



Constitutional Union Party

“No North, No South, No East, No West, *Nothing but the Union*”

Candidate: John Bell of Tennessee

The first group to hold a party convention in 1860 was also the newest entrant in the electoral race. A group of conservative ex-Whigs and Know-Nothings, put out by raging sectional disputes in the Democratic Party and resisting new Republican ideas, banded together to found the Constitutional Union Party.

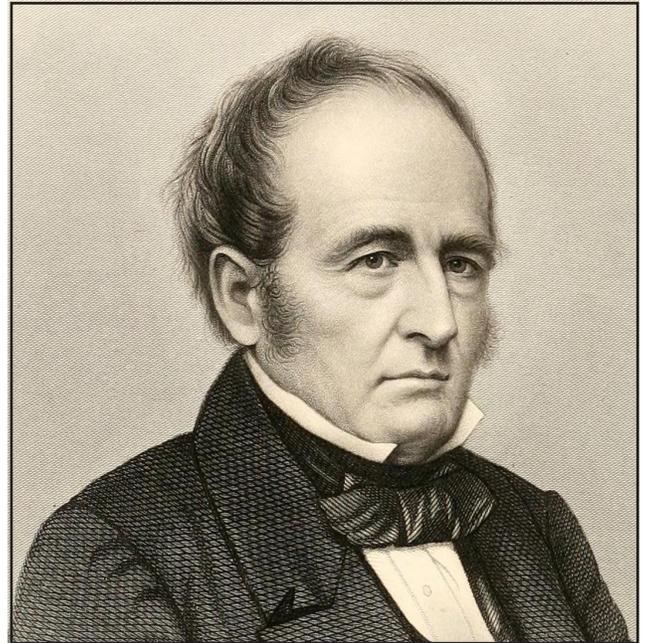
At its May 1860 convention, Constitutional Unionists chose Bell, a Tennessee slaveholder, as their candidate for President. Edward Everett, a Massachusetts native and former President of Harvard University, was selected as the vice presidential nominee. Seeking to avoid accusations of disunion from its opponents, the party took no position on slavery or any other specific issue. Instead, they pledged to defend “no political principle other than the Constitution... the Union... and the Enforcement of the Laws.”

Constitution Union strategy relied not on winning the election, but on syphoning voters away from its opponents. If no candidate received the 152 electoral votes necessary to win outright, the Constitution’s Twelfth Amendment threw the vote to the House of Representatives. If this goal were achieved, Bell would be in a better position to reach the White House.

To this end, party members sought “fusion tickets,” where all three non-Republican entrants combined, creating a single-candidate ticket in strategic states. This tactic had some success: all three fused in Rhode Island, New York, and New Jersey (where a Douglas-led ticket split the state’s seven electoral votes with Lincoln); Bell and Douglas fused in Texas while a partial fusion occurred in Pennsylvania.

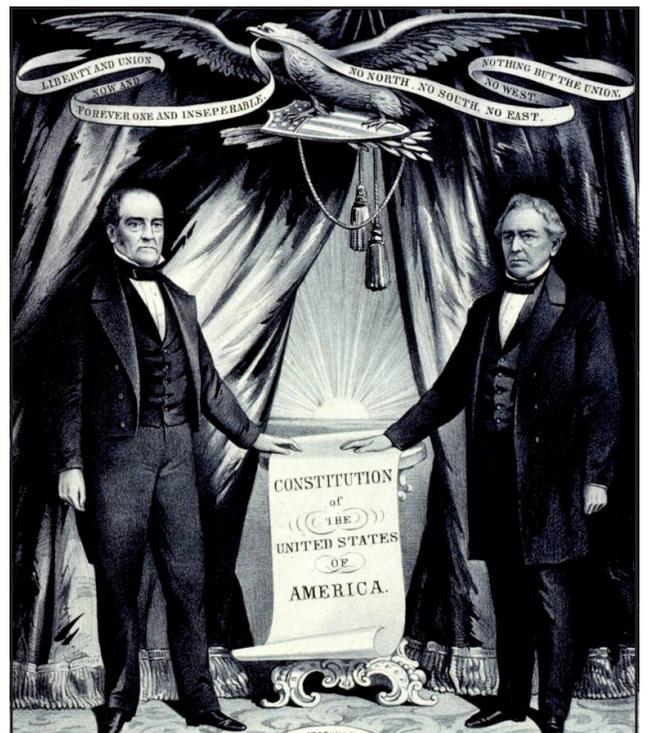
Despite their pro-Union platform, Constitutional Union support came mostly from the South: fewer than 24% of voters in every free state went for Bell, while he won more than that in every slave state. He carried only three border states: Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, losing to Lincoln and Breckinridge.

Image Courtesy Library of Congress



This artist’s rendering of John Bell was featured in a booklet sold to voters during the 1860 campaign.

Image Courtesy Library of Congress



Constitutional Union supporters circulated this poster nationwide throughout 1860. Its message appealed to undecided voters as Election Day approached.