

**Tariff Politics and Congressional Elections:  
Exploring the Cannon Thesis**

Andrew J. Clarke\*  
University of Virginia  
[andrewclarke@virginia.edu](mailto:andrewclarke@virginia.edu)

Jeffery A. Jenkins  
University of Virginia  
[jjenkins@virginia.edu](mailto:jjenkins@virginia.edu)

Kenneth S. Lowande  
University of Virginia  
[lowande@virginia.edu](mailto:lowande@virginia.edu)

While a number of studies have examined the politics of tariff decision making in the United States, little work has examined the subsequent political effects of tariff policy. We help fill this gap in the literature by analyzing—both theoretically and empirically—the electoral implications of tariff revision. Specifically, we investigate the veracity of the Cannon Thesis – the proposition advanced by Speaker Joe Cannon in 1910 that the majority party in the U.S. House was punished when it made major revisions to the tariff. We find that from 1877 to 1934, major tariff revisions were, on average, associated with a significant loss of votes for majority-party members – both regionally and nationally – that translated into a loss of House seats. We find support for the notion that major tariff revisions generated inordinate uncertainty among various business interests, which the opposition party could then use (by leveraging fear and market instability) to mobilize its base and gain ground in the following election. Our results provide a new explanation for the delegation of tariff policymaking to the Executive branch.

\*All authors were equal contributors. Paper presented at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Congress & History Conference, University of Maryland. We thank Richard Bensel and Chuck Finocchiaro for comments.

## Introduction

The tariff – and international trade more generally – has been among the most contentious issues in American politics since the Nation’s inception. This is due, in part, to the scope of international trade policymaking, as tariff schedules and trade restrictions involve – whether directly or indirectly – nearly every economic sector in the United States. As a result, various agricultural, industrial, and manufacturing interests have taken a keen interest in trade politics and the construction (and proposed revision) of the tariff.

The centrality of the tariff as a national political-economic issue was paramount in the pre-World War II era. From the early 19th century (beginning with the Tariff of 1816, the Nation’s first protective tariff) through the beginning of the New Deal era (and the Reciprocal Trade Agreement Act of 1934), tariff politics pitted various sectional interests against one other, divided the parties (Democrats from Whigs/Republicans), and often factored heavily in national election campaigns (especially after Reconstruction).<sup>1</sup> During this time, the locus of tariff policymaking was in Congress, as members spent considerable time debating the tenets of free trade versus protectionism and responding to district/state interests that sought to entrench the status quo or revise the overall tariff schedule (Democrats typically downward, Republicans typically upward). By 1934, the complexity of tariff policymaking, and escalating costs therein, pushed members of Congress to delegate international trade issues to the Executive Branch.<sup>2</sup>

From an academic perspective, the tariff has been the focus of numerous studies across time. Indeed, as Goldstein (1993: 4) notes: “Few political phenomena have been studied as thoroughly as tariff policy.” The range of scholarship has encompassed traditional histories

---

<sup>1</sup> Tariffs were a major issue in presidential elections during the last two decades of the 19th century. Indeed, it was *the* major issue in the 1888 campaign between Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison, and spurred “The Great Debate” between protectionists and free traders over the “proper” size of the tariff (Reitano 1994; Calhoun 2008).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the political origins of the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act of 1934, see Bailey et al (1997).

(Stanwood 1903; Taussig 1931), analytical histories (Lake 1988; Goldstein 1993; Bense 2000, Chapter 7), “public choice” analyses (Pincus 1977; Conybeare 1991), and more “normal science” (formally or non-formally inspired) quantitative approaches (Hansen 1990; Epstein and O’Halloran 1996; Brady et al. 2002; Hiscox 2002; Fordham and McKeown 2003; Weller 2009). And while various studies have examined the politics of tariff decision making – often as they related to the construction or revision of *particular* tariffs<sup>3</sup> – and how (a) sectional interests and congressional parties lined up and (b) individual members voted, little work has examined systematically the subsequent political effects of tariff policy. Stated differently, tariff policymaking – at either the aggregate or individual level – is often considered the phenomenon to be explained rather than a factor explaining some *other* phenomenon.

This study explicitly follows the latter path, by considering the tariff as a potential determinant in national election outcomes. Specifically, we explore whether a major tariff revision during the period spanning 1815-1934 affected the subsequent electoral fortunes of the majority party in the House of Representatives. Our interest in this question is motivated by statements made by House Speaker Joe Cannon (R-IL) in 1910, days before the November midterm elections (which would result in his Republicans being swept from power). Speaking to a group of reporters, Cannon voiced a belief about the causal relationship between major tariff legislation and the electoral performance of the House majority, specifically, that the enactment of a major new tariff prior to the November elections resulted in the majority party “getting licked” (*Dallas Morning News*, 11/8/1910, 1; see also *Washington Post*, 11/7/1910, 3).<sup>4</sup> He then

---

<sup>3</sup> The most famous example is probably Schattschneider (1935), who investigated pressure politics related to the design and passage of the Smoot-Hawley Tariff of 1930.

<sup>4</sup> Note that a single congressional election day (the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November) was first established by the Apportionment Act of 1872, and only went into standard effect in the early 1880s. Prior to the 1872 act, states could (and did) schedule elections at their discretion. In fact, many states held their elections to a given Congress *after* that Congress officially opened on March 4. Since Congress did not typically convene until December, states often scheduled their elections throughout the year, but before December.

provided a series of examples going back nearly thirty years to support his proposition. Thus, in Cannon's view, tariff reform constituted the "third rail" of electoral politics for the majority party in the House to that time.

Cannon's proposition – or "thesis," as we will call it<sup>5</sup> – has never been explored in depth or tested systematically. Some scholars have presented anecdotal accounts to suggest that a particular tariff led to the enacting coalition's (majority party's) defeat in the ensuing elections – the McKinley Tariff of 1890, which resulted in the Republicans suffering significant losses and yielding majority control of the House to the Democrats, is an oft-told story (Stanwood 1903; Taussig 1931). But, by and large, scholars of modern social science have ignored the connection between tariffs and elections almost entirely.<sup>6</sup> We seek to fill this gap in the literature by engaging the Cannon Thesis directly with some straightforward time-series analyses.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, we explore the Cannon Thesis in detail, by outlining Cannon's logic as to why changes in the tariff (regardless of whether it was raised or lowered) should have produced electoral fallout for the majority party. Given this logic, we present a model to identify conditions under which a "rational" majority party might revise the tariff—knowing full-well the electoral consequences. In the third section, we identify major tariff revisions between 1815 and 1934, and specify a series of time-series models by

---

<sup>5</sup> What to call Cannon's claim about the connection between tariffs and elections is, in some ways, a matter of logic or philosophy of science. Reporters of the time called the claim a "theory" (*Dallas Morning News*) or an "axiom" (*Washington Post*). There is no evidence that Cannon ever developed a fully-worked-out theory of tariffs and elections, even though he established an argument to support his claim (see Section Two of this paper). And while Cannon may have presented his claim as if it were an axiom – or "self-evident truth that requires no proof" (per the Random House Dictionary, Unabridged) – it certainly is not universally accepted and it *can* be tested. As such, we prefer to call Cannon's claim a "thesis," which the Random House Dictionary (Unabridged) defines as "a proposition stated or put forward for consideration, especially one to be discussed and proved or to be maintained against objections."

<sup>6</sup> One exception is Conybeare (1991), who examines individual-level vote totals in the election following the adoption of the McKinley Tariff. He finds some evidence that voters in districts that benefitted incrementally from the tariff (i.e., from the rate change) rewarded incumbents – but the effect is small, and the overall tariff level washed out. He acknowledges these mixed/weak results by saying: "In any case, it is not obvious that Republicans were being punished for the McKinley Tariff increments" (80).

electoral cycle (i.e., elections to a given Congress) to examine the impact that they had on majority-party vote totals, controlling for other important factors/covariates; we find that for the 1877-1934 period, major tariff revisions were associated with a significant loss of votes – both regionally and nationally – for the majority party, which translated into a loss of House seats. In the fourth section, we show (a) that these electoral consequences do not merely coincide with the cyclical effects of midterm elections and (b) failed attempts at tariff reform do not generate electoral consequences of equal magnitude. In the fifth section, we explore individual-level electoral consequences in a given case, the Wilson-Gorman Tariff of 1894, and find that a vote for the tariff increased a House member’s probability of defeat. In the final section, we conclude by discussing the implications of our work for further study.

### **The Cannon Thesis in Historical and Theoretical Context**

Joseph Gurney Cannon was a colorful character who epitomized the classic Gilded Age politician.<sup>7</sup> A representative from downstate Illinois, Cannon was a cigar-smoking, hard-drinking “everyman” who eschewed progressive reform and rose to the top of an institution that was built on machine-style politics and partisan patronage. First elected in 1872, “Uncle Joe” became Speaker of the House in 1903, harnessing and enhancing the strong majority-party institutions and leadership techniques first established by William Brackett Reed more than a decade earlier. Cannon is often referred to as a “czar” in the way that he managed the chamber – pugnacious, iron fisted, and uncompromising in pursuit of policies supported by conservative (or “Old Guard”) Republicans. In March 1910, Cannon’s reign effectively ended, when progressive Republicans joined with Democrats to strip him of an assortment of important powers; he remained in the Speaker’s chair, but was effectively neutered as a strong leader. Later that year,

---

<sup>7</sup> For background on Cannon and his political life, see Bolles (1951), Gwinn (1957), and Rager (1998).

he advanced his tariffs/elections thesis, just prior to the congressional midterm elections in which the Democrats would wrest majority control of the House from the Republicans.<sup>8</sup>

### The Cannon Thesis Articulated

The Cannon Thesis, captured in news reports from the *Washington Post* and *Dallas Morning News*, linked congressional action on the tariff to a subsequent popular response by the public. Per the *Post*: “One of his political axioms, [Cannon] said, was that a political party that revises the tariff is always defeated at the ensuing election.”<sup>9</sup> To support this thesis, Cannon cited a series of major tariff revisions that occurred during his time in Congress: the Mongrel Tariff of 1883 (47th Congress), the McKinley Tariff of 1890 (51st Congress), and the Wilson-Gorman Tariff of 1894 (53rd Congress). In each case, the majority party that passed the tariff was replaced in the next Congress. (In offering this evidence, Cannon seemed to forget that the Mongrel Tariff was actually passed in the lame-duck session of the 47th Congress, *after* the elections to the next Congress.) Cannon conceded that the Dingley Tariff of 1897 (55th Congress) was an exception to the rule – as the Republican majority retained control of the House in the next Congress – and thus his claim of “always” was in fact conditional.<sup>10</sup> He also predicted that the Payne-Aldrich Tariff of 1909 (61st Congress) would fit the typical pattern, and he was correct – as the Republicans were routed in the 1910 midterms.

---

<sup>8</sup> Cannon served in the House from the 42nd (1873-75) through the 67th (1921-23) Congress, with the exception of the 52nd (1891-93). He lost his reelection bid in 1890, as did many of his co-partisans, in the Democratic landslide; many believe that the GOP’s defeat generally, and Cannon’s specifically, was the result of a public rebuke of the McKinley Tariff and those who supported it. Two decades later, Cannon would survive the 1910 midterms, even as many of his Republican colleagues would be sorted out of office in another Democratic landslide.

<sup>9</sup> Cannon was fond of “holding court” in the company of reporters and other politicians; in so doing, he sometimes divulged one of his political “axioms.” One example, often attributed to Cannon, was the following: “You can’t beat somebody with nobody” (Safire 2008: 824).

<sup>10</sup> Cannon would in fact adopt the conditional in discussing tariffs and elections in his autobiography, published over a decade and a half later (1927: 211): “We know from long experience that no matter how great an improvement the new tariff may be, it almost always results in the party in power losing the following election.”

What was Cannon's reasoning? Why did tariff revision lead to electoral fallout for the majority party? He did not discuss the matter in November 1910, but revealed his logic prior to taking over the speakership in 1902 and again in his autobiography in 1927. The argument remained the same over that quarter century: tariff revision involved uncertainty, which made conducting business – and planning for the future – in every economic sector extremely difficult. He discussed this in detail in 1902, in articulating his opposition to tariff reform:

... it is always demoralizing to business to have Congress being at work on revising the tariff. The manufacturer waits to see what will be the result, working only on orders; the merchant buys only what he feels certain he can sell; and the ordinary consumer buys only what he needs. Everybody waits to see what will be the result, for nobody knows in advance just what schedules will be changed or what the changes will be. *It always means at least a year of uncertainty, and I don't believe the people of this country want a year of uncertainty ... to check the prosperity we have* (*Washington Post*, 8/21/1902, 3; emphasis added).

His view in 1927 – looking back to conditions in 1902 – was similar, and his argument was more succinct: “The country at that time was prosperous, manufacturers were satisfied with their profits and workingmen with their wages, and it did not seem to me either good business or sound politics to dislocate business and bring about hesitation and uncertainty by a tariff revision” (Cannon 1927: 211).

Cannon actively worked against tariff reform while in the Speaker's chair, and his anti-reform views were shared by most other Republicans of the era. For example, Senator Francis Warren (R-WY), in 1903, stated: “Revision of the tariff would bring with it uncertainty, which would result in untold loss from stoppage of business” (*Los Angeles Times*, 6/30/1903, 1). Rep. James Hemenway (R-IN) concurred, stating:

... the people, in my opinion, are not willing to take any chances of destroying the magnificent result we have accomplished. They have evidently come to the logical conclusion that to touch one item in the tariff bill means that others, and perhaps the whole fabric, is to be disturbed and distorted. Nothing could be more serious to business interests. The whole industrial system of the country would,

in that event, be turned topsy-turvy. Chaos, instead of the wonderful calm and equilibrium now existing, would reign, and the result would be disastrous (*Los Angeles Times*, 6/30/1903, 1).

Rep. John Dalzell (R-PA) echoed these concerns in 1906, even as support for tariff revision in the Nation grew. Dalzell stated: “When the manufacturers of this country are convinced that Congress is about to revise the tariff, they immediately begin to prepare for a radical change in business conditions. Imports and exports immediately slump and business almost comes to a standstill. Large concerns cease to place future orders, and all careful business men conduct their enterprises on a hand-to-mouth policy” (*Washington Post*, 4/8/1906, 6).

Note that while Cannon clearly opposed tariff reform, the Cannon Thesis was predicated on “revision” of any kind increasing uncertainty – and thus harming economic planning and conditions throughout the country. In the postbellum era,<sup>11</sup> Republicans were supporters of protectionism and high tariffs (and tied these conditions to a strong domestic marketplace and high wages for the middle class), while Democrats favored lower tariffs and free-trade initiatives to open up international markets (and thus rejected the GOP’s claims, especially those that tied high tariffs to high wages for middle-class workers, and instead argued that protectionism transferred wealth from South to North and hurt domestic consumers across the board).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Cannon argued that American economic interests of all kinds benefited from stability in the “rules of the game”; that is, in the increasingly complex economic world, major tariff revisions – with their hundreds of pages of stipulations and intricate tariff schedules –

---

<sup>11</sup> Partisan differences were less apparent in the antebellum era, as sectional interests were more predominant (Stanwood 1903; Taussig 1931; Pincus 1977; Goldstein 1993). The emergence of the Republican Party, and a coherent ideological strategy revolving around “free soil, free labor, free men” (Foner 1970), consolidated intra-party interests and established clear positions for – and divisions between – the parties on tariff policy (protectionism for the Republicans, free trade – or “freer” trade – for the Democrats).

<sup>12</sup> By the late-19th century, both parties favored opening up foreign markets for trade. Republican interests feared that the domestic marketplace was reaching a saturation point, and that new markets would need to be found or product prices in the U.S. would inevitably drop (due to oversupply). As a result, the first reciprocity initiatives were pushed by Republicans – in the McKinley Tariff of 1890 – and resulted in the first efforts to delegate trade agreement power to the president. On the Republican move to reciprocity, see Wolman (1992).

raised uncertainty for everyone, even if specific changes might seem to benefit certain economic interests. Stated differently, from Cannon's perspective, downward revision (on average) or upward revision (on average) produced the same result – *both* increased uncertainty for interests of all types, because the tariff was so deeply embedded in the American national economy.

### The Cannon Thesis and Modern Institutional Theory

In articulating his thesis, Cannon's reliance on uncertainty and the potential costs that business interests might face under a new tariff regime place him squarely in a theoretical literature at the heart of economics and political science. First appearing in the economics field, and perhaps best articulated by North (1990a, 1990b), transaction cost theory holds that institutions are often impervious to change, even if they are inefficient or suboptimal. This is because a potential new set of institutions brings with it a myriad of political and economic uncertainties, which requires actors to invest heavily in order to learn and master the new institutional arrangements. Stated differently, actors would need to pay large start-up costs, which they (for a variety of reasons) may not be willing to do. In the political world, for example, members of Congress – with very short time horizons – would risk being voted out of office, because they would not be able to learn the new system quickly enough to provide for their constituents before the next election. In the economic world, business owners would face the possibility of not being able to pay their bills (cover their various costs) and/or maintain a sufficient revenue stream, and thus run the risk of bankruptcy. Summarizing this line of thinking, Adler (2002: 24) notes succinctly: “The enemy we know is ... less intimidating than the enemy we do not know.”

In the political science literature, the North's notions of uncertainty and transaction costs have found a home in both Historical and Rational Choice Theories. This is somewhat unique,

in that the two theories often approach questions from very different vantage points – Historical Institutionalists (HIs) usually adopt a macro-level (or sociological) perspective, whereas Rational Choice Institutionalists (RCIs) typically maintain a micro-level (or economic) perspective. Statements by two leading institutionalists – Paul Pierson (HI) and Kenneth Shepsle (RCI) – reveal the similarity of views. Pierson (2000: 491-92) states: “When actors adapt to the ... rules of the game by making extensive commitments based on the expectation that these rules will continue, previous actions may ‘lock in’ options that actors would not now choose to initiate. Put another way, social adaptation to institutions drastically increase the cost of exit from existing arrangements.” Shepsle (1989: 144) makes an analogous point in somewhat more depth:

... even when institutional arrangements are not optimally suited to a given environment, they may nevertheless endure because prospective gains from change are more than outweighed by the costs of effecting them. In a world full of uncertainty about future states, imperfect information and a modicum of risk aversion of participants may make that cushion substantial. As a consequence, institutions may be robust, not because they are optimally suited to the tastes of participants and the present environment, but rather because transactions costs price alternative arrangements too high.

Thus, the Cannon Thesis, from a theoretical view, is based on tenets that are widely accepted across different intellectual traditions in the modern study of institutions.

### The Cannon Thesis and Equilibrium Behavior

Cannon’s Thesis provides a testable empirical proposition about the electoral consequences of tariff reform, but it also presents a theoretical puzzle. If tariff revision results in electoral loss for the majority party, why (in equilibrium) would the majority party ever revise the tariff? One explanation might be that the party was simply shortsighted, or that party leaders routinely miscalculated the electoral effects of major tariff revision. We find this explanation unsatisfying, given that party leaders operate in a

high information environment designed to serve members' electoral goals. To move beyond such an explanation, we present a simple model of tariff revision. The model allows us to explore the circumstances for which, Cannon's proposition might hold. That is, we identify conditions necessary for a "rational" majority party to revise the tariff—knowing full well it might cost them the election.

First, assume that there are two periods, denoted  $p \in \{1,2\}$ . In each period, the majority party ( $M$ ) chooses whether or not to revise the tariff,  $x \in \{0,1\}$ . The party and voter ( $V$ ) payoff for this revision depends on the state of the world,  $\omega \in \Omega = \{0,1\}$  where  $\omega=1$  with probability  $q$ . Here,  $\omega$  is a theoretical stand-in for the economic uncertainty Cannon highlights. Since the voter does not observe this parameter, it does not know the "correct" action that ought to be taken by the majority, or how the majority's observed actions will impact their bottom line. The majority party also receives a side payment, or "industry rent" for making a revision,  $r \in [0,1]$ .<sup>13</sup> Majority parties come in two types,  $t \in T = \{0,1\}$ , congruent and dissonant, where the probability of congruence is  $p$ .<sup>14</sup> At the end of the first period, an election is held and the voter chooses either to keep the incumbent party ( $e = 1$ ) or draw a new majority party from  $T$  ( $e = 0$ ). The utility of the majority party in period 1 is

$$U_M = -|\omega_1 - x_1|t + rx_1$$

The utility for the majority party in period 2 is

$$U_M = -|\omega_2 - x_2|t + \beta rx_2 + e\tau$$

---

<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, we assume that the industry rent does not outweigh the payoff of "correct" policy selection. When  $r > 1$ , all parties revise the tariff and the voter is indifferent at election time.

<sup>14</sup> Note, strictly speaking, the Harsanyi transformation is not necessary to achieve the main result. Alternatively, Nature could determine the endowment of private industry, who would then secretly buy-off the majority party. Thus, uncertainty over the amount of the bribe and the state of the world would condition the voters' choice—resulting in the same equilibrium outcome under similar conditions.

where  $\beta \in (0,1]$  is a discount rate applied to future rents, and  $\tau$  is the value of holding office for the majority party. The payoff for the voter in either period is

$$U_V = -|\omega_p - x_p|$$

The sequence of play is as follows:

1. Period 1
  - a. Nature selects the state of the world ( $\omega$ ) and the majority party's type ( $t$ ).
  - b. The majority party observes both and selects a policy ( $x$ ).
  - c. The voter observes  $x$  and chooses whether to re-elect the party ( $e$ ).
2. Period 2
  - a. If re-elected, Nature selects another  $\omega$ .
    - i. Majority party again selects a policy,  $x$ .
    - ii. Play ends and payoffs are distributed.
  - b. If thrown out, Nature selects another  $\omega$  and  $t$ .
    - i. New majority party selects  $x$ .
    - ii. Play ends and payoffs are distributed.

Given this framework, we can specify the conditions under which Cannon's Thesis holds. First, it is immediately apparent that if  $r > \beta r + \tau$ , then all dissonant parties revise the tariff. In other words, when the value of holding office is sufficiently low, and the discount rate for period two rents is sufficiently high, dissonant parties revise the tariff in period one—regardless of the state of the world. This provides a first condition:  $r > \frac{\tau}{1-\beta}$ .

Second, it is also apparent that there is separation between “good” and “bad” parties in period two when  $\omega = 0$ . That is, congruent parties choose the policy that is good for the voter;

dissonant parties revise the tariff to acquire the industry rent.<sup>15</sup> Thus, as in standard models of political agency, it is in the voter's interest to correctly identify the majority party's type at the end of the first period (Barganza 2000; Besley 2006). Given that dissonant parties revise the tariff, the critical question is whether a congruent majority party would fail to revise the tariff when  $\omega = 1$ , in order to credibly signal its type in pursuit of re-election. Accordingly, if the following condition holds, congruent majority parties select the appropriate policy in period one:

$$\tau < r + p + q - pq - \beta r q.^{16}$$

If both conditions are satisfied, the voter's optimal decision is straightforward. Since  $\omega = 1$  results in a pooling equilibrium on  $x = 1$ , tariff revision provides no additional information to the voter. Thus, upon observing a revision, the voter is forced to rely on its prior belief about the distribution of majority parties,  $p$ . Thus, in any perfect Bayesian equilibrium in which the previous two conditions are satisfied, the voter re-elects ( $e^* = 1$ ) after observing no revision, and re-elects after observing a revision with probability  $p$ .

Thus, the model highlights the underlying mechanisms behind both tariff revision and the electoral losses presupposed by the Cannon Thesis. Unfortunately for congruent majority parties, tariff revision is directly tied to industry rents. That is, any revision implies the majority party receives some side payment from private interests. Occasionally, this side payment directly contradicts public preferences. While inaction identifies congruent parties, a tariff revision sends an unequivocally negative signal to the voter. More specifically, the increase in the probability of dissonance results in a corresponding reduction in electoral support. As in Cannon's elaboration, this result is driven by the fact that there is uncertainty about the

---

<sup>15</sup> By definition,  $1 > \beta r > 0$ , so  $x_2^*(t = 1|\omega_2 = 0) = 0$  and  $x_2^*(t = 0|\omega_2 = 0) = 1$ .

<sup>16</sup> For a congruent majority, the total utility of re-election is  $\tau + r q$ , whereas being unseated results in an expected payoff of  $(p - 1)(1 - q)$ . Thus, if  $\omega_1 = 1$ , then  $r + p + q - pq - 1 > \tau + \beta r q - 1$  must hold for congruent majorities to choose to revise—which reduces to the stated condition.

appropriate policy and the congruence of the majority party. In addition, there is the common knowledge about the particularistic benefit of revising the tariff.

This brings us to the puzzle of why majority parties would revise the tariff at all. The model provides one of two explanations. First, the majority party could simply be dissonant and “rent-seeking”—that is, it does not care about appropriateness of the policy, and revises only to receive the industry bribe. Second, and more interestingly, the majority party could be congruent, and choose to revise because it is the preferred policy of voters. In both cases, parties are willing to revise and suffer the consequences because the value of holding office is sufficiently low. Stated differently, the majority party is willing to incur the risk associated with a replacement party. This condition does not require dubious assumptions about what majority parties value. After all,  $\tau$  represents the benefit of serving in office, over and above both tariff policy- and rent-related utility. As we highlighted previously, tariff schedules were perhaps the most salient political issue during the period in question. Thus, we think it is possible that  $\tau$  satisfies the conditions specified. For non-rent-seeking parties, these conditions are more restrictive, but necessary for the outcome predicted by Cannon.

Given this theoretical extension of Cannon’s argument, we now consider whether his basic proposition finds any *empirical* purchase.

### **Empirical Strategy**

Is the Cannon Thesis correct? A first cut at answering this question would be to generate a list of major (or landmark) tariff reforms from the 14th (1815-17) through 73rd (1933-34) Congresses – since the years spanning 1815-1934 were when Congress determined, and sectional and partisan interests battled over, protective tariff levels – and assess whether majority party control in the House flipped after successful enactments. Such a list is presented in *Table 1*,

which comes from Stathis (2014), who assembles all landmark laws from the First Federal Congress (1789-91) through the 112th Congress (2011-12).<sup>17</sup> Other lists of landmark laws exist for shorter periods of time (Mayhew 2005), and specific lists of major tariff reforms have also been constructed for longer periods of time (Epstein and O’Halloran 1996; Hiscox 2002). The Stathis list encompasses our full time horizon, and overlaps nicely with the other tariff-specific lists; for example, only one major tariff appears in the Epstein/O’Halloran and Hiscox lists that is absent from the Stathis list.<sup>18</sup> And, overall, the Stathis list is slightly more inclusive than the other two lists – but not such that any of the tariffs in *Table 1* were obscure enough to lack contemporary coverage or significant mentions in the secondary literature.

[Table 1 about here]

In looking at the landmark tariffs in *Table 1*, we see that the cases cited in the news articles (and mentioned by Cannon to support his thesis) appear cherry-picked. Of the 24 major tariff revisions in the Stathis list, only 8 immediately preceded a change in majority control – and 3 of these were enacted in lame-duck sessions (one of which was the Mongrel Tariff, which was mistakenly noted by Cannon to support his argument). Cannon’s Thesis is only validated if one “squints” at the data between 1890 and 1907, wherein three of the four major tariffs resulted in the majority losing control of the House in the ensuing elections.

A slightly broader interpretation of Cannon’s argument, however, might find some empirical support. That is, we might take Cannon to mean that, following the enactment of a major new tariff, the majority party is punished at the polls for injecting uncertainty into the American economy. In other words, viewed in the way more in-keeping with our theoretical

---

<sup>17</sup> The Stathis data has been used by Harvey and Friedman (2009) and Madonna (2011), among others, and is the only list of landmark legislation that extends back to the First Federal Congress.

<sup>18</sup> Epstein and O’Halloran (1996) include the Emergency Tariff in the 67th Congress – but since our dataset (based on Stathis) includes the Fordney-McCumber Tariff (also in the 67th, and also an increase), the analyses we present later remain unchanged if the Emergency Tariff is incorporated.

model, a broader Cannon Thesis might yet yield some empirical leverage. We explore this possibility through a variety of multivariate analyses.

To test the “broader” Cannon Thesis, we must specify a measure of the dependent variable capable of picking up the key phenomenon according to Cannon: getting “licked.” While the news articles describing the “narrow” thesis suggest that this means a loss of majority status in the House, we adopt measures that are less deterministic to assess the broader interpretation.

In the aggregate Congress-level analysis that follows, we operationalize the dependent variable in two ways: [1] the change in the seat share of the House majority party between Congress  $t$  and  $t+1$  and [2] the change in the national vote share of the House majority party between Congress  $t$  and  $t+1$  (both of which are labeled *Majority Change* in the following equations).<sup>19</sup> We include both variables to unpack the effect on votes and ultimate outcomes. It may be the case, for instance, that tariff revisions result in a net loss of votes, without a loss of seats. This logic extends to the sectional analyses we present later, where the dependent variable is the change in the majority party’s vote share, by region (*Region Change*). Since sectional politics figure prominently in accounts of tariff revisions, especially in the antebellum era (Pincus 1977; Goldstein 1993), these more fine-grained election returns are essential.<sup>20</sup>

Our key independent variable will be the major non-lame-duck-session tariff revisions (*Tariff*) culled from Stathis’ (2014) list of landmark legislation, which are presented in *Table 1*. Stated simply, given our explanation of why Cannon’s proposition may plausibly operate, only revisions (a) enacted prior to the congressional elections and (b) that are salient enough to serve

---

<sup>19</sup> This does not assume, of course, that the House majority party in Congress  $t$  was *still* the House majority party in Congress  $t+1$ . We simply want to track the performance of the party that *was* in the majority in Congress  $t$  in the subsequent elections (to Congress  $t+1$ ).

<sup>20</sup> We acquired vote share by region from Rusk (2001).

as a tool for mobilizing the opposition should be included.<sup>21</sup> We do not (and should not) expect, for example, that every one of the thousands of tariff amendments enacted between 1815 and 1934 would equally affect the majority party's electoral returns. In terms of coding, *Tariff* takes on a value of 1 for Congresses in which a major non-lame-duck-session tariff was enacted (per Stathis), and zero otherwise. It is possible that actions short of tariff enactment (such as serious debate and votes) also produced uncertainty that cost the majority party votes. However, since these activities are collapsed into the 0 of our treatment variable, they make the null harder to reject. Later in the paper, we explore – and unpack – this other potential source of uncertainty.

Finally, since our dependent variable measures the electoral fortunes of the majority party, we must establish a set of controls. Ideally, we would include the standard vector of covariates that forecasters use to predict contemporary elections: voter registration, “feeling” thermometers, unemployment, etc. However, some of these data do not exist for the period in question, and we expect that the predictive power of others is temporally dependent. For example, we should not expect the unemployment rate to have the same effect when ritual month-to-month job reports by the Bureau of Labor Statistics did not yet exist. Given these limitations, we rely on economic variables that plausibly affect the fortunes of the majority party.

First, we include the average rate of inflation (*Inflation*) and sovereign debt as a percentage of GDP (*Debt*).<sup>22</sup> Here, inflation is the average change in the U.S. Consumer Price Index. Changes in inflation often benefited distinct constituencies, like farmers and debtors. We believe it is reasonable to expect the majority party to be rewarded or punished by key constituents whose economic livelihood depended upon the price of goods (or who benefited

---

<sup>21</sup> Our model of tariff revision does not explicitly account for mobilization of the opposition, but implicitly, we might expect that minority parties do the work of revealing  $x$  to voters at the end of Period 1.

<sup>22</sup> Flores-Macias & Kreps (2013) collected these variables for their study of war taxation and are available at: <http://skgovernment.wordpress.com/research-and-data/>. We averaged the *Inflation* and *Debt* variables by Congress.

from a decrease in the overall value of personal debt). Sovereign debt is critical as well, since surpluses were considered an “embarrassment” for the majority party and suggested that the tariff level was too high and should be reduced (Goldstein 1993; Bense 2000). Second, we also control for the possibility that economic panics lead to unfavorable outcomes for the party that happens to be in the majority at the time.<sup>23</sup> The Panic of 1893, for instance, seemed to rebound to the benefit of William McKinley and the Republicans in the 1896 election (Brady 1988).

We thus model the national electoral fortunes of the majority party from the 14th (1815-17) through 73rd (1933-34) Congresses as a linear function of major tariff revisions and economic circumstances:

$$Majority\ Change_{t+1} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Tariff_t + \beta_2 Inflation_t + \beta_3 Debt_t + \beta_4 Panics_t + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

We also expect regional changes in the strength of the majority party to be a function of the same covariates. While the aggregate analysis gives us a broader sense of whether Cannon’s thesis holds nationally, a sectional analysis will allow us to “look under the hood” to determine what regions seem to drive the national treatment effect. Thus, we replace the *Majority Change* dependent variable with a *Region Change* dependent variable:

$$Region\ Change_{t+1} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Tariff_t + \beta_2 Inflation_t + \beta_3 Debt_t + \beta_4 Panics_t + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

Finally, since the tariff has been portrayed as a zero-sum institution, it is necessary to investigate whether the direction of the change – raise (1), lower (-1), or no change (0) – had any discernable regional effect. If the substantive content of the revision mattered, then we would expect to

---

<sup>23</sup> Here, we restrict our data to a list of major economic panics about which secondary literature is available: 1819-1821, 1837-1843, 1857-1858, 1893-1896, 1907, and 1929. These were taken from Kindleberger (1996). A Congress is coded 1 if any of these years falls within session. For years falling within each panic, we consulted the secondary literature to determine when the panic could be considered “over” (Rothbeard 1962; Roberts 2012; Aldrich 2013; Rodgers and Payne 2013).

observe patterns that coalesce well with historical accounts of the tariff. In the heavily agricultural South, for instance, raising the tariff should cost the majority party votes. Thus, we replace the *Tariff* variable with a *Direction* variable:

$$Region\ Change_{t+1} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Direction_t + \beta_2 Inflation_t + \beta_3 Debt_t + \beta_4 Panics_t + \varepsilon \quad (3)$$

The equations above suggest a simple OLS regression<sup>24</sup> framework, but given the time series nature of our data, we must first establish that no further adjustments need to be made. Naturally, the seat share and regional vote share of the majority party will be associated with the relevant share in the previous Congress. However, since we have adopted a first-difference approach, including a lagged dependent variable is not necessary. None of our dependent variables are trending over time. Of the independent variables, only *Debt* exhibits a time trend, but since it is a control variable (which we are not substantively interested in drawing inferences about), we have not de-trended it.<sup>25</sup>

To recap, we have developed a theoretical and empirical framework designed to test a “broader” interpretation of the Cannon Thesis. According to Uncle Joe and our theoretical model, we should expect the House majority party to suffer electoral losses after enacting a major non-lame-duck-session tariff revision. In addition, if tariff politics are an essential component of sectional politics, we should expect differential effects by region. That is, tariff

---

<sup>24</sup> Our dependent variables take on continuous values between [-100, 100], and most have means close to zero. Additionally, none exhibit atypical distributions, so we forgo maximum likelihood estimation. Another alternative specification would be to employ an error correction model (ECM), given that majority party vote share might have some long-term mean, to which it naturally reverts. In this case, the first difference of majority party support is modeled as a function of previous support, tariff revision, and the first difference of tariff revision. The results of this model differed only marginally from basic OLS, so we do not present them here. Though yet another possibility would be to adopt a matching framework by leveraging predictive models of the strength of the majority party, OLS offers the most straightforward estimation of the relationship we are interested in.

<sup>25</sup> Our *Debt* variable is the only one that has a unit root, according to Dickey-Fuller tests. If we de-trend this variable, wherein the new variable is the white noise residuals of *Debt* modeled as an AR(2) process, our results do not substantively change.

changes should not affect every region equally, especially if we account for whether the tariff was raised or lowered.

## Results

Both Cannon's thesis (broadly interpreted) and the reasoning behind it are supported by our analyses. In the national model (Equation 1), we find that major tariff revision after Reconstruction is associated with a substantial loss of House seats for the majority. The regional analysis (Equation 2) suggests that this national result is the aggregation of majority party losses in nearly every region. Surprisingly, accounting for the direction of the change (Equation 3) does *not* reveal differential effects by region. Overall, Cannon's explanation holds up remarkably well after 1877. Not only is it the case that major tariff revision hurt the majority party, *the substance of the revision appears to be inconsequential* – suggesting that the uncertainty associated with tariff changes, by itself, was an effective weapon for the opposition to use in the following election.

Initially, we ran a national model that included the complete time series (1815-1934). The returned estimates were not statistically distinguishable from zero – a finding that was not surprising, for a number of reasons. First, the salience of the tariff as a political issue is certain to vary over the extended series. As Goldstein (1993: 82) notes, the industrial development in the postbellum era put pressures on members of Congress that “further politicized” the tariff. Second, the fact that our analysis begins prior to the rise of mass democracy will likely affect the mechanism by which tariff changes are supposed to affect majority party strength. Specifically, the congressional career motivations and accountability mechanisms necessary for the “modern” electoral connection were not yet in place (Carson and Jenkins 2011). Third, each of the examples cited by Cannon himself comes from the post-Reconstruction era, which suggests that

the proposition was never meant to explain party politics throughout the entire 19th century. For these reasons, we note that temporal context plays an important role in the explanatory power of Cannon's thesis, and concur with Wawro and Katznelson (2014) that careful attention to periodicity is important for any lengthy across-time analysis. Accordingly, we present the national model broken down by pre- and post-Reconstruction Congresses in *Tables 2* and *3*.<sup>26</sup>

[Tables 2 and 3 about here]

Prior to Reconstruction, we find no statistically distinguishable effect of major tariff revision on majority seat share. In one bivariate model (*Table 2*, 1a), the coefficient is not even in the expected direction. Our theoretical model of tariff revision may help explain this null result. That model is built on a relationship between parties and voters that changed dramatically over the course of the 19th century. In a pre-Australian ballot era of electoral politics, the accountability mechanism crucial to our theoretical model did not operate in the same way, and this likely mutes the effects of the *Tariff* variable in columns 1a and 1b in *Table 2*.

For those Congresses spanning 1877-1934, however, tariff revision appears to have been electorally costly.<sup>27</sup> In the full model in *Table 2* (2b), accounting for other covariates, the majority change in total House seats was 12.7 percentage points lower following a major tariff revision. In the time period we consider, this translates into the majority losing between 35 and 52 seats – a margin certainly capable of inducing minority status. The coefficient is precisely estimated, and the overall model performs well. Inclusion of the economic controls results in an increase in explained variance and no increase in the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) – despite the inclusion of additional parameters. The same story is evident in *Table 3*, where the

---

<sup>26</sup> The Pre-/Post-Reconstruction break is not arbitrary. By excluding those years, we side-step problems associated with the exclusion of the South and the gradual reintroduction of southern representatives. Other cross-time analyses have selected the same break, for similar reasons (see, for example, Cox and McCubbins 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Note that the pre- and post-Reconstruction *Tariff* coefficients are also statistically different from each other ( $p < 0.01$ ), as revealed by post-estimation (Wald) tests.

dependent variable is vote share as opposed to seat share. Here, a major tariff revision, on average, costs the House majority party 3.57 percentage points of the national vote. This could have meant the difference between majority and minority status, given that the mean national popular vote for the majority party from 1877-1934 was 53.49 percent, with a standard deviation of 3.2 percent. Again, the coefficient is precisely estimated and the model makes efficient use of relevant parameters.

Interestingly, in *Table 2* the *Inflation* and *Debt* coefficients both switch signs after Reconstruction, with a rise in inflation estimated to benefit the majority party. This result is inconsistent with the vote share operationalization in *Table 3*, in that across both time periods, inflation seems to benefit the majority. Democratic majorities and their constituencies (farmers, debtors) who directly benefitted from inflation may drive this result. Finally, some economic panics – specifically, the Panics of 1819 and 1893 – appear to have an effect on the change in majority party electoral returns.

The regional models largely confirm the aggregate story. Prior to Reconstruction we find no statistically discernable effect for tariff revisions – but after Reconstruction, changes seem to benefit the opposition party across regions. This can be seen in *Table 4*, where we present results for New England, South, Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, Border South, and West.<sup>28</sup> In 10 of 12 models, the *Tariff* coefficient is in the expected (negative) direction, and the estimate in New England, the Mid-Atlantic, the South, and the Border South is within conventional levels of statistical significance. Additionally, in most regions, the models explain much of the variation

---

<sup>28</sup> Rusk (2001) uses regional codes adapted from the ICPSR: New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont), South (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia), Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin), Mid-Atlantic (Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania), Border South (Maryland, Kentucky, Oklahoma, West Virginia), and West (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming).

in majority party vote share. Only the West and Midwest seem to be unaffected (or inconsistently affected) by major tariff changes. In no region does tariff revision appear to be a catastrophic blunder by the majority party – *rather, the modest effect in each region seems to add up to a weighty national effect.*

[Table 4 about here]

The economic controls, interestingly, exhibit different relationships with change in majority vote share depending upon region. The national effect of the Panic of 1893 appears to be largely driven by the West and Midwest – regions that had been affected by railroad failures (Campbell 1938). Additionally, increases in inflation seemed to benefit the majority party in all but the Border South and South.

The directional analysis, which appears in *Table 5*, also provides indirect support for Cannon’s thesis.<sup>29</sup> Raising or lowering the tariff, in fact, did *not* have a consistent relationship with vote share in any region, or any model. This largely comports with what Cannon suggests: namely, that the uncertainty created by a tariff change – *any change* – benefits the opposition party. To verify that this finding was not a function of the way we operationalized direction, we re-estimated the models using the change in duties collected as a percentage of dutiable imports immediately after a tariff took effect (see Goldstein 1993). This measure provides a more precise, continuous estimate of tariff magnitude. Our results remained substantively unchanged.

[Table 5 about here]

### **Additional Tests**

In this section, we consider an alternative explanation (potential confound) for our tariff findings, specifically, that with the *Tariff* variable we may be capturing simply the degeneration

---

<sup>29</sup> *Table 5* reports analyses by region, but the same results hold nationally. The direction of the tariff was not systematically associated, either positively or negatively, with electoral outcomes.

of support for the president’s party during midterm elections. We also unpack the source of uncertainty around the tariff, and consider whether the negative electoral effect for the majority party was based exclusively on major tariff revision, or whether serious but unsuccessful actions (tariff votes that did *not* lead to enactments) produced the same result.

### Midterm Effects

The coincidence of major tariff revisions and midterm congressional elections raises the possibility of a presidential “midterm effect” driving our results. It is well-known that the president’s party generally loses seats during midterm elections (Jacobson and Carson 2015) – in the 39 midterm elections since 1862, for example, the president’s party lost House seats in all but three of them (1934, 1998, and 2002). It is reasonable to suggest, then, that our tariff variable may just be picking up a familiar phenomenon in congressional elections.

We explore this possibility by including a new variable, *Midterm*, in the analysis. This variable is coded 1 if the House majority party and the president’s party are one and the same entering a midterm election. (In fact, in all but one midterm election between 1877-1934, the same party controlled both the House and presidency in the prior Congress.<sup>30</sup>) We report the results of our robustness checks in *Table 6*. In alternative models that include both *Tariff* and *Midterm*, *Tariff* remains statistically significant by conventional standards, and the point estimate itself remains strong. In each of the models, the magnitude of the *Tariff* coefficient exceeds that of the *Midterm* coefficient. These analyses suggest that, though the models presented earlier may have slightly overestimated the effect of a tariff revision because of correlation between the two variables, there is still a larger and substantively significant effect of revising the tariff for

---

<sup>30</sup> The exception is the midterm to elect the 46th Congress, in which Democrats opposite Republican President Rutherford B. Hayes controlled the House the 45th.

the majority party. That is, the majority party – over and above any presidential midterm effect – lost votes and seats after making a major revision to the tariff schedule.

[Table 6 about here]

It is also possible that the *Tariff* coefficient represents a simple case of “regression to the mean” in terms of party power. That is, presidential elections may have swept marginal co-partisans into the House, which gave the majority party its “high watermark” of power and a chance to enact tariff revisions before regressing to more typical seat and vote shares. In this view, tariff revisions would be a proxy for mere cyclical trends in congressional seat and vote share. While the indicator variable (*Midterm*) in Table 6 largely captures this story, the height of a majority party’s coalition does not always coincide with every midterm election cycle. Thus, we accounted for this possibility in two ways. First, we ran additional tests of the main results and included a variable coded 1 for the initial Congress of a term of unified government after a period of divided or reverse party control. Inclusion of this variable only marginally reduces the magnitude of the point estimate for *Tariff* (from -0.12 to -0.09 in terms of seat share), and the variable itself is not distinguishable from zero. Second, we included a dummy variable in the previous models coded 1 if the majority party exceeded a “large majority” threshold – and tested at all integer values between 55-65 seat/vote share. This variable has no discernable impact, regardless of the particular threshold set. Controlling for the “height” of party coalitions also does not dampen the impact of the tariff – the *Tariff* coefficient remains either unchanged or greater than the original results in Table 2. By all indications, then, the effect of the tariff variable is not merely a proxy for the moment at which the majority party is likely to lose seats. In fact, when controlling for these moments, the policy itself seems to have an observable effect on the electoral fortunes of the majority party.

## Unpacking Uncertainty

To this point, our analysis has focused on tariff enactment as the meaningful event that triggers an electoral loss – with the general explanation that economic uncertainty associated with the tariff costs the majority party at the polls. However, we recognize that the mechanism between tariff revision and electoral outcomes may be operative beyond just the *enactment* of a major new tariff. In other words, uncertainty may be generated by other stages in the lawmaking process – and may be qualitatively different than the uncertainty generated by a formal enactment. If this perspective – frequently voiced in contemporaneous financial periodicals, like *The Commercial and Financial Chronicle* – is correct, our previous models may conflate these distinct forms of tariff-induced uncertainty.<sup>31</sup>

In our time series, there were many Congresses that debated and voted on major tariff revisions that never became law. This would result in uncertainty about the content of changes and whether the changes would occur. By contrast, uncertainty generated by enactment would be specific to the way in which known policy changes alter wages and prices (and could be used as electoral fodder by the minority party in the subsequent political campaign). Though the pre-enactment concerns do not preclude the post-enactment concerns, this raises a question of which kind of uncertainty resulted in the proposed effect.

Empirically, if pre-enactment uncertainty resulted in electoral loss, our initial analyses presented a difficult test. That is, by collapsing uncertainty resulting from congressional proceedings on tariffs that did *not* produce an enactment into the model's constant – and thus combining it with cases in which *no* congressional proceedings over tariffs occurred – it should have been difficult to find a significant tariff enactment effect. Nonetheless, to unpack

---

<sup>31</sup> *E.g.*, “The whole country is waiting for the conference committee to put an end to the tariff agitation, which is holding our industries in a state of suspended action” (*The Commercial and Financial Chronicle*, 08/04/1894, 168).

uncertainty empirically, we coded a new indicator variable (*Votes*) that represents whether a major tariff revision was voted on, but never passed, in a given House.<sup>32</sup> If pre-enactment uncertainty influenced electoral outcomes, we expect that the coefficient on *Votes* should be negative and statistically significant. Moreover, if it is not statistically distinguishable from the enactment variable, it may be that this kind of uncertainty is the more pertinent mechanism explaining the majority party's subsequent electoral decline.

[Table 7 about here]

We present these results in Table 7. In sum, they suggest that *only post-enactment uncertainty led to electoral decline*. Across all models, tariff enactment (*Tariff*) remains negative and statistically different from zero, whereas tariff activity without enactment (*Votes*) has no consistent relationship. In the sole model in which these votes appear to have some relationship (2a), a post-estimation test reveals that the *Tariff* coefficient remains statistically distinguishable from the *Votes* coefficient. This supplies strong evidence that uncertainty generated by a new status quo – *not merely the failed attempt at producing a change* – resulted in the electoral damage for the majority party.<sup>33</sup> It also supports the idea that the revision itself generated political ammunition for the opposition party in the succeeding election.

### Summary

We find that, after Reconstruction, Cannon's thesis (broadly interpreted) seems to hold – both regionally and nationally. By all indications, the relationship between tariff enactment and electoral loss for the majority party is not the spurious result of well-known congressional

---

<sup>32</sup> We culled these major votes by first looking at Bensel (2000: 470-71) and Wawro and Schickler (2006:141-46) for guidance, and then examining roll call data on a congress-by-congress basis (using the “tariff” issue identifier) using Poole and Rosenthal's Voteview program. This *Votes* variable take a value of 1 in the 45th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 50th, 54th, 60th, 66th, 70th, and 72nd Congresses, and zero otherwise. Note also that this variable overlaps with the sole case of a major lame-duck tariff (the “Mongrel” tariff) in the post-Reconstruction era.

<sup>33</sup> Note that this largely supports the causal process outlined in the model in Section 2, given that it is the selection of *x* that sends the operative signal.

election patterns, or the cyclical ebb-and-flow of party coalition sizes. Moreover, we find support for our uncertainty explanation when we look deeper into the content of major revisions, and when we account for serious proceedings and votes on tariff revisions that did make their way into law. In short, all empirical evidence suggests that major tariff revision cost the majority party in the following election.

### **The Wilson-Gorman Tariff**

In this section, we provide a disaggregated analysis of a single tariff policy to illustrate our aggregate findings. As *Table 8* suggests, tariff politics evoked wide variation in party voting behavior. The McKinley Tariff, for example, was largely a party-line vote; others, such as the Sectional Tariff of 1824, split party coalitions. By testing the average effect of tariff revision across these votes, our aggregate analysis necessarily obscures the rich political context of each. Given the centrality of tariff politics to government expenditures, commercial interests, and sectional strife, we proceed to ground our hypothesis in a cross-sectional illustration of the political context and consequences of tariff reform in the 53rd Congress (1893-95).

[Table 8 about here]

We select the Tariff Act of 1894, which came to be known as the “Wilson-Gorman Tariff” after its two Democratic sponsors, as an illustration for three reasons.<sup>34</sup> First, the modest changes of Wilson-Gorman allow us to move towards isolating the effect of uncertainty. If economic *uncertainty* – as opposed to policy content – drives the electoral cost of tariff revision, we should see Democrats punished in the subsequent congressional elections despite the minor substantive revisions made to the recently enacted McKinley Tariff of 1890. Second, Wilson-Gorman provides an opportunity to analyze a Democratic initiative, and thus separate out the

---

<sup>34</sup> The two cosponsors were Rep. William L. Wilson of West Virginia and Sen. Arthur P. Gorman of Maryland.

bill's effect from our aggregate analysis of largely-protectionist policy changes. In this way, we depart from existing work that tends to focus on Republican-sponsored revisions. Finally, the Wilson-Gorman Tariff is referenced in the primary sources documenting Cannon's thesis on tariff reform, but does not include the complications of lame-duck electoral politics (e.g., the Mongrel Tariff of 1883). In these ways, Wilson-Gorman proves to be a particularly useful illustration of the individual-level foundations of our empirical findings.

The elections of 1892 ushered in unified, Democratic control of the federal government for the first time in over three decades. By campaigning against GOP-style protectionism, Grover Cleveland and the Democratic Party defeated incumbent Republican President Benjamin Harrison, maintained a large majority in the House, and picked up five seats in the Senate.<sup>35</sup> Following the elections, the House Committee on Ways and Means quickly set out to craft an acceptable Democratic tariff policy, but by autumn of 1893, industry representatives came forward to argue against revision on the grounds of *economic uncertainty*.

The controversial nature of emerging Democratic tariff proposals virtually guaranteed contestation in the courts and future legislative sessions. Consequently, manufacturers lamented the "constant feeling of uncertainty as to the price at which these goods may be put upon the market" (U.S. Congress, *Tariff Hearings*, 1173). Businessmen argued that the lack of a clear government policy brought business to a standstill and made budgeting virtually impossible (444). Capitalists no longer felt secure in making investments, and an anticipatory reduction in manufactured goods had reduced the demand of natural resources, labor, and transportation services (296).

---

<sup>35</sup> In the late 19th century, Democrats had come to view tariff politics in terms of taxation, rather than industrial policy (Gerring 1998), and in the five years leading up to the Wilson-Gorman Tariff, 37 percent of government expenditures were spent on military pensions largely paid out in northern congressional districts (Bensel 1984, 66-67). Cleveland and his co-partisans consequently painted the Republican Party as a dishonest, paternalist group that executed a deeply politicized tax-and-spend strategy.

We cannot, *prima facie*, distinguish a genuine concern with market instability from a tactical approach to preserving protectionist policies. Nonetheless, members of Congress were consistently pressured to act (and act conservatively) by spokesmen of iron, sugar, steel, cotton, wool, glass, earthenware, and many more industries on the premise of *uncertainty*.

On August 13th, the Wilson-Gorman Tariff passed in the House by a coalition of 172 Democrats, 2 Independent Democrats, and 8 Populists.<sup>36</sup> The new tariff policy would reduce average *ad valorem* rates from 49 to 41 percent on dutiable goods for three fiscal years, significantly lower the tariff on coal, iron ore, chinaware, and tin-plate, and provide a two-percent tax on personal and corporate annual incomes exceeding \$4,000 (Ratner 1972: 39).<sup>37</sup> In addition, the unilateral powers of the president to “suspend by proclamation . . . the privilege of free importation,” which were put in place by the McKinley Tariff, were eliminated (Larkin 1936: 45-46). These changes aside, Wilson-Gorman disappointed free-trade advocates, as it only slightly moderated GOP-style protectionism. As Bense (2000: 481) notes: Wilson-Gorman “mildly but inconsistently reduced duties in a way that left industrial protection substantially intact.”

The political fallout of the Wilson-Gorman Tariff came swiftly. The Republicans would blame the continued effects of the 1893 depression on Democratic efforts to repeal the McKinley Tariff (Bense 2000: 255). For political purposes, they would argue, Democrats had injected economically devastating uncertainty into the markets. In this respect, the Democratic Party was duly warned. During the Ways and Means Hearings of 1893, Samuel W. McCall (R-MA) had stated that “politically it might be a good idea for the party which enacts [tariff reform] to not

---

<sup>36</sup> Thirteen Democrats would join with 93 Republicans to cast a “nay” vote on the final version of the bill: Everett (MA-7), Gorman (MI-2), Tarsney (MO-5), Meyer (LA-1), Davey (LA-2), Price (LA-3), Covert (NY-1), Hendrix (NY-3), Bartlett (NY-7), Dunphy (NY-8), Cockran (NY-12), Warner (NY-13), Johnson (OH-21).

<sup>37</sup> The income tax provision was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1895, stripping the revenue stream meant to offset the elimination of duties on raw sugar.

have it go into effect pending an election” (Hearings, 6). Former-House Speaker Thomas Reed (R-ME) would prove equally prescient, if more dramatic, in his remarks: “The Democratic mortality will be so great,” he predicted, “that their dead will be buried in trenches and marked ‘unknown’” (Remini 2006: 257).

To support the stated consequences of manipulating the tariff schedules in 1894, we engage in cross-sectional analysis of incumbent Democrats using historical election and roll-call data. *Defeated* is our binary dependent variable; those Democrats that attempt but fail to be reelected are coded as 1.<sup>38</sup> Our key explanatory variable is a vote on the Wilson-Gorman Tariff: members voting in favor are coded as 1, while members opposing the bill are coded 0. If Cannon’s proposition holds, we should see that the effect of voting to revise the tariff schedule is an increase in the probability of being defeated in the 54th Congress, all else held constant.

We account for past legislative and electoral behavior in two ways. First, we include first- and second-dimension *DW-NOMINATE* scores to account for revealed preferences on other roll-call votes. Second, we include a variable indicating a vote in favor of repealing the Sherman Silver Act to control for the economic uncertainty induced by the silver threat to the gold standard. Those voting to repeal the Sherman Silver Act are coded as 1, while those who voted against the bill are coded as 0.<sup>39</sup>

Results from a linear probability model are presented in column (a) of *Table 9*, and provide strong support for the Cannon Thesis. Democrats that voted for the Wilson-Gorman

---

<sup>38</sup> The results presented here code all other members as 0. Alternatively, we create a more specific dependent variable in which *Defeated* is 0 only if members win reelection. These data allow us to separate reelection from career changes, retirement, and other possible outcomes (Swift et. al. 2010). While we believe the latter variable unnecessarily drops observations, our results are virtually the same across models.

<sup>39</sup> In fact, the *Atlanta Constitution* editorial of November 8, 1894 suggested that the Democratic defeat at the polls was due to Cleveland’s push for unconditional repeal of the Sherman Act (Schlesinger 1973: 1543).

Tariff were 41 percentage points more likely to lose in the 54th Congressional election cycle, holding other revealed policy preferences constant.

[Table 9 about here]

While these results are impressive, we must be sensitive to other important electoral conditions that might confound them. For example, we need to consider the lingering effects of the Panic of 1893. Both modern and 19th century research has documented the disproportionate harm inflicted by the Panic to agricultural regions in western states (Noyes 1894; Dupont 2009); over 75% of bank suspensions following the Panic took place in *Western and Midwestern states* (Dupont 2009: 33). Moreover, our aggregate analysis suggested that the Panic of 1893 had a statistically significant, negative impact on vote share in two regions: the West and the Midwest. Thus, we control for regional effects in these states. In addition, we also control for whether a member's degree of "marginality" affected his likelihood of electoral success, by including each member's vote share in the previous (53rd) congressional election cycle (*Prior Vote Share*).<sup>40</sup>

Results from this broader model appear in column (b) of *Table 9*.<sup>41</sup> While the magnitude of our initial tariff-vote result decreases slightly, the overall interpretation of our Wilson-Gorman variable remains the same. That is, Democrats that voted for Wilson-Gorman found themselves roughly 34 percentage points more likely to be defeated for reelection – even after accounting for prior vote share, positions taken on the controversial repeal of the Sherman Silver Act, past voting behavior, and proxies for lingering economic malaise from the Panic of 1893.

---

<sup>40</sup> Individual-level election data come from Dubin (1998). In this case, prior election is any election to office in the election cycle leading up to the 53rd Congress.

<sup>41</sup> Table 9 reports results from linear probability models for convenience of interpretation. Given the distribution of our dependent variable, we also run logistic regression models. The two models (linear and non-linear) are nearly identical for all variables of interest. In the full model (column B), our key variable of interest (*Vote for Wilson-Gorman*) is statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level with a marginal change in probability of being *Defeated* of 0.28 and a predicted probability of 0.36.

We believe these estimates are conservative in two ways. First, by looking exclusively at the fate of Democrats, we undersell the consequences of voting for tariff revision. By including Populists and other parties, for example, we find that those voting for Wilson-Gorman face an even larger increase in the probability of reelection defeat, all else held constant. Second, twenty-eight Democrats who supported Wilson-Gorman decided not to seek reelection – over double the amount of retirements among those that opposed the tariff. It is plausible that our estimates would increase if we could directly measure strategic retirement.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, we investigated the veracity of the Cannon Thesis, the proposition advanced by Speaker Joe Cannon that the majority party in the House would be punished for making major revisions to the tariff. We find that from 1877 to 1934, major tariff revisions enacted in non-lame-duck sessions were, on average, associated with a significant loss of votes (both regionally and nationally) that translated into a loss of House seats. Though the strictest interpretation of Cannon's statements would hold that revision led to a loss of majority status entirely, we find support for a less deterministic thesis – namely, that major tariff revisions generated inordinate uncertainty among business interests, which the opposition party could then use to mobilize its base and gain ground in the following election. This did not mean certain defeat for the majority. Nonetheless, it had observable political costs.

More broadly, our theoretical model of tariff revision may shed light on the eventual decision to delegate tariff revision authority to the Executive. More specifically, our analysis suggests that the decision to delegate tariff policy to the executive branch may have been motivated by the divergent preferences of party leaders and their rank-and-file. If we apply the majority party's utility function to an individual level, we might expect the value of being in the

majority,  $\tau$ , was disproportionately high for leaders like Joe Cannon, while rank-and-file legislators weighed industry rents and policy-related utility more heavily. In part, the divergent values of  $\tau$  contribute to the existence of party leadership positions in the first place.

Consequently, Cannon's dissatisfaction with reform efforts is unsurprising. Moreover, placed in the context of this party leadership—put in power to solve the collective action problems of the rank and file—the eventual delegation of authority may have redounded to the benefit of the majority party.<sup>42</sup>

This raises two additional implications for further study. First, since presidents typically made incremental changes to tariff schedules through directives like executive orders, proclamations, determinations, and memoranda, more attention must be paid to the politics of unilateral action in the area of trade policy. Beginning with the McKinley Tariff (1890), presidents have been vested with some *ex post* tariff authority, designed to provide the United States with the capacity to react quickly to market changes and retaliate against foreign protectionism. Here, we have investigated the electoral consequences of major tariff revision for the House, but an equally significant question is whether the same patterns exist in the executive. Did the president bear the same political burden when finally delegated this authority? Did vesting this power in the president reduce the visibility of revisions, such that changes did not serve as political ammunition for the opposition party? Did presidents refrain from making changes when they were politically constrained (e.g., divided government)? It may also be the case that the period in question was the only one in which the tariff was salient enough as an issue to have systematic effects. Nonetheless, these critical questions remain unanswered and important for the purposes of understanding the political origins of U.S. trade policy.

---

<sup>42</sup> Note that this direct electoral benefit is qualitatively different than traditional explanations for delegation, which involve gains in expertise (e.g., Epstein & O'Halloran 1999; Volden 2002; Gailmard and Patty 2007).

## References

- Adler, E. Scott. 2002. *When Congressional Reforms Fail: Reelection and the House Committee System*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Aldrich, Mark. 2013. "Tariffs and Trusts, Profiteers and Middlemen: Popular Explanations for the High Cost of Living, 1897–1920." *History of Political Economy* 45: 693-746.
- Bailey, Michael A., Judith Goldstein, and Barry R. Weingast. 1997. "The Institutional Roots of American Trade Policy: Politics, Coalitions, and International Trade." *World Politics* 49: 309-38.
- Barganza, Juan Carlos. 2000. "Two Roles for Elections: Disciplining the Incumbent and Selecting a Competent Candidate." *Public Choice* 105: 165-193.
- Bensel, Richard Franklin. 1984. *Sectionalism and American Political Development: 1880-1980*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bensel, Richard Franklin. 2000. *The Political Economy of American Industrialization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Besley, Timothy. 2006. *Principled Agents: The Political Economy of Good Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bolles, Blair. 1951. *Tyrant From Illinois: Uncle Joe Cannon's Experiment With Personal Power*. New York: Norton.
- Brady, David W. 1973. *Congressional Voting in a Partisan Era*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Brady, David W. 1988. *Critical Elections and Congressional Policy Making*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Brady, David, Judith Goldstein, and Daniel Kessler. 2002. "Does Party Matter? An Historical Test Using Senate Tariff Votes in Three Institutional Settings." *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization* 18: 140-54.
- Calhoun, Charles W. 2008. *Minority Victory: Gilded Age Politics and the Front Porch Campaign of 1888*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Campbell, E. G. 1938. *The Reorganization of the American Railroad System, 1893-1900*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cannon, Joseph Gurney. 1927. *Uncle Joe Cannon: The Story of a Pioneer American, As Told to L. White Busbey*. New York: Henry Holt.

- Carson, Jamie L., and Jeffery A. Jenkins. 2011. "Examining the Electoral Connection Across Time." *Annual Review of Political Science* 14: 25-46.
- Cox, Gary W., and Mathew D. McCubbins. 2005. *Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Conybeare, John. 1991. "Voting for Protection." *International Organization* 45: 57-81.
- Dubin, Michael, J. 1998. *United States Congressional Elections, 1788-1997: The Official Results of the Elections of the 1<sup>st</sup> Through 105<sup>th</sup> Congresses*. Jefferson: McFarland.
- Dupont, Brandon R. 2009. "Panic in the Plains: Agricultural Markets and the Panic of 1893," *Cliometrica*. 3:27-54
- Epstein, David, and Sharyn O'Halloran. 1996. "The Partisan Paradox and the U.S. Tariff, 1877-1934." *International Organization* 50: 301-24.
- Epstein, David, and Sharyn O'Halloran. 1999. *Delegating Powers: A Transaction Cost Politics Approach to Policy Making Under Separate Powers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Flores-Macias, Gustavo A., and Sarah E. Kreps. 2013. "Political Parties at War: A Study of American War Finance, 1789-2010." *American Political Science Review* 107: 833-48.
- Foner, Eric. 1970. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*. New York: Norton.
- Fordham, Benjamin O., and Timothy McKeown 2003. "Selection and Influence: Interest Groups and Congressional Voting on Trade Policy." *International Organization* 57: 519-49.
- Gailmard, Sean, John W. Patty. 2007. "Slackers and Zealots: Civil Service, Policy Discretion, and Bureaucratic Expertise." *American Journal of Political Science* 51: 873-89.
- Gerring, John. 1998. *Party Ideologies in America: 1828-1996*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goldstein, Judith. 1993. *Ideas, Interests, and American Trade Policy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Gwinn, William Rea. 1957. *Uncle Joe Cannon, Archfoe of Insurgency: A History of the Rise and Fall of Cannonism*. New York: Bookman Associates.
- Hansen, John Mark. 1990. "Taxation and the Political Economy of the Tariff." *International Organization* 44: 527-51.

- Harvey, Anna, and Barry Friedman. 2009. "Ducking Trouble: Congressional Induced Selection Bias in the Supreme Court's Agenda." *Journal of Politics* 71: 574-92.
- Hiscox, Michael J. 2002. "Commerce, Coalitions, and Factor Mobility: Evidence from Congressional Votes on Trade Legislation." *American Political Science Review* 96: 593-608.
- Jacobson, Gary C., and Jamie L. Carson. 2015. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, Ninth Edition. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kindleberger, Charles P. 1996. *Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crisis*, 3rd ed. New York: Wiley.
- Lake, David. 1988. *Power, Protection, and Free Trade: International Sources of U.S. Commercial Strategy, 1887-1939*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Larkin, John Day. 1936. *The President's Control of the Tariff*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Madonna, Anthony J. 2011. "Winning Coalition Formation in the U.S. Senate: The Effects of Legislative Decision Rules and Agenda Change." *American Journal of Political Science* 55: 276-288.
- Mayhew, David R. 2005. *Divided We Govern: Party Control, Lawmaking, and Investigations, 1946-2002*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- North, Douglas. 1990a. "A Transaction Cost Theory of Politics." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 2: 355-67.
- North, Douglas. 1990b. *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Noyes, A.D. 1894. "The Banks and the Panic of 1893," *Political Science Quarterly*, 9(1):12-30
- Pierson, Paul. 2000. "The Limits of Design: Explaining Institutional Origins and Change." *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration* 13: 475-99.
- Pincus, Jonathan. 1977. *Pressure Groups and Politics in Antebellum Tariffs*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Poole, Keith T., and Howard Rosenthal. 2007. *Ideology and Congress*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

- Rager, Scott William. 1998. "The Fall of the House of Cannon: Uncle Joe and His Enemies, 1903-1910." In Roger H. Davidson, Susan Webb Hammond, and Raymond W. Smock, eds., *Masters of the House: Congressional Leadership Over Two Centuries*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Ratner, Sidney. 1972. *The Tariff in American History*. New York: D. Van Nostrand Company.
- Reitano, Joanne. 1994. *The Tariff Question in the Gilded Age: The Great Debate of 1888*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Remini, Robert V. 2006. *The House: The History of the House of Representatives*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Roberts, A. Scott. 2012. *America's First Great Depression : Economic Crisis and Political Disorder after the Panic of 1837*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Rodgers, Mary Tone and James E. Payne. 2013. "How the Bank of France Changed US Equity Expectations and Ended the Panic of 1907." *Journal of Economic History* 74: 420-48.
- Rothbeard, Murray Netwon. 1962. *The Panic of 1819: Reactions and Policies*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rusk, Jerrold G. 2001. *A Statistical History of the American Electorate*. Washington: CQ Press.
- Safire, William. 2008. *Safire's Political Dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schattschneider, E. E. 1935. *Politics, Pressure, and the Tariff*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books.
- Schlesinger, Jr., Arthur M. 1973. *History of the U.S. Political Parties: The Gilded Age of Politics*, Vol. II. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.
- Shepsle, Kenneth A. 1989. "Studying Institutions: Some Lessons from the Rational Choice Approach." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 1: 131-47.
- Stanwood, Edward. 1903. *American Tariff Controversies in the Nineteenth Century*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Stathis, Stephen W. 2014. *Landmark Legislation, 1774-2012: Major US Acts and Treaties*. Washington: CQ Press.
- Swift, Elaine K., Robert G. Brookshire, David T. Canon, Evelyn C. Fink, John R. Hibbing, Brian D. Humes, Michael J. Malbin, and Kenneth C. Martis. 2000. *Database of [United States] Congressional Historical Statistics, 1789-1989*, Study 03371. Ann Arbor: ICPSR.
- Taussig, Frank W. 1931. *The Tariff History of the United States*, 8th ed. New York: Capricorn.

- U.S. Congress. House. The Committee on Ways and Means. 1893. *Tariff Hearings*. 53rd Congress., 1st sess., 28 September.
- Volden, Craig. 2002. "A Formal Model of the Politics of Delegation in a Separation of Powers System." *American Journal of Political Science* 46: 111-33.
- Wawro, Gregory J. and Ira Katznelson. 2014. "Designing Historical Social Scientific Inquiry: How Parameter Heterogeneity Can Bridge the Methodological Divide between Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches." *American Journal of Political Science* 58: 526-46.
- Wawro, Gregory J., and Eric Schickler. 2006. *Filibuster: Obstruction and Lawmaking in the U.S. Senate*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Weller, Nicholas. 2009. "Trading Policy: Constituents and Party in U.S. Trade Policy." *Public Choice* 141: 87-101.
- Wolman, Paul. 1992. *Most Favored Nation: The Republican Revisionists and U.S. Trade Policy, 1897-1912*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

**Table 1. Major Tariff Revisions and the Face Validity of Cannon’s Thesis, 1815-1934**

<b>Congress</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Major Tariff Revision</b>	<b>Majority Switch?</b>	<b>Majority Change</b>	<b>Lame-Duck?</b>
14th	1816	Tariff of 1816 (Dallas)		+0.14	
18th	1824	Tariff Act of 1824 (Sectional)		+0.17	
20th	1828	Tariff of 1828 (Abominations)		+0.10	
22nd	1832	Tariff Act of 1832		+0.01	
22nd	1833	Compromise Tariff of 1833		+0.01	✓
27th	1842	Tariff Act of 1842 (Black)	✓	-0.26	
29th	1846	Tariff of 1846 (Walker)	✓	-0.14	
34th	1857	Tariff of 1857	✓	-0.05	✓
36th	1861	Morrill Tariff Act of 1861		+0.10	✓
37th	1862	Tariff Act of 1862		-0.12	
38th	1864	Morrill Tariff Amendments of 1864		+0.24	
41st	1870	Tariff of 1870		-0.14	
42nd	1872	Tariff Act of 1872		+0.12	
43rd	1875	Tariff Act of 1875	✓	-0.32	✓
47th	1883	Mongrel Tariff	✓	-0.15	✓
51st	1890	McKinley Tariff Act	✓	-0.28	
53rd	1894	Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act	✓	-0.35	
55th	1897	Dingley Tariff		-0.13	
61st	1909	Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act	✓	-0.14	
63rd	1913	Underwood Tariff Act		-0.14	
67th	1921	Emergency Tariff Act		-0.18	
67th	1922	Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act		-0.18	
71st	1930	Smoot-Hawley Tariff		-0.11	
73rd	1934	Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act		+0.01	

Note: Here, we cull major tariff legislation from Stathis (2014). “Majority Switch?” indicates whether the next Congress saw a change in majority party in the House. “Majority Change” indicates loss or gain in national vote percentage of the majority party following a tariff revision. “Lame-Duck?” indicates whether the Tariff was enacted in a lame-duck session.

**Table 2. Testing Cannon's Thesis in the Aggregate;  
DV: Change in Majority Party Seat Share in the House**

Variable $t$	<i>Pre-Reconstruction (1815-1866)</i>		<i>Post-Reconstruction (1877-1934)</i>	
	(1a)	(1b)	(2a)	(2b)
<b>Tariff</b> $_{t-1}$	0.052 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.08)	-0.164** (0.04)	-0.127*** (0.04)
<b>Inflation</b> $_{t-1}$		-0.034** (0.01)		0.009*** (0.003)
<b>Debt</b> $_{t-1}$		-0.006 (0.01)		0.0007 (0.002)
<b>Panic of 1819</b> $_{t-1}$		0.120 (0.19)		
<b>Panic of 1837</b> $_{t-1}$		-0.019* (0.10)		
<b>Panic of 1857</b> $_{t-1}$		-0.249 (0.15)		
<b>Civil War</b> $_{t-1}$		0.321 (0.227)		
<b>Panic of 1893</b> $_{t-1}$				-0.135** (0.06)
<b>Panic of 1907</b> $_{t-1}$				0.013 (0.166)
<b>Crash of 1929</b> $_{t-1}$				0.04 (0.09)
Constant	-0.07* (0.04)	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.036 (0.04)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.48	0.37	0.65
N	20	16	26	22
BIC	-15.5	-11.5	-47.4	-47.4

OLS point estimates with standard errors in parentheses, \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01

**Table 3: Testing Cannon's Thesis in the Aggregate;  
DV: Change in Majority Party Vote Share for House Elections**

Variable $t$	<i>Pre-Reconstruction (1815-1866)</i>		<i>Post-Reconstruction (1877-1934)</i>	
	(1a)	(1b)	(2a)	(2b)
<b>Tariff</b> $t-1$	-3.44 (4.96)	-2.44 (4.59)	-4.98** (1.57)	-3.57** (1.45)
<b>Inflation</b> $t-1$		2.07** (0.73)		0.41*** (0.11)
<b>Debt</b> $t-1$		2.39*** (0.57)		-0.002 (0.08)
<b>Panic of 1819</b> $t-1$		-23.58** (9.03)		
<b>Panic of 1837</b> $t-1$		3.74 (5.98)		
<b>Panic of 1857</b> $t-1$		6.04 (8.65)		
<b>Civil War</b> $t-1$		-33.29** (13.21)		
<b>Panic of 1893</b> $t-1$				-3.52 (2.25)
<b>Panic of 1907</b> $t-1$				-3.54 (6.19)
<b>Crash of 1929</b> $t-1$				0.64 (3.22)
Constant	5.41** (2.47)	0.90 (2.80)	0.10 (0.79)	-0.16 (1.46)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.28	0.28	0.61
N	22	16	26	22
BIC	-15.5	-11.5	155.7	155.4

OLS point estimates with standard errors in parentheses, \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01

**Table 4: Testing Cannon's Thesis by Region, 1877-1934**  
**DV: Change in Majority Party Vote Share for House Elections**

Variable <sub><i>t</i></sub>	<i>New England</i>		<i>South</i>		<i>Midwest</i>		<i>Mid-Atlantic</i>		<i>Border-South</i>		<i>West</i>	
	(1a)	(1b)	(2a)	(2b)	(3a)	(3b)	(4a)	(4b)	(5a)	(5b)	(6a)	(6b)
<b>Tariff<sub><i>t-1</i></sub></b>	-5.56**	-5.33**	-5.83**	-4.55*	-2.71	0.09	-4.98**	-4.31**	-4.93**	-3.23**	-0.55	2.86
	(2.01)	(2.12)	(2.36)	(2.42)	(2.11)	(1.54)	(1.94)	(1.94)	(1.32)	(1.40)	(3.23)	(2.37)
<b>Inflation<sub><i>t-1</i></sub></b>		0.38**		0.28		0.54**		0.46**		0.20*		0.70**
		(0.16)		(0.20)		(0.12)		(0.15)		(0.11)		(0.20)
<b>Debt<sub><i>t-1</i></sub></b>		0.01		0.21		-0.05		-0.07		0.03		-0.21
		(0.12)		(0.14)		(0.08)		(0.10)		(0.08)		(0.14)
<b>Panic of 1893<sub><i>t-1</i></sub></b>		2.26		-3.49		-9.33**		0.01		-1.76		-14.39**
		(3.27)		(4.07)		(2.39)		(3.01)		(2.21)		(3.97)
<b>Panic of 1907<sub><i>t-1</i></sub></b>		9.33		2.41		-5.25		0.32		3.70		-6.38
		(9.01)		(11.20)		(6.57)		(8.27)		(6.10)		(10.93)
<b>Crash of 1929<sub><i>t-1</i></sub></b>		6.72		2.55		-3.31		4.45		-5.51*		-2.84
		(4.69)		(5.83)		(3.42)		(4.30)		(3.17)		(5.67)
Constant	-0.62	-1.46	0.42	-3.17	-0.91	-0.24	-0.28	-0.28	0.14	-0.51	-2.16	1.14
	(1.00)	(2.12)	(1.18)	(2.64)	(1.06)	(1.54)	(1.95)	(1.95)	(0.66)	(1.44)	(1.61)	(1.54)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.23	0.46	0.19	0.36	0.06	0.68	0.20	0.49	0.35	0.51	0.001	0.60
N	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
BIC	169.6	176.4	178.6	188.6	172.3	158.7	167.5	171.6	146.0	154.5	196.1	187.2

OLS point estimates with standard errors in parentheses, \* p<0.10, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01

**Table 5: The Effect of Revision Direction by Region, 1877-1934**  
**DV: Change in Majority Party Vote Share for House Elections**

Variable <sub><i>t</i></sub>	<i>New England</i>		<i>South</i>		<i>Midwest</i>		<i>Mid-Atlantic</i>		<i>Border-South</i>		<i>West</i>	
	(1a)	1b	2a	2b	3a	3b	4a	4b	5a	5b	6a	6b
<b>Tariff<sub><i>t-1</i></sub></b>	-0.09 (1.99)	0.15 (2.25)	-1.59 (2.26)	-3.54 (2.42)	-0.27 (1.89)	1.02 (1.76)	-1.09 (1.87)	-0.65 (1.91)	-1.67 (1.38)	-1.19 (1.37)	1.38 (2.79)	3.63 (2.58)
<b>Inflation<sub><i>t-1</i></sub></b>		0.46** (0.19)		0.32 (0.20)		0.59** (0.15)		0.52** (0.16)		0.23* (0.12)		0.77** (0.24)
<b>Debt<sub><i>t-1</i></sub></b>		-0.02 (0.13)		0.29* (0.14)		-0.04 (0.11)		-0.06 (0.11)		0.03 (0.08)		-0.21 (0.17)
<b>Panic of 1893<sub><i>t-1</i></sub></b>		-2.50 (3.87)		-6.69 (4.26)		-3.05 (3.08)		-3.55 (3.36)		-5.31* (2.41)		-2.99 (4.98)
<b>Panic of 1907<sub><i>t-1</i></sub></b>		-2.98 (10.46)		5.83 (11.27)		-7.25 (8.15)		-5.30 (8.70)		-3.06 (6.37)		3.01 (13.20)
<b>Crash of 1929<sub><i>t-1</i></sub></b>		2.02 (5.52)		2.30 (5.95)		-3.75 (4.33)		1.47 (4.70)		-7.16** (3.37)		-3.09 (6.96)
Constant	-2.01* (1.00)	-1.87 (2.17)	0.42 (1.18)	-5.23* (2.55)	-0.91 (1.06)	-0.86 (1.85)	-1.95** (0.94)	-1.05 (2.01)	-1.04 (0.69)	-1.40 (1.54)	-2.16 (1.61)	0.57 (2.98)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.001	0.26	0.02	0.35	0.001	0.50	0.01	0.42	0.05	0.35	0.01	0.41
<i>N</i>	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
BIC	176.8	185.0	184.0	189.2	174.0	171.4	173.5	175.9	156.5	159.4	195.8	197.9

OLS point estimates with standard errors in parentheses, \* p<0.10, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01

**Table 6: Investigating a Presidential Midterm Effect, 1877-1934**

Variable $t$	<i>DV: Change in Maj. Seat Share</i>		<i>DV: Change in Maj. Vote Share</i>	
	(1a)	(1b)	(2a)	(2b)
<b>Tariff</b> $t-1$	-0.14** (0.05)	-0.08* (0.04)	-4.58** (1.96)	-2.50 (1.73)
<b>Midterm</b> $t-1$	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.07* (0.04)	-0.60 (1.69)	-1.55 (1.39)
<b>Inflation</b> $t-1$		0.01*** (0.003)		0.42*** (0.11)
<b>Debt</b> $t-1$		0.001 (0.002)		-0.004 (0.08)
<b>Panic of 1893</b> $t-1$		-0.15** (0.06)		-3.81 (2.25)
<b>Panic of 1907</b> $t-1$		-0.04 (0.16)		-4.68 (6.24)
<b>Crash of 1929</b> $t-1$		0.04 (0.08)		0.59 (3.20)
Constant	-0.004 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.04)	0.10 (0.79)	-0.16 (1.46)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.39	0.71	0.28	0.63
N	28	28	28	28
BIC	-45.0	-48.5	158.9	157.0

OLS point estimates with standard errors in parentheses, \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01

**Table 7: Investigating Pre- and Post-Enactment Uncertainty, 1877-1934**

Variable $t$	<i>DV: Change in Maj. Seat Share</i>		<i>DV: Change in Maj. Vote Share</i>	
	(1a)	(1b)	(2a)	(2b)
<b>Tariff</b> $t-1$	-0.20** (0.05)	-0.13** (0.04)	-6.47** (1.63)	-4.01** (1.50)
<b>Votes</b> $t-1$	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	-3.12** (1.48)	-1.68 (1.46)
<b>Inflation</b> $t-1$		0.01*** (0.003)		0.33*** (0.11)
<b>Debt</b> $t-1$		0.002 (0.002)		-0.06 (0.08)
<b>Panic of 1893</b> $t-1$		-0.13** (0.06)		-3.30 (2.23)
<b>Panic of 1907</b> $t-1$		-0.04 (0.17)		-0.97 (6.12)
<b>Crash of 1929</b> $t-1$		-0.06 (0.06)		-3.63 (2.20)
Constant	-0.004 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.04)	1.58 (1.02)	-0.18 (1.46)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.43	0.68	0.39	0.63
N	28	28	28	28
BIC	-46.7	-46.0	154.5	153.3

OLS point estimates with standard errors in parentheses, \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01

**Table 8: Summary of Votes on Major Tariff Revisions, by Party**

Congress	Year	Major Revision	Floor Vote	Democrat*		Republican	
				Y	N	Y	N
14th	1816	Dallas Tariff	73 - 62	37	53	36	9
18th	1824	Sectional Tariff	101 - 99	33	32	68	67
20th	1828	Tariff of Abominations	105 - 94	44	60	61	34
22nd	1832	Tariff Act of 1832	132 - 65	87	34	45	31
22nd	1833	Compromise Tariff of 1833	119 - 85	94	27	25	58
27th	1842	Black Tariff	104 - 103	20	64	84	39
29th	1846	Walker Tariff	114 - 95	113	18	1	77
34th	1857	Tariff of 1857	122 - 72	68	2	54	70
36th	1861	Morrill Tariff Act of 1861	105 - 64	8	57	97	7
37th	1862	Tariff Act of 1862	57 - 55	4	31	53	24
38th	1864	Morrill Tariff Amendments	81 - 28	7	24	74	4
41st	1870	Tariff of 1870	145 - 49	5	47	140	2
42nd	1872	Tariff Act of 1872	149 - 61	73	19	76	42
47th	1883	Mongrel Tariff	152 - 116	21	104	131	12
51st	1890	McKinley Tariff	151 - 81	0	79	151	2
53rd	1894	Wilson-Gorman Tariff	182 - 106	182	13	0	93
55th	1897	Dingley Tariff	187 - 116	6	116	181	0
61st	1909	Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act	195 - 183	2	163	193	20
63rd	1913	Underwood Tariff Act	255 - 104	249	4	6	100
67th	1922	Fordney-McCumber Tariff	210 - 91	5	77	205	14
71st	1930	Smoot-Hawley Tariff	222 - 153	14	133	208	20
73rd	1934	Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act	274 - 111	272	12	2	99

\*Historical antecedents to the Democratic and Republican parties are coded according to Jerrold G. Rusk's *A Statistical history of the American Electorate* (2001)

**Table 9: Testing Cannon's Thesis in the Case of Wilson-Gorman;  
DV: Defeat in the 54th Congressional Election Cycle (0, 1)**

Variable	(a)	(b)
<b>Vote for Wilson-Gorman</b>	0.41*** (0.13)	0.34*** (0.13)
<b>Vote for Sherman Repeal</b>	0.27*** (0.09)	0.23*** (0.09)
<b>DW-NOMINATE (1st Dimension)</b>	1.37*** (0.31)	0.9** (0.37)
<b>DW-NOMINATE (2nd Dimension)</b>	0.32*** (0.11)	0.21* (0.13)
<b>Prior Vote Share</b>		-0.01*** (0.003)
<b>Western State</b>		0.1 (0.19)
<b>Midwestern State</b>		0.07 (0.09)
<b>Constant</b>	0.38* (0.18)	0.85*** (0.29)
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.17	0.24
<b>N</b>	185	185

OLS point estimates with standard errors in parentheses,  
\* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01