The Rise and Fall of the Know-Nothing Party

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[We] have to be prepared to talk honestly...we have to listen to the concerns that working people, our forgotten working people, have over the record pace of immigration and it’s impact on their jobs...

We also have to be honest about the fact that not everyone who seeks to join our country will be able to successfully assimilate.

When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best...They’re sending people that have lots of problems and they’re bringing those problems with us.

The present European immigration is deeply prejudicial to the fair remuneration of American labor.

The alien born ...cannot be competent to enter into spirit and comprehend the genius of our institutions.

State Almshouses now contain two thousand foreign paupers...our State Prison, Jails, and Houses of Correction, over six thousand five hundred foreign inmates per annum...a large proportion of whom were shipped here at the expense of foreign authorities, to relieve their native countries from their support.

[Henry J. Gardner Inaugural Speech; Jan. 1855]
- This paper seeks to use the lens of history to identify factors that led to the rise and fall of the Know-Nothing party.
  - Future work will also explore the consequences of the Know-Nothing party on health and socioeconomic status of the Irish.

- The Know Nothing or American Party is perhaps the most prominent anti-immigrant movement in US history - lens of history prove useful to understanding cycles of nativism.
1. Background

2. Data

3. Suggestive Evidence
   a) Archival research
   b) Bivariate correlations
   c) Multivariate regression

4. Discussion
- **Throughout the US:** Vowed to reduce the political influence of immigrants, particularly Catholics oath-bound secret society, operated out of lodges, if asked say "know nothing" about party.

- Burst onto the American political scene in 1854, by the end of the following year had captured the 8 governorships, over one hundred congressional seats, mayorships of Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago plus thousands of local officials.

- **Initiation Requirements:** Native born, parents as well, grandparents as well (or serve in Revolution).

Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts, Mulkern
Irish Immigration to the US

Great Famine 1845-152.
Commonwealth of Massachusetts: "in its first run for statewide office, tallied the largest number of votes of any party to that time and swept its candidates – political unknowns for the most part – into virtually every elective office in the state." All but three state representatives.

Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts, Mulkern
Antebellum Politics in Massachusetts

Graphs by year
Hypothesized Factors that Led to Know-Nothing Rise (Historical-Political)

1. Irish Immigration.
   a) Naturalization.
   b) Paupers.

2. Slavery/Temperance.
Anti-Catholic Sentiment

- [the alien] has been taught as the fundamental truth of his religion that spiritual obligation overrides mere temporal and civil obligation [Gardner, 1855]
Highly Successful in Massachusetts

**Irish**

**Catholic**
Urbanization in Massachusetts
1. Labor Market Competition.

2. Industrialization and Structural Change.
   a) Confluence of immigration + urban/shift to factories.
   b) By mid-1820s, manufacturing had grown to be the largest sector of the economy. $83 mil to $215 mil ’45-’55.
   c) Boot and shoe production in Massachusetts accounted for more than a third of the nation’s output.
Data

1. ANNUAL, TOWN LEVEL VOTES FOR GOVERNOR 1854 to 1857
   a) Newly discovered and digitized from Commonwealth Archives

2. TOWN - LEVEL CHARACTERISTICS
   a) Paupers (native and foreign), Irish-born, Urban/Rural, Mill town

3. MEMBERSHIP LISTS

4. OCCUPATIONAL COMPOSITION OF IRISH AND NATIVE-BORN
   a) 1850 Census (queries individuals on place of birth and occupation)
   b) Digitizing Massachusetts 1855 Population Census

5. INDUSTRIAL COMPOSITION OF TOWNS
   a) Digitizing 1850 Industrial Census
   b) Digitizing Industrial Statistics from 1845 and 1855
- Digitized names of 200 members, found 53 in 1850 Census

- Age, occupation and real estate wealth of members vs. non-members (other natives in East Boston)

- Slightly older (36 years of age vs. 34)

- Higher occupational score (not common laborers)

- More likely to have real estate wealth (10% vs. 3%).
Membership Lists

- Anbinder (historian) performs a similar analysis using lists from East Boston, Worcester, Portland, Canandagiua.

- By far, the most common profession - particularly in the Massachusetts chapters, was "high-skill" (~60%).

  These statistics contradict the widely held belief that the Know Nothings were an organization disproportionately dominated by workingmen... The socio-economic background of Know Nothing lodge members suggest that economic grievances were not at the heart of the Order’s popularity.

- Limited view of economic impacts.
Evidence on Labor Market Composition

Native

Irish
Bivariate Correlations between Know-Nothing Vote...

Irish

Free Soil
Bivariate Correlations between Know-Nothing Vote...

Laborers

Mechanics
Empirical Strategy

$$(\text{Outcome})_{i(j)} = \beta_1 (\text{LMC})_i + \beta_2 (\text{IND})_i + \beta_3 (\% \text{ Irish})_i + \beta_4 (\% \text{ Free Soil})_i + X_i' \Omega + e_i$$

- Outcomes = Know-Nothing Vote Share. [Maps]
- LMC = labor market competition (low skill)
- IND = industrialization (affecting mechanics - medium skill)
- $X$ includes constant, mill, foreign paupers, urban dummy, % Whig, growth in Irish pop, and county fixed effects.
Identification

LMC using shift-share - share Irish comprising occupations over time, weighted by native-born in town $i$ working in occupation $j$.

$$\sum_j ShrNative_i^{1850, j} \cdot (\Delta Shrlrish_i^j).$$

IND using shift-share - state-level change in factory output for good $k$, weighted by share of state’s craftsmen making $k$ within town $i$.

$$\sum_k ShrNative_i^{1850, k} \cdot (\Delta Y_{Mass.}^k).$$
## Results on Percent Know Nothing Vote (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1854</th>
<th>1855</th>
<th>1867</th>
<th>1857</th>
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<tr>
<td>Log Agriculturalists</td>
<td>-2.698</td>
<td>-4.352***</td>
<td>-0.106</td>
<td>-1.433</td>
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<td>(1.833)</td>
<td>(1.667)</td>
<td>(1.821)</td>
<td>(1.248)</td>
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<td>Log Laborers</td>
<td>-0.424</td>
<td>-0.452</td>
<td>0.230</td>
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<td>(0.969)</td>
<td>(0.983)</td>
<td>(1.120)</td>
<td>(0.756)</td>
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<td>Log Mechanics</td>
<td>3.548**</td>
<td>2.657**</td>
<td>2.678</td>
<td>0.650</td>
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<td>(1.643)</td>
<td>(1.331)</td>
<td>(1.803)</td>
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<td>Log Professionals</td>
<td>-1.361</td>
<td>0.497</td>
<td>-0.891</td>
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<td>(1.828)</td>
<td>(1.780)</td>
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<td>County FE</td>
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<td>298</td>
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<td>Foreign Paupers</td>
<td>-0.00362</td>
<td>0.000116</td>
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<td>(0.0155)</td>
<td>(0.0235)</td>
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<td>Delta Pct Irish</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>-0.119</td>
<td>-0.189</td>
<td>-0.106</td>
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<td>(0.284)</td>
<td>(0.288)</td>
<td>(0.282)</td>
<td>(0.131)</td>
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<td>Pct Irish 1855</td>
<td>-0.165</td>
<td>0.0870</td>
<td>-0.170</td>
<td>0.248**</td>
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<td>(0.161)</td>
<td>(0.180)</td>
<td>(0.154)</td>
<td>(0.111)</td>
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<td>Pct Free Soil 1852</td>
<td>0.00606</td>
<td>-0.175**</td>
<td>0.0407</td>
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<td>(0.0851)</td>
<td>(0.0873)</td>
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<td>Pct Whig 1852</td>
<td>-0.120</td>
<td>-0.0497</td>
<td>-0.00331</td>
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<td>(0.0814)</td>
<td>(0.0792)</td>
<td>(0.0872)</td>
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<td>Mill</td>
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<td>6.164**</td>
<td>0.309</td>
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<td>(2.141)</td>
<td>(2.689)</td>
<td>(2.640)</td>
<td>(1.993)</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
<td>-2.834</td>
<td>-5.706*</td>
<td>-6.013**</td>
<td>-1.759</td>
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<td>(2.736)</td>
<td>(2.993)</td>
<td>(2.714)</td>
<td>(2.329)</td>
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Results on Percent Know Nothing Vote (3)
Results on Percent Know Nothing Vote (3) - Mechanics

Mill = 1

Mill = 0
Results on Percent Know Nothing Vote (4) - Laborers

\[ \text{Mill} = 1 \quad \text{Mill} = 0 \]
Concluding Remarks

- Suggestion economic forces, particularly associated with mechanics (i.e. industrialization), important.
  - differential effects for laborers and mechanics in mill towns

- Next steps
  - Complete digitizing the 1855 population census and industrial censuses.
  - Generate instruments.
  - Estimate consequences of nativism (marriage, mortality).
  - Explore persistence.
Know Nothing Votes

1854

1857

K–N vote share

- No data
- 0–.533
- .533–.630
- .630–.709
- >.709

Results I
Membership Criteria and Lists

- Membership List from Mass. State Archives - East Boston Branch