I look at “disappointments,” another indicator of party agenda control used by.¹⁰ Disappointments are the inverse of rolls—they are votes on which a majority of the majority party votes yes, but the outcome of the vote is no. A disappointment indicates a party’s failure to achieve an outcome that it desires. On final passage votes, disappointments indicate a failure of positive agenda control (the ability to push something through to passage). It is likely also true that most disappointments on amendment votes indicate a failure to push forward a substantive proposal, though the potential for strategic behavior on amendment votes is reason for caution in

¹⁰ As far as I am aware, the earliest use of disappointments was in a penultimate draft of Cox and McCubbins’s (2005) *Setting the Agenda*; however, disappointments do not appear in the published version. For a recent and more thorough treatment of disappointments, see Jenkins and Monroe (2013).

drawing such inferences. Procedural votes, however, can be used to block or to push something—for example, someone might propose tabling an amendment because it is inherently objectionable, or because it is unobjectionable and threatens to water down a preferred version of a bill. Thus, a procedural disappointment alone does not tell us much about whether the failure is one of positive or negative agenda power—but does indicate failure in some type of agenda power.

Figure 6 here

Figure 6 shows disappointment rates by vote type. Interestingly, across the entire the time series, the majority party is least likely to be disappointed on final passage votes—meaning that it rarely votes in favor of something on final passage, but loses the vote. By contrast, the majority is frequently disappointed on amendment votes, indicating limits on its ability to amend bills as it wishes. Disappointments on tabling motions fall into a range similar to that of amendments—meaning that the majority often fails to kill proposals that it would like to kill (which perhaps contributes to its inability to pass amendments it wants). Finally, the majority is often disappointed on suspension votes—which is unsurprising given the two-thirds requirement, which means that even a completely unified majority cannot approve the motion without support from members of other parties.

Regional roll rates

Finally, rather than look at the data from an agenda-setting perspective, I examine it from a regional perspective. That is, instead of parties, I use Northern and Southern House contingents as the basis for measurement. This is of obvious and particular interest during the antebellum period, when slavery became an increasingly divisive issue, the Democrats and Whigs both

featured significant Northern and Southern factions, and the anti-slavery, non-Southern Republicans emerged as the new second party.

Figure 7a here

For brevity's sake, I examine only roll rates (across the same four vote types used in earlier sections). Figure 7a, which shows Northern roll rates, paints a fairly clear picture: Northern roll rates were fairly low and constant across vote types and congresses during this period. On final passage votes, the rate is above single-digits in only five of the sixteen congresses,¹¹ with others looking somewhat similar to Reed-era majority party roll rates. In only two instances did Northern roll rates for any vote type exceed 20 percent (see footnote 11). Moreover, there appears to be little systematic cross-vote type variation in the likelihood of rolls, with the exception of suspension votes. On votes on motions to suspend the rules, Northerners were rolled only *once* across this entire period, which is a better success rate than that of the majority party on suspension votes, shown above in Table 4.

Figure 7b here

Southern roll rates, however, follow starkly different patterns. As shown in Figure 7b, the 26th Congress is the only instance in which the Southern roll rate on final passage votes is *below* 20 percent; in fact, it is one of only three congresses in which it is below 30 percent, and in more than half the congresses it is above 40 percent. Southerners were not rolled as often on other types of votes as on final passage, but were generally rolled more often than Northerners on each type of vote, including far more suspension votes.

¹¹ The exceptions are the 20th Congress (25 percent), 22nd (14.2 percent), 31st (10.7 percent), 32nd (12 percent), and 35th (23.7 percent).

These regional patterns are perhaps unsurprising given the North's significant numerical superiority in the House. They do seem to indicate, however, that parties' cross-regional coalitions, much known for efforts to keep slavery off the agenda to avoid splitting the party or the Union, were systematically far less reticent about slitting the party on other issues.

Conclusion

The picture that emerges from the foregoing data is mixed, but helps narrow the range of possible levels of party organization in the antebellum House. On the one hand, it seems clear that, procedurally, parties fell far short of the cartel level of organization—not just in the obvious senses that the organizational cartel and the infrastructure for the procedural cartel were absent, also in the sense that the data give little reason to believe that House majorities maintained high levels of procedural organization through procedural methods other than those used in the modern House. On the other hand, there is circumstantial evidence of limited partisan procedural organization, such as higher rates of party unity on procedural votes that occur on some Congresses, and lower roll rates on tabling motions than on substantive votes.

However, these data are likely to be more useful as bases for future research than as grounds for firm inferences about party organization. In addition to inferential limitations noted above, other caveats apply. First, changes over time in the composition of the roll call record can lead to misleading inferences from roll call data (Crespin, Rohde, and Vander Wielen 2011, Roberts and Smith 2003). Lynch and Madonna (2012) show that changes in the incidence of voice votes can interfere with inferences—and there were far more voice votes in the past than in the present. In addition, the data here take little or no account of how changes in procedures affect the results (Roberts 2007), of changes in the party system, or of the broader political

context. Another huge limitation of the analysis here is that it excludes many important aspects of antebellum procedure, including dilatory motions, previous question motions, motions to postpone or consider, and others.

All of the above issues, as well as others, point to additional research that needs to occur in order to thoroughly understand the relationship between the legislative process and parties in the antebellum House. Thus, this paper by itself essentially a crude first cut at a large topic, and a first step in a much larger project.

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Figure 1. Majority and Minority Rollrates, Congresses 1-105

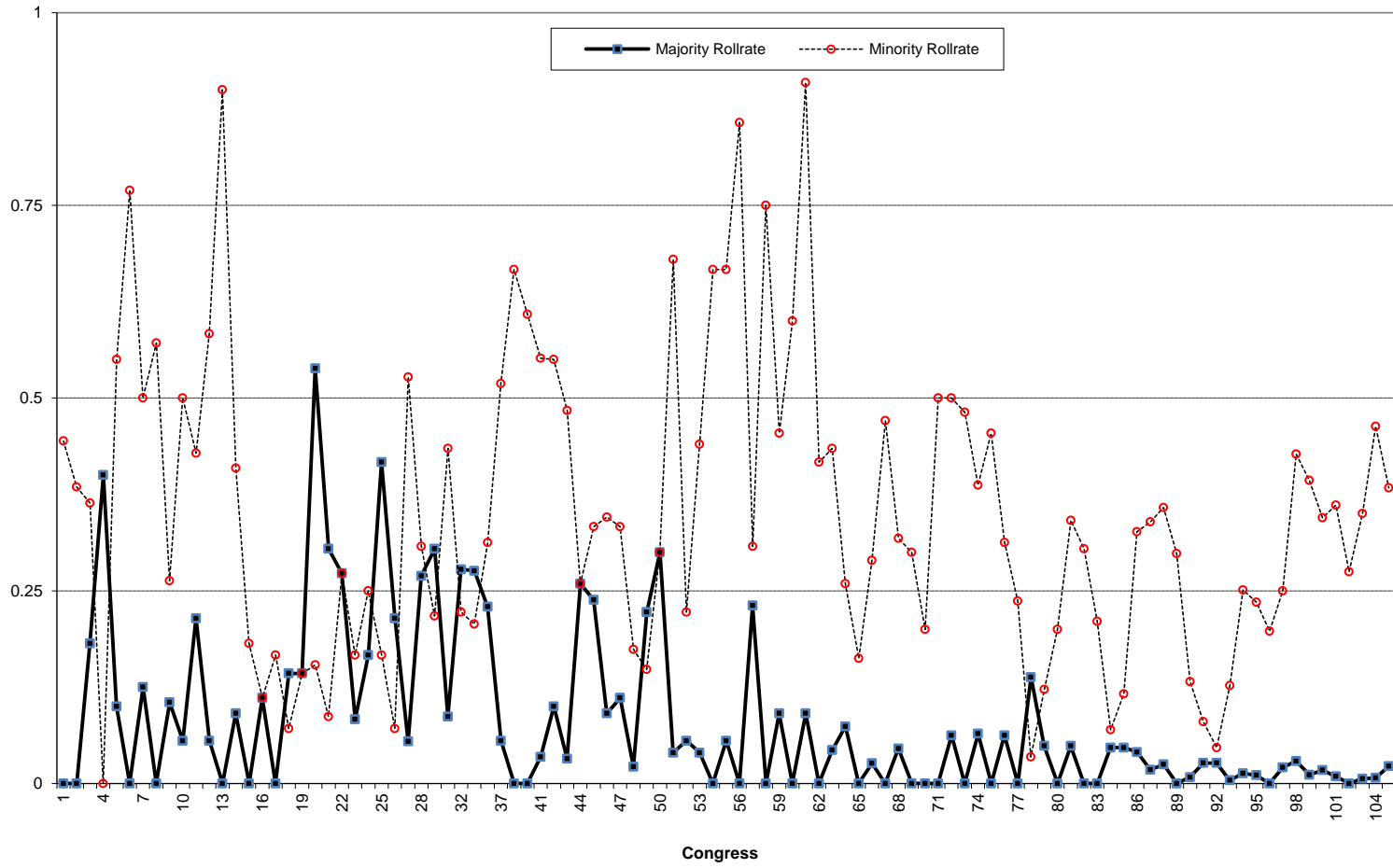


Figure 2a. Number of each type of roll call vote per Congress, 1827-1861

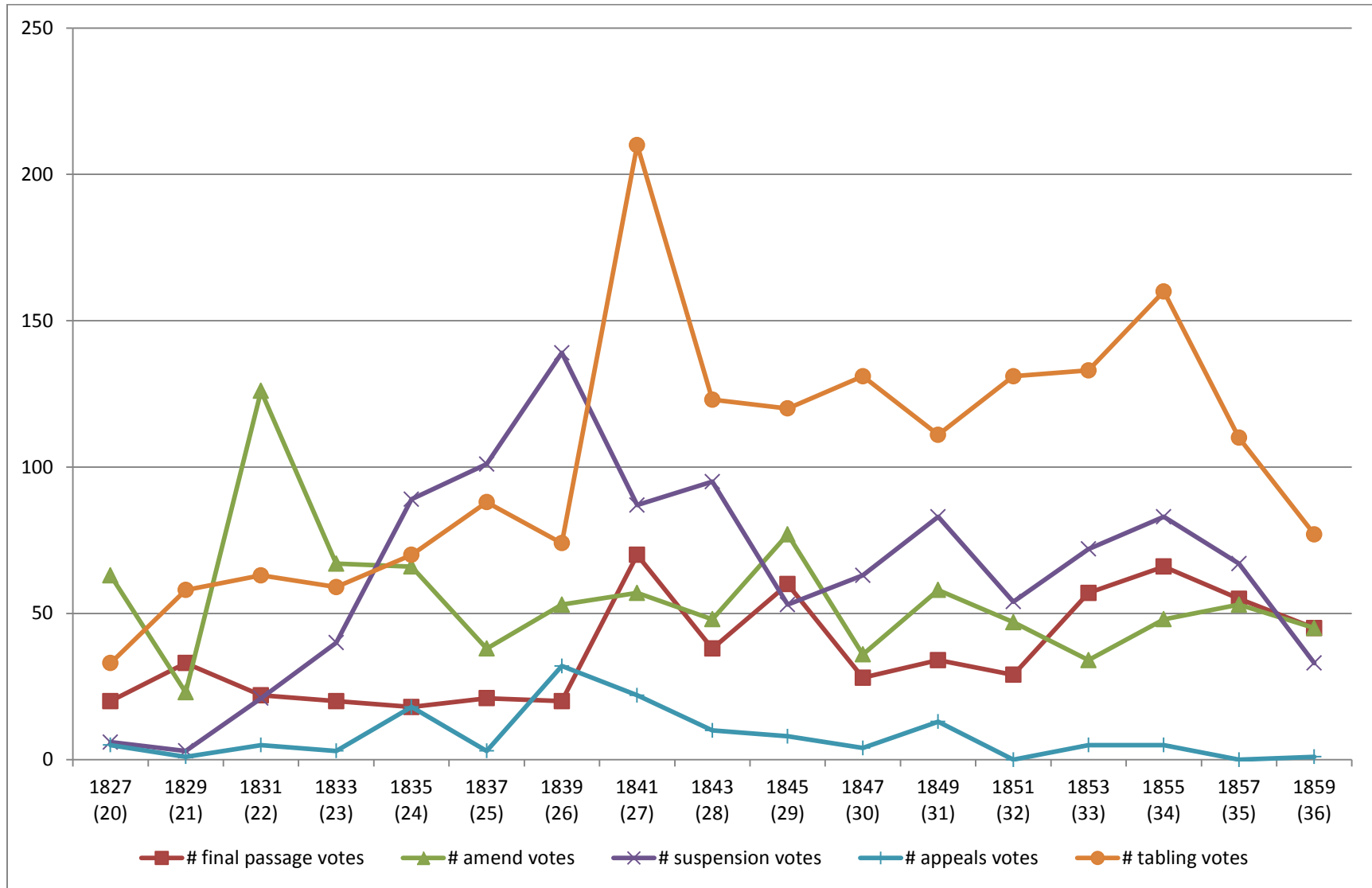


Figure 2b. Proportion of all roll call votes in each Congress falling into each vote type category, 1827-1861

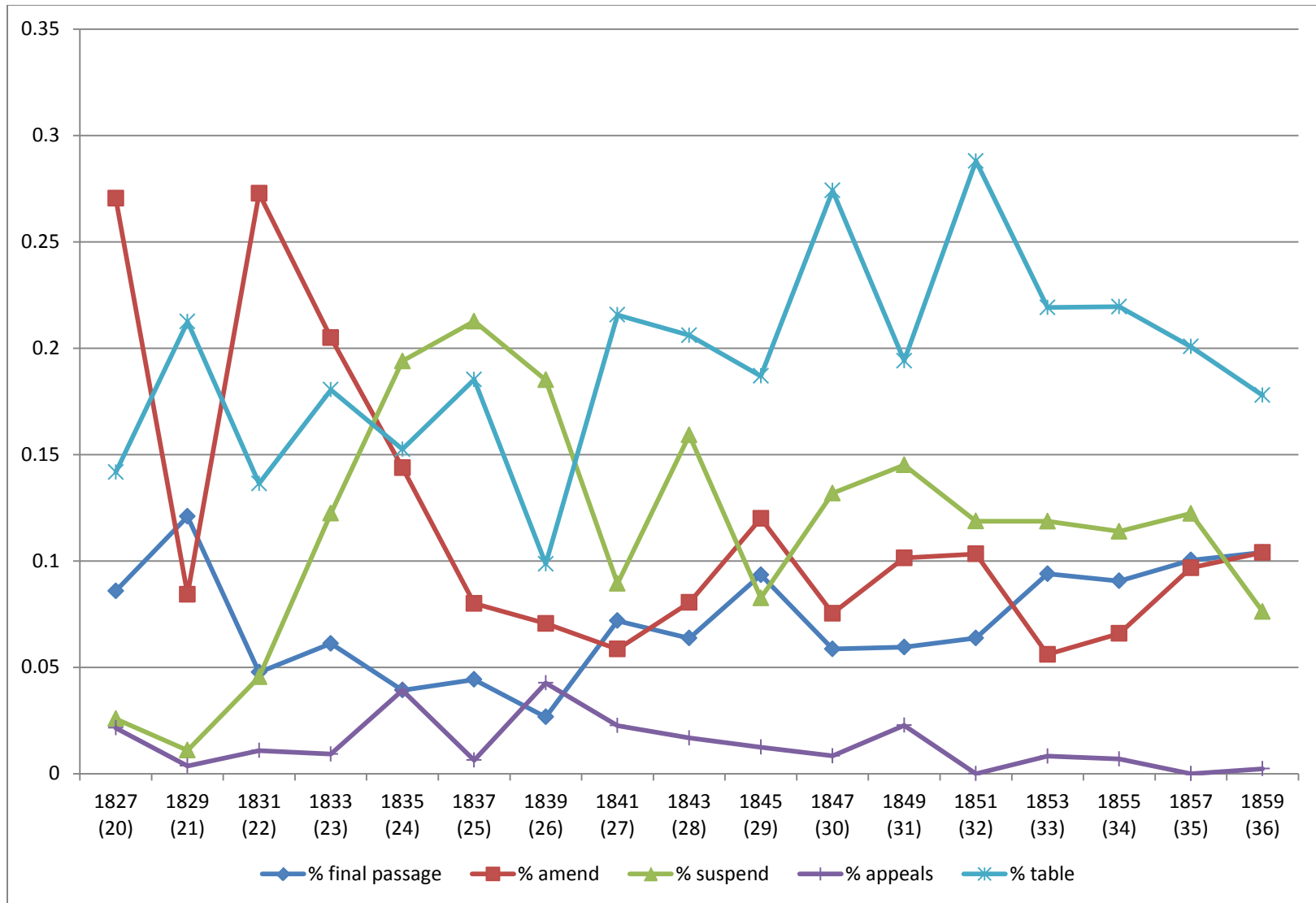


Figure 3. Proportion of votes in a given Congress that are party unity votes, by vote type, 1827-1861

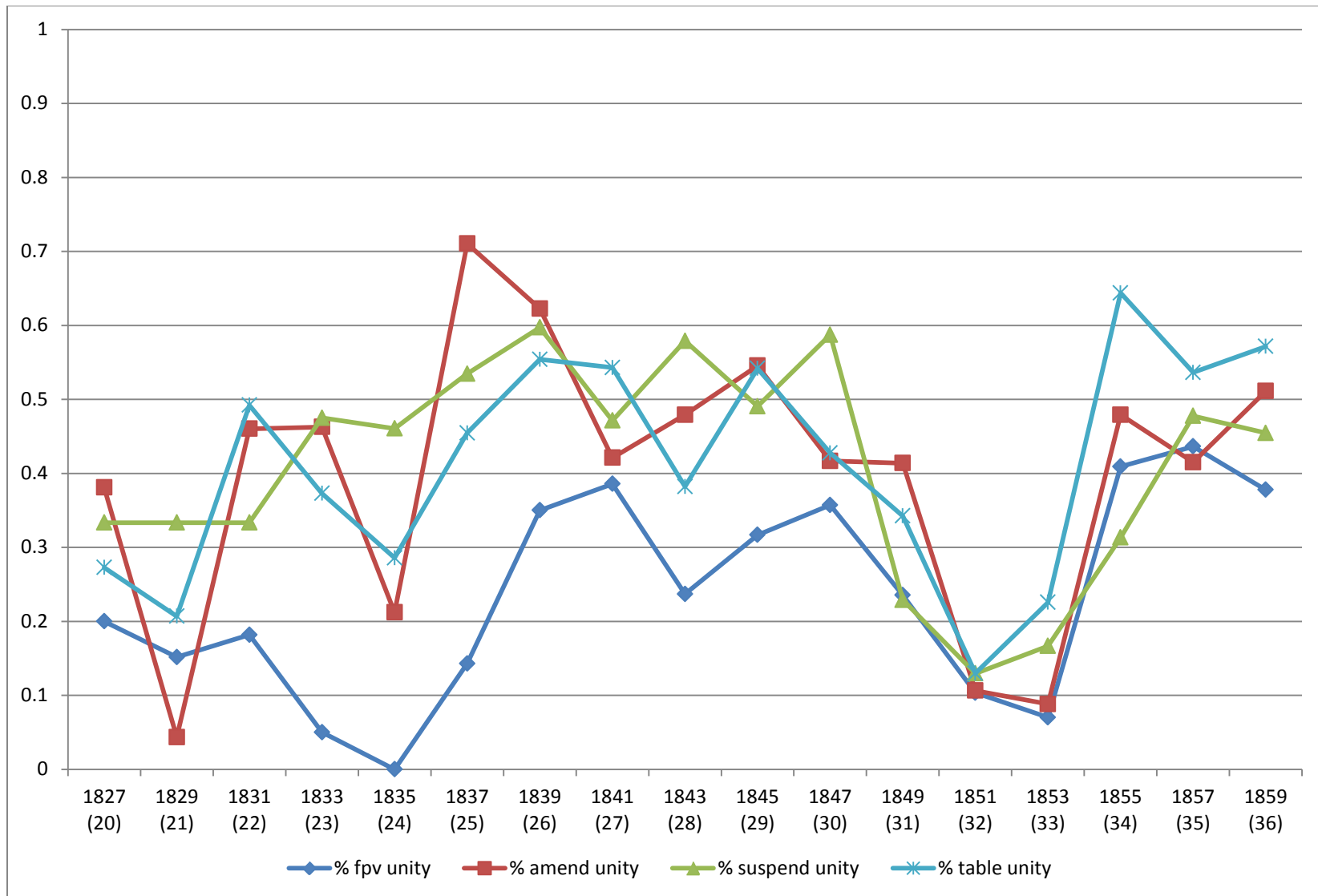


Figure 4. Proportion of votes in a given Congress that are majority rolls, by vote type, 1827-1861

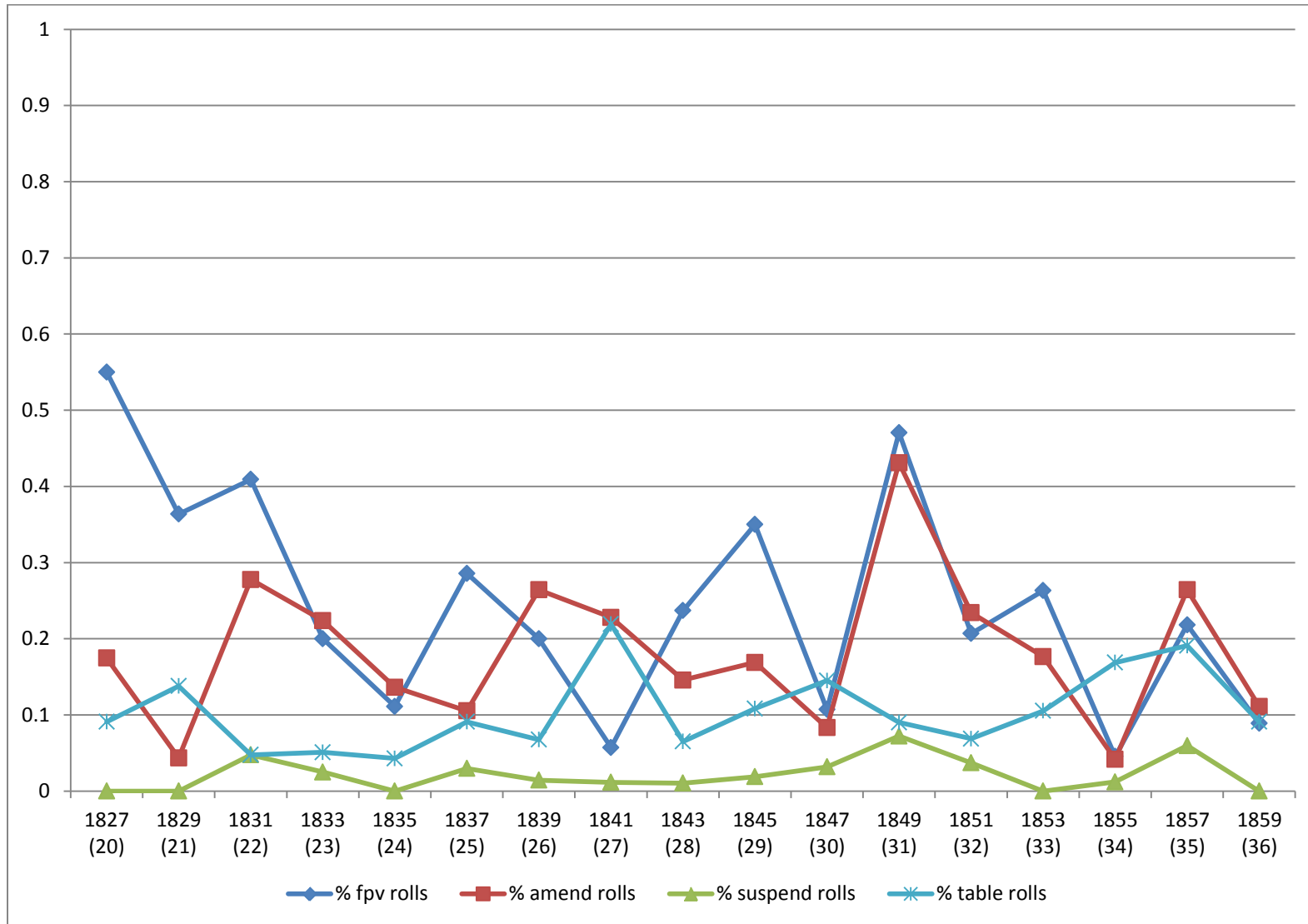


Figure 5. Proportion of party unity votes in a given Congress that are majority rolls, by vote type, 1827-1861

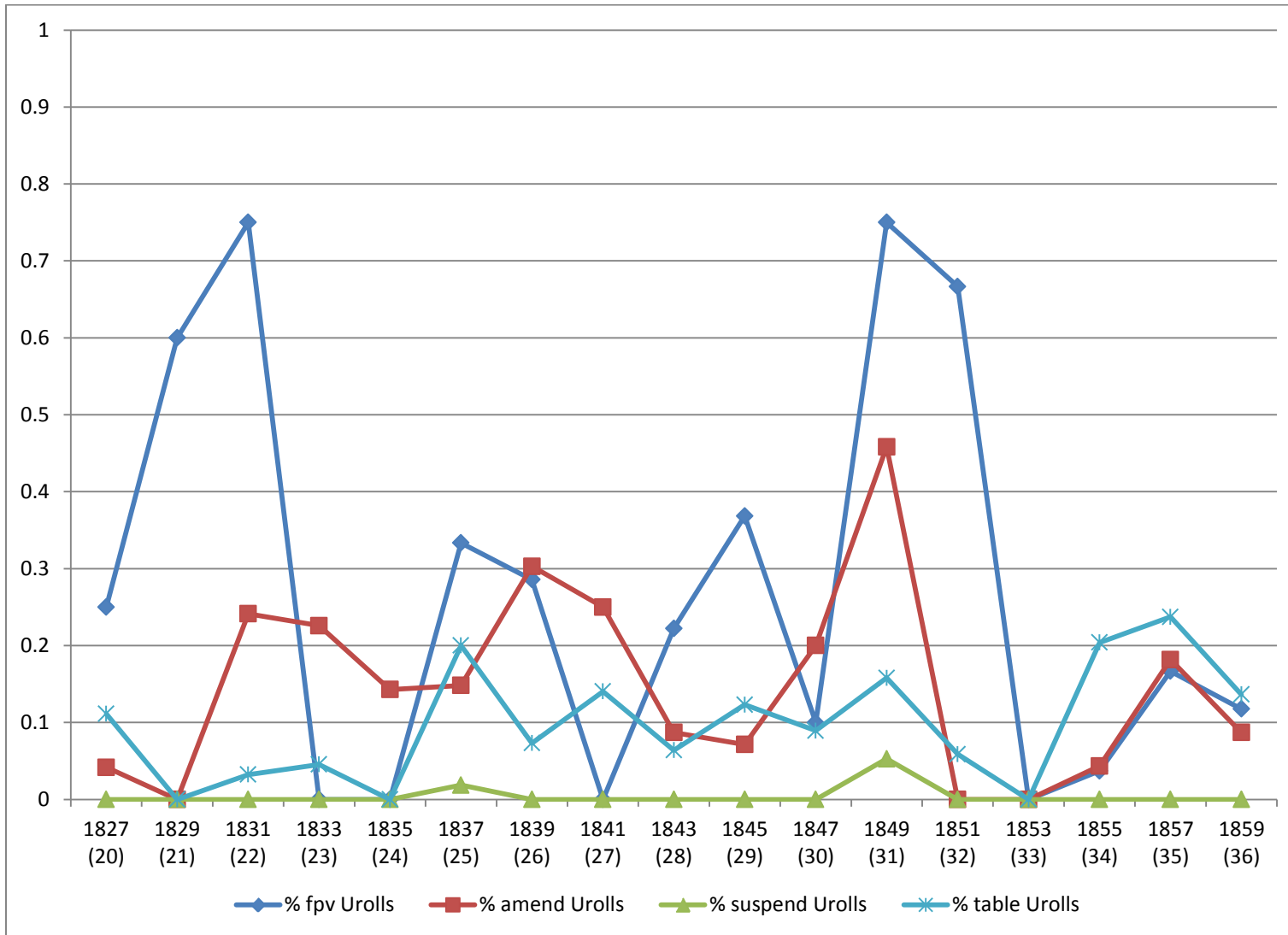


Figure 6. Proportion of votes in a given Congress that are majority disappointments, by vote type, 1827-1861

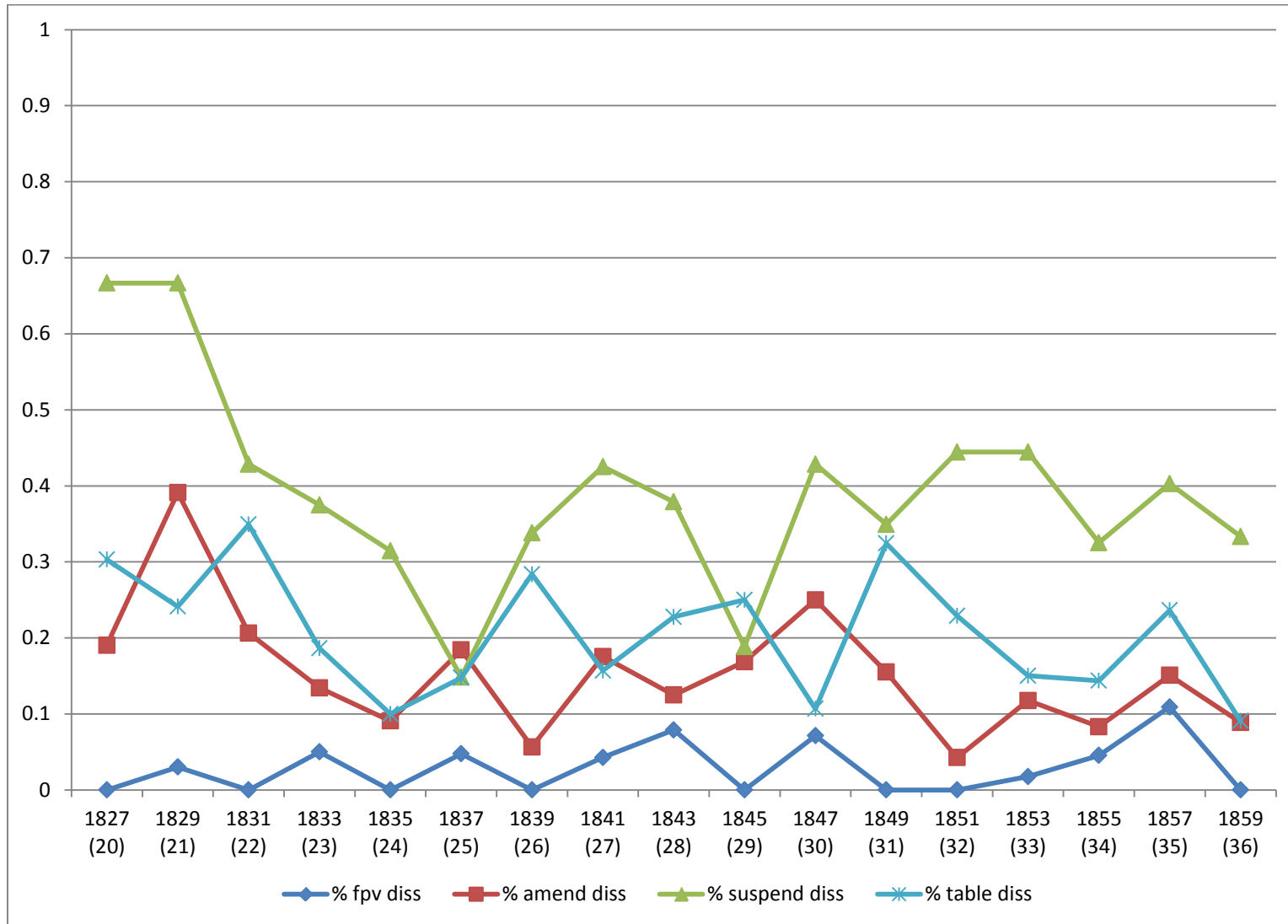


Figure 7a. Proportion of votes in a given Congress that are Northern rolls, by vote type, 1827-1861

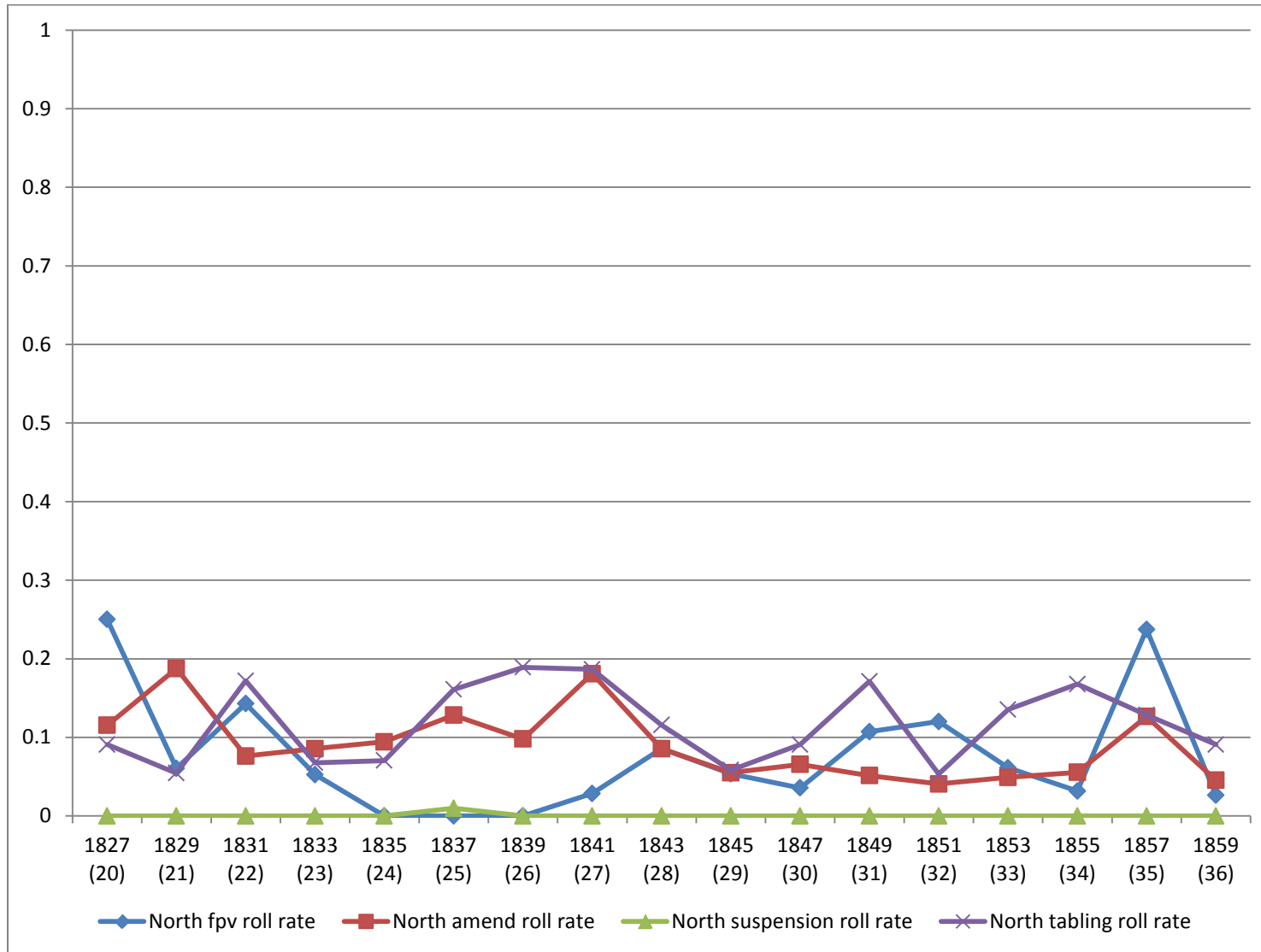


Figure 7b. Proportion of votes in a given Congress that are Southern rolls, by vote type, 1827-1861

