

Creating a Costs-Benefits Analysis: Why Did the South Secede?

Assume you are a Southern secessionist in 1861. You support the decision for your state to withdraw from the Union and for the United Confederate States to become an independent and free nation.

Follow the steps below to develop a Decision Grid that proves the South was indeed acting in its own best interests. Use the Decision Grid Template to record your answers.

1. State the problem and record it in the orange cell in the template.
2. List the Alternatives and record them in the yellow cells in the template:
 - (a) Emancipation of the slaves by the slave holders.
 - Enormous loss of immediate wealth by the slave holders.
 - Enormous loss of future wealth by the slave holders.
 - Burden of loss borne only by the slave holders.
 - Emancipation of the slaves by receiving compensation from the Federal government
 - Burden of eliminating slavery would require huge expenditures by the government.
 - Because most of the population lived in the North, Northerners would assume a larger financial burden than would Southerners.
 - Since no one proposed compensation for the future value of the slaves, it was uncertain if the Southern slave holders would accept current value compensation.
 - Go to war to maintain the institution of slavery
3. Political compromise after political compromise had been tried and had failed. Independence would settle the issue once and for all.
 - (d) There were no new compromises proposed that both sides found acceptable.
 - Both the North and the South anticipated a short war.
 - Both the North and the South anticipated the war would cost less than it did. Estimates were around \$12 billion.
4. Using the information provided above, determine and list your criteria or goals. Record the criteria in the blue cells on the template.
5. Evaluate the alternatives based on your goals. Use a 1-5 scale, where 1 indicates the least amount of criteria met, and 5 indicates the most amount of criteria met. Numbers 2-4 indicate values that fall between least and most. Record your ranks in the pink cells in the template.
6. Make your decisions and record them in the white cells in the template.

Additional Questions

1. What was your opportunity cost?
2. From an economic perspective was the South's opportunity cost pertaining to succession?
3. Was the South's major goal of independence best served by going to war?