

The Domestic Politics of World Power: Explaining Debates over the United States Battleship Fleet, 1890-91

Abstract

The decision to construct a battleship fleet was an important early step in the transformation of the United States from a marginal player in world politics into a global power. Understanding the politics of this decision can illuminate states' motives for expanding their foreign policy ambitions as they grow economically. This paper evaluates three explanations for congressional support and opposition to the initial appropriation for this purpose in 1890-91. The first concerns differing regional interests in overseas trade and trade protection. The second treats the battleship fleet as a way to promote national unity in the face of social changes caused by industrialization and immigration. The third focuses on representatives' social proximity to the elites who promoted navalist ideas during this period. An analysis of roll-call votes in the House of Representatives finds strong support for the influence of trade interests. Immigration and labor unrest were also associated with support for the battleship fleet, though less strongly. I find little evidence that social proximity to the navalists made a difference, though this line of argument is more difficult to test.

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In January 1890, the Naval Policy Board chaired by Commodore W. P. McCann issued a report calling for the United States to build the largest navy in the world, including 35 ocean-going battleships. These vessels would embody the cutting edge of naval technology, with the largest guns and thickest available armor. The McCann Board's recommendation was a major departure from prior American naval policy. The United States had not previously built any ships of this sort. The new fleet was to be capable of engaging and destroying other great powers' navies in the open seas rather than simply raiding enemy commerce and defending the coasts. The report was followed shortly by the publication of Alfred Thayer Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, which emphasized the importance of this mission. The book soon became a best seller. Although the plan the Navy Department actually submitted a few months later called for only 20 battleships, it nevertheless clearly embraced the goal of building a blue-water navy. After a vigorous debate between April of 1890 and January of 1891, Congress authorized the construction of the first three battleships. Both contemporary observers and subsequent scholars have identified this decision as a watershed event in the rise of the United States as a world power (Rhodes 1999, 32-4; Shulman 1995, 128-34; Sprout and Sprout 1966 [1939], 205-17; Trubowitz 1998, 37-43).

After more than sixty years as a superpower, it is easy to take for granted a very broad definition of American interests around the world. It is worth remembering that American policy makers did not always understand the country's role in the world this way. Steps toward the expansion of the country's role in world politics, including the decision to build a battleship fleet, provoked considerable domestic political controversy. What explains support and opposition to the new navy and the expanding world role that went along with it? The historical importance of the policy change makes it a useful moment to evaluate possible answers to this question.

Historians and political scientists have applied several different arguments about the politics of foreign policy to this period. This paper presents a preliminary quantitative test of these claims. Overall, there is strong evidence that economic interests arising from international trade and, to a lesser extent, a desire to promote national unity the face of immigration and labor unrest, shaped the congressional debate over battleship construction. I find less support for arguments suggesting that support for the fleet arose mainly from individual-level ideational considerations.

Beyond the historical significance of the battleship debate, explanations for it also bear on the broader theoretical question of why domestic political conflict occurs over security issues. Military spending, intervention, and other security questions are often controversial, but the sources of disagreement over them are not well understood. As Frieden (1999, 62-3) noted in his review of arguments about the origins of preferences in international relations, research on foreign economic policy has been able to draw on well-developed economic theories explaining actors' preferences. Partly because there is no comparable body of work accounting for differences over questions of war and peace, explaining sub-national preferences on security issues has proven more difficult. In research on international conflict, there is a long tradition of abstracting away from domestic political differences, or even denying that they affect policy choice. Although scholarly interest in the impact of domestic politics on international conflict has grown enormously, most of it has focused on the role of domestic institutions rather than on the preferences of domestic political factions (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Russett and Oneal 2001). This line of research has produced many useful insights but has left the origins of domestic differences over these issues obscure. Explanations for this important shift in American foreign and defense policy should illuminate broader questions about the politics of these issues.

Explaining the Politics of Battleship-Building

The stakes in the debate over the construction of a battleship fleet were considerable. Because of the character of the international system at the time, projecting military power overseas was important for insuring American access to export markets in much of the world. The other major powers were aggressively establishing overseas colonies in Africa and Asia. By 1890, most of sub-Saharan Africa had been divided into areas of European rule. Parts of the Middle East and North Africa formerly held by the Ottoman Empire had also come under European control. The French had established colonies in Indochina and the Japanese, Germans, and Russians were seeking to do so in East Asia, perhaps partitioning the crumbling Chinese Empire. These emerging colonial powers posed a greater threat to American economic access than did Britain, with its longstanding empire, because they did not share Britain's commitment to free trade. A battleship fleet would help persuade the other powers to recognize American demands for continuing economic access to less developed areas of the world.

Americans were also concerned about the European colonial powers' intentions in the Western hemisphere. Without a military force capable of enforcing the Monroe Doctrine's prohibition on further European colonization in the hemisphere, there was no guarantee that these states would respect it. Canada might serve as a hostage to insure Britain's good behavior, but there was no comparable restraint on the other powers. French efforts to seize control of Mexico during the Civil War might be repeated elsewhere, especially if disorders in other American states provided them with a pretext for intervention. Without a battleship fleet of its own, the United States would have to rely on the Royal Navy to keep other powers out of the hemisphere.

For some, the battleship fleet and the more ambitious foreign policy that required it also held additional intangible benefits. The fleet would be a visible symbol of the nation's rising status as a world power. Shulman (1995, 46-57) points out that advocates of naval expansion mobilized considerable popular enthusiasm for the navy as a patriotic symbol of American national power. Because of their enormous size, technological sophistication, and (ostensibly) heroic overseas mission, battleships were especially saleable in these terms. Not all Americans found the vision of the country as a world-class military power appealing, but it is clear that many did.

Why did some Americans place greater stock in these potential benefits of the battleship fleet than others? Scholars who have studied the issue offer a variety of explanations. The remainder of this section will summarize three widely discussed arguments, drawing several testable hypotheses from each one.

Trade Interests

One of the best developed explanations for the politics of the battleship fleet focuses on its role in protecting access to international markets for American exports. Accounts of American foreign policy stressing overseas economic interests were very important in the historiography of American foreign policy during the 1960s and 1970s. Scholars of the "Wisconsin School," such as William Appleman Williams, Walter LaFeber, and Thomas McCormick, argued that the search for foreign markets drove the expansion of American political involvement around the world. This search became increasingly frantic as prices declined after 1873, something many hoped additional demand from foreign customers could stop. Williams' seminal formulation of the argument generalizes from the Open Door Notes of 1899-1900, which petitioned the major powers to guarantee equal commercial access to China. According to Williams, American policy

makers from the late nineteenth century through the Cold War sought a worldwide "Open Door" for American traders and investors, especially in less-developed parts of the world. Policy makers preferred to rely on diplomatic and economic instruments to advance their agenda. However, they were willing to use force when necessary to overcome resistance from economic nationalists in less developed countries or rival major powers seeking to create exclusive economic and political empires for themselves.¹

Building on the work of the Wisconsin School, Trubowitz (1998) and Narizny (2001; 2007) point to the centrality of the battleship fleet in the search for overseas markets for American manufactures. Continuing access to markets in less developed areas of the world depended in part of the ability of the United States to project its power overseas. There was greater support for the construction of a battleship fleet in parts of the country that stood to benefit from these markets for manufactures, especially the Northeast. By contrast, Southern and Western commodity exports had much less to gain from markets in less developed parts of the world, and Southerners were correspondingly less supportive of the battleship navy.²

Most accounts stressing the importance of export markets in shaping American foreign policy during this period have tended to slight the role of imports.³ In fact, demands for trade protection have important implications for the debates over battleships and the world role of the United States more generally. A key critique of the Wisconsin School was that the largest

¹ Williams (1972 [1959], 56-7). Other key works in this tradition include Williams (1969), LaFeber (1963), and McCormick (1967). For discussions of the Wisconsin School and its historiographical impact, see Perkins (1984) and Fry (1996).

² Trubowitz also stresses the political role of the benefits from the manufacture of steel and other commodities required to build the battleship fleet. These also accrued mainly to the Northeast. I lack the data at present to test the hypotheses this argument implies but intend to do so at a later time. See also Baack and Ray (1985).

³ Terrill (1973) is one of the few to discuss the role of the tariff at length. He treats it as a tactical disagreement among policy makers who were all committed to finding foreign markets for American exports. Some advocated selective reciprocal tariff reduction as a way to pursue these markets while continuing to protect American producers. Others preferred broader tariff reductions.

overseas markets for American exports were located in Europe, not the less developed regions where American expansionists directed their primary energies. The fact that European exports would compete with American manufactures in the U.S. domestic market helps explain this otherwise puzzling set of priorities. In the years before World War I, protecting the domestic market was an article of faith among Republicans, even as some also hoped for markets overseas. American manufacturers and their political representatives therefore needed markets in parts of the world that would not export manufactured goods to the United States. Latin America and China fit this description. As the world's principal industrial center, Europe emphatically did not. Continuing trade protection thus gave American foreign economic policy before World War I a particular regional emphasis on less developed areas.

By contrast, the Democratic critics of the battleship program, especially those from the South, also opposed the high tariffs Republicans preferred. Battleships were not necessary to secure access to European markets for American exports of cotton and other raw materials. On the contrary, the battleship fleet and the more assertive foreign policy it would support were likely to antagonize many of the principal buyers of these commodities. Moreover, financing the battleship fleet required the revenue from the high tariffs Republicans supported. For a variety of reasons, support for the battleship building went hand in hand with support for trade protection.

This argument about the role of export markets and trade protection suggests four hypotheses about congressional support for battleship-building:

H1. Members of Congress from states that were relatively dependent on exports to Europe should be less likely to support the construction of a battleship fleet.

H2. Members of Congress from states that were relatively dependent on exports to less developed areas of the world should be more likely to support the construction of a battleship fleet.

H3. Members of Congress from states that were relatively sensitive to imports from Europe should be less likely to support the construction of a battleship fleet.

H4. Members of Congress from states that were relatively sensitive to imports from less developed areas of the world should be less likely to support the construction of a battleship fleet.

Industrialization and the "Psychic Crisis"

Several historians have suggested a second possible explanation for domestic support of the battleship fleet and American overseas expansionism more broadly. This line of argument closely parallels arguments about social imperialism in the European context, especially in the case of Germany (e.g., Wehler 1970; Snyder 1991, 66-111). It also bears a family resemblance to the diversionary theory of war (e.g., Levy 1989). Focusing on the later decision to annex the Philippines, Richard Hofstadter (1966 [1951], 148-9) argues that a constellation of social problems arising from industrialization produced a "psychic crisis" that drove the United States toward a more aggressive foreign policy in the 1890s. These problems included free-silver agitation among farmers, growing labor unrest, urban corruption, and new waves of "seemingly unassimilable" immigrants. Hofstadter argued that American elites responded to these problems through both movements for social reform at home and expansion abroad. Patriotic symbols linked to the growth of American military power became increasingly important as a means of promoting national solidarity in the face of these problems.

Subsequent writers further developed Hofstadter's case (e.g., May 1968). Robert Dallek (1982, 340) was among the most systematic, writing that, at the root of American expansionism "were the domestic tensions over the country's shift from an agricultural, rural, largely homogenous society to an industrial, urban one with a heterogeneous population." Rhodes' account of the battleship debate strikes a similar note, arguing that social changes made the traditional account of what it meant to be an American obsolete.

It offered no explanation of why an urban proletariat should join in common society with an industrial capitalist class, or of why Protestants of English, German, and Dutch descent should work in common cause with Catholics and Jews from Southern and Eastern Europe. (Rhodes 1999, 62)

Appeals to competition against other powers offered a way to promote national solidarity among this newly diverse population. More cynically, one might say that jingoism offered a conservative alternative to demands for sweeping domestic change from labor activists, urban social reformers, and rural populists.

Historical accounts building on Hofstadter's "psychic crisis" thesis can potentially explain the politics of battleship-building because the social changes they emphasize did not affect the entire country uniformly. It makes sense to suppose that support for the new military posture should be stronger in areas of the country where these trends were most pronounced. Like the case concerning economic interests in international trade, this one suggests that the new foreign policy served manufacturing interests best. The two arguments rest on different causal processes, however. One suggests that trade interests might have prompted support for the battleship fleet even if American society had remained ethnically homogenous and labor had been relatively quiescent. The other suggests that the battleship fleet would have been politically important even if it had not been necessary to secure access to markets in less developed regions of the world. The "psychic crisis" thesis thus implies a different set of testable hypotheses about congressional support for the fleet.

H5. Members of Congress from states experiencing an increasingly level of labor unrest should be more likely to support the construction of a battleship fleet.

H6. Members of Congress from states that were home to a growing proportion of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe should be more likely to support the construction of a battleship fleet.

These hypotheses concern changes in labor unrest and immigration because the underlying argument is about the response to trends rather than simply to the level of these variables. It is the fact that these phenomena were new that made them politically important. I will return to this issue when presenting the empirical analysis.

The Role of Ideas

A third line of argument found primarily in more recent scholarship downplays the role of external social and economic forces, focusing instead on the role of ideas. As noted above, Rhodes' account of the battleship debate contends that support for the new naval strategy arose in part as a response to major changes in American society. However, Rhodes (1999, 59-70) places a much heavier emphasis on the nature of the ideas that supporters of the battleship fleet held. New concepts about the role of the state in American life, the nature of war, and the requirements for military success greatly strengthened the case for building a battleship navy and adopting the more assertive foreign policy that came with it. Rhodes' essential claim is that the new naval strategy was adopted because it made sense to more people as the new ideas spread.

What makes Rhodes' account of the battleship debate distinctive is his refusal to focus on external influences on the spread of these ideas. Unlike Hofstadter or Dallek, Rhodes argues forcefully that the new concepts were not simply reflection of interests.

Just as religions have an internal logic of their own that transcends the immediate instrumental interest of any of their adherents, so too do political beliefs. And, rather than reflecting the power of various interest groups, the influence of beliefs—political or religious—reflects their ability to permit individuals to overcome key cultural and cognitive problems and to impose an acceptable order on social relationships and intellectual processes. (Rhodes 1999, 37)

Though neither discusses the 1890s specifically, both Legro (2005) and Dueck (2006) make a similar case for the role of ideas in explaining changes in American foreign policy more

generally. Other historical accounts of American foreign policy that stress the role of various schools of thought implicitly adopt the same position (e.g., Mead 2001). In these accounts, policy arises from intellectual debate, and the positions taken in this debate are largely independent of influences from the material world.

This line of argument is more difficult to test than those concerning trade interests or the social pressures arising from industrialization. Ideas cannot be observed unless actors express them. This makes it difficult to avoid a tautology when explaining actors' policy positions. In order to do so, the ideas political actors express (the proposed independent variable) have to be distinguished from the positions they take in political debates (the dependent variable). It would be difficult to advocate the construction of a battleship fleet without employing concepts and arguments that make it appear to be a wise choice. Evaluating whether the ideas members of Congress use in debates predict their policy positions is thus not an informative exercise. It begs the question of whether the need to support the policy position led members to adopt the ideas they used, or vice versa.

I will pursue a different strategy for testing this line of argument here. If the ideational argument is correct, individual-level factors should be more important in predicting members' positions on battleship construction than conditions in their home state. Although people develop their ideas in part by interacting with others, they are fundamentally individual phenomena. Two individual characteristics should make members of Congress more likely to have internalized the ideas that supported the new naval strategy. First, younger members of Congress should be more likely to support battleship construction. These individuals should be less likely to have commitments to older ideas about the navy. Second, individuals who were socially closer to the group that developed the new ideas should be more likely to have adopted them. Rhodes quotes

O'Connell's observation that the key advocates of the new naval strategy were "Anglo-Saxons of upper class origins and anti-commercial leanings," including a variety of famous names from the early years of what would later be known as the foreign policy establishment (Rhodes 1999, 63; O'Connell 1991, 69). I will use attendance at an Ivy League university as a rough indicator of social proximity to this group. These individual characteristics lead to the final two hypotheses to be tested here.

H7. Members of Congress who were relatively young should be more likely to support the construction of a battleship fleet.

H8. Members of Congress who attended an Ivy League college should be more likely to support the construction of a battleship fleet.

Research Design and Data

I will test the hypotheses set out in the previous section using all six roll-call votes on battleship construction in the House of Representatives during the pivotal 1890-91 debate on naval appropriations. Table 1 provides information about each of these votes. Unfortunately, a comparable analysis of the Senate's deliberations is not possible. There were even fewer roll-call votes on the naval appropriations bill taken there, and none that directly concerned battleship construction. The dependent variable in the analysis that follows will be the individual member's vote on each issue. For the analysis, the votes are recoded as indicated in Table 1 such that a "1" indicates support for battleship fleet, and "0" indicates opposition. I will treat expressions of the member's position other than voting, such as pairing, as votes. Because the issue and precise circumstances surrounding each vote were different, the model will include a dummy variable for each vote. This will permit the baseline probability of supporting each measure to vary.

[Table 1 here]

Even a cursory examination of the information in Table 1 reveals that political party played an important role in shaping support and opposition to the battleship fleet. Republicans were always more supportive than were Democrats. Even though none of the arguments set out in the last section stresses party, it is clearly necessary to consider how the influences each one did emphasize relate to this consideration. These arguments concerned the origins of political actors' preferences. Parties are a way of organizing groups and individuals with similar views into an effective coalition for political action, whether it is an election campaign, legislation, or policy implementation. The difficulty that party poses for assessing the influence of various considerations on the way legislators vote is that membership in a coalition might well lead members to deviate from their personal preferences on some issues in order to hold the coalition together and secure the votes of other members on different questions. Party is thus a direct influence on how members vote and belongs in a model of this process.

At the same time, a member's party is not independent of the constituent interests discussed in the last section. Parties have well known positions on many issues that they promote during elections. Battleship construction was definitely one such issue. Constituents with a stake in it had every reason to select their representative based in part on his or her party. Districts with interests favoring battleship construction should be more likely to elect Republicans, while those with opposing interests should be more likely to elect Democrats. Party thus embodies in part the influence of constituent interests in the models to be estimated here. Constituent interests can have an indirect effect on how members vote through party in addition to their direct effect through members' individual preferences.⁴ I consider both effects when presenting the empirical results.

⁴ There is a large literature on this issue in the field of American politics. My own views on it are discussed in greater detail in Fordham and McKeown (2003). See also Bearce (2003).

Data on Trade Interests

Measuring the influence of export-orientation and import-sensitivity with respect to different areas of the world requires data on both exports and imports, disaggregated by commodity and country or origin or destination, and data on the production of these commodities by state. (Production data by congressional district would be even better but are not available for this period.) These data exist but not in easily accessible form. Machine-readable data on both trade and output for this historical period are too highly aggregated. Trade data disaggregated by commodity are not disaggregated by the country that received the exports or sent the imports. Trade data disaggregated by country of origin or destination are not disaggregated by commodity (e.g., Carter, et al. 2006; Simon and Novack 1964; Lipsey 1963). Similarly, while much of the original census data on output is available in machine-readable form, state-level data disaggregated by sector are not (e.g., Haines and ICPSR 2004). Most of these data have to be entered by hand.

Given the necessary data, it is possible to compute indices of the export-orientation and import-sensitivity with respect to various regions of the world for each U.S. state. Previous research, including my own, has employed these measures in analyses of Congressional voting (e.g., Bailey and Brady 1998; Fordham 1998; 2008). The first step is to gather data on exports disaggregated by commodity and country of destination as well as data on imports by commodity and country of origin. The United States government kept detailed records of American exports and imports during the period considered here. Country-by-commodity data on exports and imports were compiled in the annual volumes of *Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the*

United States.⁵ For example, the 1890 volume presents data on 292 imported commodities for 75 states and colonies. It also provides data on 276 U.S. export commodities to 77 states and colonies.

Next, the traded commodities must be matched to the sectors of manufacturing, mining, and agriculture that produce them within the United States. The Census gathered detailed data on employment, capital investment, and output in all three areas, alongside data on population, through 1900. Beginning in 1905, economic data were gathered separately about every five years. For example, the 1890 Census included state-level data on manufacturing in more than 400 industries. Much of the data from the Census of Population, including the economic data, was rendered into machine-readable form by Haines and ICPSR (2004). Unfortunately, the state-level economic data were not included in this effort. Roy (1990) gathered sectoral data on manufacturing from the Census from 1880 through 1914 for the country as a whole and for three major manufacturing states: New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. I will eventually code the economic data in the Census on the remaining states but have not yet completed this process. For the preliminary empirical analysis in the next section, I must therefore treat the entire manufacturing sector as a single unit.

Once the raw data on trade and production are gathered, it is necessary to group them together into matching categories. The categories must be broad enough to accommodate the different schemes used to measure trade and production but narrow enough to capture regional differences. Following Roy's (1990) example, I will eventually use the 95 manufacturing sectors

⁵ These data were also compiled for some less regularly issued government publications. *Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States* appears to be the most complete source. Happily, the Google books project has made this series, which is no longer protected by copyright, available free of charge online.

originally set out by Evans (1948).⁶ I will supplement the manufacturing data on with comparable information on 9 mineral and 15 agricultural sectors for which trade data are also available. These data can be used to compute indices of export orientation and import sensitivity for each sector. The export orientation index is simply the value of exports divided by total production. The import sensitivity index is the value of imports divided by the sum of domestic production and imports. Both indices can be computed for specific parts of the world using export and import data disaggregated by country of origin or destination.

Next, these data can be combined with state-level data on employment in mining, manufacturing, and agriculture to estimate the import sensitivity and export orientation of U.S. states. In order to do this, I use state-level employment data to construct a set of weights indicating each sector's economic importance within each state. These weights are the sector's share of overall employment in the state. The weighted sum of the sectoral export orientation and import sensitivity score across all industries in each state yields an index of the state's overall export-orientation or import sensitivity.

Data on Strikes and Immigration

Testing the hypotheses drawn from the "psychic crisis" argument requires data on strikes and immigration. Fortunately, the United States government kept detailed data on both phenomena. The Census kept track of the country of birth of the U.S. population. The argument reviewed in the last section focused primarily on immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, what the

⁶ The industries used in pre-World War II census data were not gathered under the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system. The SIC system for classifying the United States economy was developed in the 1930s and remained in use until it was replaced by the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) in 1997. Because it is difficult to render earlier Census data into SIC categories below the 2-digit level, Evans categories are good alternative.

1890 Census termed "Latin Nations" and "Slav Nations."⁷ In the analysis that follows, the change in the proportion of the total population in each state that was born in these countries between the 1880 and 1890 Census will indicate the growth in immigration.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, state-level data on strikes were presented in periodic reports of the Commissioner of Labor. The Sixteenth Annual Report provides data from the 1880s and 1890s (Carroll 1901). For the analysis in the next section, I will use the difference between the number of strikes per 1000 persons living in each state in 1890 during the 1881-85 and 1886-90 periods to indicate growth in strike activity. The argument in the last section concerns broad trends in labor unrest, something better represented by change over a relatively long period of time, not just since the preceding year. The five-year totals are also less prone to distortion by a single unusual year.

Data on Individual Member Characteristics

Data on members' ages, and on whether they attended an "Ivy League" college, are available from ICPSR and McKibben (1997). The dataset treats the following institutions as "Ivy League": Yale, Harvard, Brown, Columbia, Princeton, Pennsylvania, Dartmouth, Cornell, Rutgers, and West Point.

Empirical Results

Table 2 presents the results of five probit models of roll-call voting on the battleship fleet in the House of Representatives. The first includes only party, the next three test the arguments discussed earlier separately, and the last tests all three together. Although the causal processes on

⁷ The Latin nations listed in the Census were France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece. The Slav nations were Russia, Hungary, Bohemia, and Poland.

which each of these arguments rests are not mutually exclusive, two of the three arise largely from industrialization. The variables used to represent them are thus collinear in practice.

Because there are only 44 state-level observations of the economic and social conditions these arguments suggest are important, testing them together demands a lot from the limited data available to us.

[Table 2 about here]

The first model in Table 2 contains only the representative's party. The results underscore the importance of this variable, something that was apparent from the descriptive statistics on the individual votes in Table 1. The model fit statistics indicate that this simple model performs nearly as well as those with additional independent variables. The predicted probability that a Republican would vote in favor of one of the battleship building measures was 0.92 compared to 0.11 for a Democrat. As I noted in the last section, the effect of party embodies other influences. I will return to this important issue shortly.

The results of the remaining models offer only qualified support for any of the three sets of claims outlined in the first section. Those in the second column support only one of the four hypotheses about trade interests. Members from states that were highly sensitive to European imports were substantially more likely to support the battleship fleet. A comparison of the fourth and the fortieth ranked states gives a realistic sense of the size of this relationship without relying on the most extreme values of these variables. Holding other variables at their mean values, a shift from the fourth most import-sensitive to the fortieth most sensitive state would change the predicted probability that a Republican would vote for such a measure from 0.99 to 0.62. For a Democrat, the probability of a pro-battleship vote would change from 0.43 to 0.01. This is a substantively important effect but it does not persist in the final model, which includes all the

independent variables. Moreover, the other three trade variables not only fail to have the expected relationship to the dependent variable but have the incorrect signs and would be statistically significant if the hypotheses about them had been reversed. Overall, the direct effect of trade interests on Congressional voting is not very robust.

There is more evidence for the "psychic crisis" model in Table 2. Increases in both strikes and immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe were associated greater support for battleship building. In model 3, neither effect was large but both were statistically significant. Holding other variables at their mean values, a shift from the fourth to the fortieth state in terms of the change in Eastern and Southern European immigration would increase the chance of a Republican voting for a battleship construction measure from 0.90 to 0.94. For a Democrat, the probability would decline from 0.16 to 0.10. The magnitudes are similar for the increases in strikes per 1000 population from the 1881-85 and the 1886-90 periods. A shift from the fourth to the fortieth state would decrease the probability that a Republican would vote for a battleship construction measure from 0.94 to 0.87. For a Democrat, the probability would decline from 0.16 to 0.07. Only the effect of strikes persists in the model containing all independent variables, remaining roughly the same size.

Evidence for the effect of individual social proximity to those promoting navalist ideas is quite weak. In model 4, age was not statistically significant but having attended an Ivy League university was associated with greater support for the battleship fleet. A Republican with this background had a 0.97 probability of supporting such a measure compared to a 0.91 probability for a Republican who had not attended an Ivy League college. For a Democrat, the probabilities were 0.23 and 0.11, respectively. This effect was not statistically significant in the full model, however. Because these effects do not stem from industrialization, concerns about collinearity

are far less important here. Moreover, because both Ivy League universities and the manufacturing center were located in the Northeast, controls for other regional effects are arguably critical in assessing the effects of attending these colleges. Overall, the results in Table 2 do not suggest that the Ivy League effect is very robust.

The results in Table 2 clearly indicate that party was the dominant influence on the battleship debate. However, as I noted in the last section, party is not independent of the other influences in the model. To the extent that the other constituent interests included in the model influenced the party of their representative, some of its effect on their positions is indirectly due to these interests. In order to assess this influence, Table 3 presents three models of representatives' party during the 51st Congress, when the debate on the initial battleships took place.

[Table 3 about here]

The results in Table 3 point to the importance of constituent trade interests in shaping representatives' party affiliation. In the first model, export-orientation to Europe is strongly related to party. Once again, a comparison between the values of the fourth- and fortieth-ranked states on the independent variables is useful in assessing their substantive importance. Holding the other variables at their means, a change in the export-orientation score of the fourth-ranked state to that of the fortieth-ranked state would decrease the probability that the representative was a Democrat from 0.92 to 0.28. This relationship remains roughly the same magnitude when the other state-level independent variables are added, as in model 3. In this model, import sensitivity to Europe is also statistically significant. A shift from the value fourth-ranked state to that of the fortieth would reduce the probability that the representative was a Democrat from 0.71 to 0.31. On the other hand, increases in strikes and immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe were

not as strongly associated with party. Neither of these variables is statistically significant in model 2. Strikes had an effect in model 3, but it was not as large as that of trade interests. A shift from the fourth- to the fortieth-ranked state on this variable would increase the probability that the representative was a Democrat from 0.43 to 0.53.

The strong relationship between party and trade interests makes sense in light of the political importance of the tariff in the late nineteenth century (e.g., Bense 2000, 457-509; Terrill 1973). The tariff not only protected the manufacturing sector and some parts of agriculture, but was also the principal source of government revenue. The issue of trade protection was highly partisan, with Democratic presidents reducing it and Republicans increasing it when they took office (Weingast, Goldstein, and Bailey 1997). The Republican Party's commitment to trade protection persisted through the 1940s (Irwin and Kroszner 1999). The importance of trade orientation to Europe, rather than toward less developed parts of the world, also makes sense in light of the fact that Europe was both the principal market for Southern exports and the main competitor for Northeastern manufacturing. Whatever the hopes for new markets in less developed countries, trade with Europe was central to the politics of trade in the 1890s.

The influence of trade interests on party produces a substantial indirect effect on how representatives voted on the battleship fleet. Because most of their impact on support for the battleship fleet works through party, the total effect of export-orientation and import-sensitivity toward Europe are greater than they appear in the models presented in Table 2. When the effect of these variables on members' party is considered, a shift in export-orientation from the value of the fourth-ranked state to that of the fortieth ranked state would reduce the probability of voting

to support the battleship fleet from 0.63 to 0.39. A comparable shift in import-sensitivity would increase the probability of such a vote from 0.27 to 0.73.

The various schools of thought presented in the opening section emphasize different causal processes but they are not mutually exclusive. The results in Tables 2 and 3 provide some useful insights about how they relate to one other. First, trade interests worked primarily through party affiliation. The direct effects of the export orientation and import sensitivity variables in Table 2 are weak and not in line with theoretical expectations. On the other hand, representatives' party affiliations were strongly related to their constituents' stakes in trade with Europe. If trade interests worked primarily through electoral competition between the parties, as these results suggest, it is possible that the associated interest groups engaged in relatively little lobbying. Representatives from the party that sympathized with their views were highly likely to take positions they supported in any event. Influencing those from the other party would have been very difficult. It would have made sense for political actors concerned with trade issues to focus on electioneering rather than lobbying. These incentives might well influence the composition of documentary evidence about the battleship debate.

By contrast, the conditions associated with Hofstadter's "psychic crisis" appear to have influenced how members voted more than their party affiliation. Trends in immigration and strike activity show up as influences on how members voted in the models presented in Table 2. Evidence for their effect on party affiliation in the models presented in Table 3 is much weaker. This result makes sense because the recent developments emphasized in this line of argument would have had less opportunity to shape the party system than did longstanding trade interests. It would have made more sense for societal actors associated with these political interests to lobby members of Congress, something that might well show up in documentary evidence

concerning the legislative process. Evidence that most of the lobbying surrounding the battleship debate concerned issues like those Hofstadter and others pointed out should not be taken to indicate that these concerns were more important. The evidence here suggests otherwise. Because party had such a strong influence of how members voted on the battleship fleet, the total effect of trends in strikes and immigration was much less than that of the trade interests.

Conclusion

Overall, the evidence considered here sheds light on three well known historical and theoretical arguments about the politics of foreign policy during the rise of the United States' as a world power. Of the three arguments reviewed here, the one emphasizing trade interests finds the most support. Trade interests had little direct effect on the battleship votes in 1890-91, but export orientation and import sensitivity to Europe strongly influenced members' party affiliations. Their indirect effects on these votes were substantively large as a result. The trade interests that made the largest difference were those arising from trade (and trade protection) with respect to Europe. Much has been made of the drive for foreign markets in Asia and Latin America. The interests associated with this drive might well have made a larger difference later, but the trade interests that shaped the battleship were mainly those arising from the struggle between manufacturing industries seeking protecting against European competition and raw material exporters interested in access to European markets.

The empirical evidence offers more limited support for the other two arguments reviewed in the opening section. Trends in labor unrest and the arrival of new immigrants who were ethnically and religiously distinct from the native population appear to have had a small but significant effect on the battleship debate. For those concerned about these trends, the battleship fleet was valuable mainly as a unifying symbol of national power. The evidence suggests that

these concerns influenced how members voted directly rather than working through party, as was the case with trade interests.

Claims about the role of ideas receive the least support in the empirical analysis. Variables indicating social proximity to those generating new ideas about the role of a battleship fleet had relatively little effect. Attending an Ivy League university had a modest effect in one of the models presented here, but it was not robust to the inclusion of other independent variables. Although there is little evidence for this line of argument here, it would be a mistake to dismiss it. Failure to reject the null hypothesis does not indicate that the null hypothesis is true. The variables used to represent the role of ideas are crude proxies for the proposed causal process. Better measures might produce different results.

There is a difference between explaining policy debates and explaining policy outcomes. The data examined here provide useful insights about the politics of the battleship debate. However, they do not reveal why it turned out as it did. It is possible that the elites who wanted a blue-water navy occupied critical institutional positions that would have enabled them to get the policy they preferred even if their opponents had been stronger. Even if this were the case, understanding the origins of support and opposition to the policy would still be important because of what it reveals about the underlying purposes of the policy. Also, even when state actors can impose their preferred policy, their political opponents can sometimes slow its implementation, as was the case in the construction of the battleship fleet, or exact compensating concessions in other policy areas.

Even though the historical arguments tested here concern a relatively narrow slice of space and time, they have broader theoretical implications about the politics of foreign policy. The battleship debate appears to be another instance in which the economic stakes on an

important security question shaped its politics. Previous research has found evidence of similar processes in other historical cases.⁸ Trade, foreign investment, and other economic concerns create winners and losers. Security issues, such as defense against foreign attack, are more likely to be universally shared, thus creating fewer political divisions. It is possible that the economic stakes on security issues like the one considered here have decisive effects on the politics of foreign policy simply because they create more political conflict than do shared security concerns.

This paper is a preliminary effort to explain the politics of foreign policy during the rise of the United States as a world power. Much remains to be done. For starters, I have yet to finish gathering state-level data on individual manufacturing industries for 1890. Complete data might well change the results presented in this paper, though they are unlikely to overturn its main conclusions. More importantly, data on later periods should answer questions about subsequent foreign policy debates similar to those posed here, providing a broader overview of the major changes and continuities in the politics of American foreign policy during the country's emergence as a world power.

⁸ See, for example, Kehr (1977), Fordham (1998; 2008), Narizny (2007); and Trubowitz (1998).

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Table 1.
House Roll-Call Votes on Battleship Construction, 1890-91

Date	Issue	Outcome
15 April 1890	Amendment to limit battleship funding to \$4 million for each. ("No" vote supports battleship construction.)	Defeated, 106-132 D: 80-28 R: 24-103 Union Labor: 1-0
15 April 1890	Amendment to recommit bill to committee with instructions to provide funds for the construction of only one battleship. ("No" vote supports battleship construction.)	Defeated, 98-129 D: 83-25 R: 15-104
25 June 1890	Vote on passage of the naval appropriations bill, as amended by the conference committee, providing for the construction of three battleships. ("Yes" vote supports battleship construction.)	Passed, 139-104 D: 10-100 R: 128-4 Union Labor: 1-0
23 January 1891	Procedural motion to organize House for debate of naval appropriation bill. ("Yes" vote supports battleship construction.)	Passed, 144-95 D: 2-95 R: 141-0 Union Labor: 1-0
26 January 1891	Procedural motion to organize House for debate of naval appropriation bill. ("Yes" vote supports battleship construction.)	Passed, 135-108 D: 4-104 R: 132-4 Union Labor: 1-0
26 January 1891	Motion to recommit the bill to committee with instructions to eliminate a paragraph providing additional funds for naval construction. ("No" vote supports battleship construction.)	Passed, 70-148 D: 67-30 R: 3-117 Union Labor: 0-1

Table 2.
Probit Models of House Votes on Battleship Construction, 1890-91

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Democrat	-2.58*	-2.71*	-2.59*	-2.60*	-2.81*
	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)
Export-orientation toward Europe		7.00 (1.88)			5.30 (1.90)
Import sensitivity to Europe		230.72* (50.41)			101.26 (68.86)
Export-orientation toward less developed areas		-275.29 (53.51)			-171.00 (61.91)
Import sensitivity to less developed areas		47.18 (10.71)			47.05 (10.11)
Change in number of strikes per 1000 population in state, 1881-85 to 1886-90			3.81* (0.56)		3.29* (1.22)
Change in proportion of state population born in Eastern or Southern Europe			15.94* (8.59)		15.16* (10.26)
Representative attended an Ivy League university				0.49* (0.20)	0.07 (0.26)
Age of representative				-0.003 (0.006)	-0.003 (0.007)
Constant	1.38* (0.25)	0.15 (0.31)	1.09* (0.24)	1.50* (0.42)	0.76 (0.47)
Observations	1,408	1,408	1,408	1,408	1,408
Percent correctly predicted	89.4	89.6	89.8	89.4	90.0
Proportional reduction in error	74.4	74.9	75.2	74.4	75.7

Note: Asterisk indicates significance at the $p < 0.05$ level in a one-tailed test. Robust standard errors adjusted for clustering on the state are reported in parentheses. All models also include a dummy variable for each of the six roll-call votes.

Table 3.
Probit Models of Party Affiliation in the House of Representatives, 51st Congress

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Export-orientation toward Europe	9.77* (2.90)		8.08* (2.98)
Import sensitivity to Europe	2.31 (56.71)		-107.48* (56.63)
Export-orientation toward less developed areas	-78.79 (67.88)		15.25 (68.06)
Import sensitivity to less developed areas	5.30 (22.96)		4.05 (23.83)
Change in number of strikes per 1000 population in state, 1881-85 to 1886-90		-0.46 (1.45)	2.24* (0.83)
Change in proportion of state population born in Eastern or Southern Europe		-17.65 (16.29)	16.34 (10.47)
Constant	-0.23* (0.45)	0.09 (0.18)	0.12 (0.46)
Observations	355	355	355
Percent correctly predicted	72.1	62.5	71.8
Proportional reduction in error	41.8	21.8	41.2

Note: Asterisk indicates significance at the $p < 0.05$ level in a one-tailed test. Robust standard errors adjusted for clustering on the state are reported in parentheses.