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Total variation regularization of geodetically and geologically constrained block models for the Western United States

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SUMMARY
Geodetic observations of interseismic deformation in the Western United States provide constraints on microplate rotations, earthquake cycle processes, and slip partitioning across the Pacific–North America Plate boundary. These measurements may be interpreted using block models, in which the upper crust is divided into microplates bounded by faults that accumulate strain in a first-order approximation of earthquake cycle processes. The number and geometry of microplates are typically defined with boundaries representing a limited subset of the large number of potentially seismogenic faults. An alternative approach is to include a large number of potentially active faults bounding a dense array of microplates, and then algorithmically estimate the boundaries at which strain is localized. This approach is possible through the application of a total variation regularization (TVR) optimization algorithm, which simultaneously minimizes the $L^2$ norm of data residuals and the $L^1$ norm of the variation in the differential block motions. Applied to 3-D spherical block models, the TVR algorithm can be used to reduce the total variation between estimated rotation vectors, effectively grouping microplates that rotate together as larger blocks, and localizing fault slip on the boundaries of these larger block clusters. Here we develop a block model comprised of 137 microplates derived from published fault maps, and apply the TVR algorithm to identify the kinematically most important faults in the western United States. This approach reveals that of the 137 microplates considered, only 30 unique blocks are required to approximate deformation in the western United States at a residual level of $<2$ mm yr$^{-1}$.

Key words: Plate motions; Kinematics of crustal and mantle deformation; North America.

1 INTRODUCTION
Understanding the geometric complexity of active fault systems has been an extant question since the advent of plate tectonics and is necessary for both quantitative seismic hazard assessment and understanding continental tectonics. Quantitative models of plate kinematics at global scales have included 12 (DeMets et al. 1990) to 19 (Sella et al. 2002) kinematically distinct plates, and phenomenological plate identifications have suggested at least 52 (Bird 2003). The primary challenge in developing global models that incorporate both plate-boundary scale (>1000 km) and regional scale (<1000 km) microplate and fault system geometries is uncertainty regarding the level of discretization necessary to explain the kinematics of active fault zones. Over the last 30 yr, Global Positioning System (GPS) observations have provided a quantitative description of nominally interseismic continental deformation with which to address this challenge and constrain plate boundary kinematics. However, elastic strain accumulation across locked faults produces smooth GPS velocity gradients (e.g. Savage & Burford 1973), making it potentially challenging to identify the slip contribution of individual faults within a fault system without explicitly defining fault geometries and modelling interseismic earthquake cycle effects.

To address this potential ambiguity in model realizations of fault system geometry, kinematic descriptions of western United States tectonics were developed satisfying path integral constraints and slip rate observations from geology (Weldon & Humphreys 1986; Minster & Jordan 1987) and geodesy (Minster & Jordan 1987) to quantify the potential influence of poorly documented deformation sources. This kinematic consistency constraint has formed the foundation of block models (Mats’ura et al. 1986; Bennett et al. 1996, 1997; Soutter 1998; McClusky et al. 2001; Murray & Segall 2001; Becker et al. 2005; McCaffrey 2005; McCaffrey et al. 2007; Meade & Hager 2005; Johnson & Fukuda 2010; Spinnler et al. 2010; Chuang & Johnson 2011; Hammond et al. 2011; Loveless & Meade 2011), in which the crust is divided into a discrete number of microplates bounded by mapped faults and combined with a first order approximation of quasi-static earthquake cycle deformation.

Assessing fault system complexity in a block model has often been approached through inspection (e.g. Meade & Hager 2005),
limiting analysis to faults with known geological fault slip rate estimates (Chuang & Johnson 2011), or by considering a small number of geometrically variable block model configurations (e.g. d’Alessio et al. 2005; Spinel et al. 2010). More recently, clustering algorithms have been applied to interseismic GPS velocities in the San Francisco Bay Area (Simpson & Thatcher 2012) and the eastern Mojave (Savage & Simpson 2013) to identify statistically distinct regions of block-like motion. Cluster analysis provides an algorithmic approach to block identification though it neglects earthquake cycle processes and is designed for cases where GPS observation coordinates are distant from the location of the Euler pole of the block on which they lie.

Here we develop block models containing a dense array of microplates with boundaries based on mapped fault traces in the western United States and apply a total variation regularization (TVR) optimization algorithm as a tool for block model selection. This quantized state vector estimation technique enables grouping of adjacent small microplates into fewer, larger blocks and identifies the kinematically most important block boundaries. In this way, we seek to algorithmically determine the simplest plate boundary block model (i.e. with the fewest blocks) that fits the data at a given level of resolution.

2 BLOCK MODELLING AND QUANTIZATION WITH TOTAL VARIATION REGULARIZATION

In the block model formulation of Meade & Loveless (2009), interseismic velocities are represented as a linear combination of block rotations and elastic strain accumulation due to slip deficit on block-bounding faults and spatially variable strain accumulation on triangular dislocation elements (TDEs, Meade 2007),

\[ \mathbf{v}_i = \mathbf{v}_B + \mathbf{v}_R + \mathbf{v}_\Omega, \]

where \( \mathbf{v}_i \) are the interseismic velocities, \( \mathbf{v}_B \) are the velocities due to block rotation, \( \mathbf{v}_R \) are velocities due to a first order approximation of elastic earthquake cycle effects on locked faults and due to elastic strain accumulation on TDEs and \( \mathbf{v}_\Omega \) are residual velocities due to model error and observational noise. Written in terms of block rotations and elastic strain accumulation, the forward problem is:

\[ \mathbf{v}_i = \left[ \mathbf{G}_B - \mathbf{G}_{SD}, \mathbf{G}_I \right] \begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{\Omega} \\ \mathbf{t} \end{bmatrix} + \mathbf{v}_\Omega, \]

where \( \mathbf{G}_B \) contains the partial derivatives functions of velocity observations with respect to the block rotation vectors, \( \mathbf{G}_{SD} \) contains the integrated effects of Green’s functions associated with slip deficits on block-bounding faults, \( \mathbf{G}_I \) contains Green’s functions for slip deficit on triangular dislocation elements, \( \mathbf{\Omega} \) is the vector of block rotations and \( \mathbf{t} \) contains the slip deficit values on partially coupled triangular dislocation elements. In this formulation, all block-bounding faults, except those explicitly represented with triangular dislocation elements, are assumed to be fully locked and accumulating strain at the full estimated fault slip rate. For the commonly considered block model problem, the block motions and TDE strain accumulation rates are considered unknown and solved for in a least squares sense,

\[ \mathbf{m}_{\text{est}} = (\mathbf{G}^T \mathbf{W} \mathbf{G})^{-1} \mathbf{G}^T \mathbf{W} \mathbf{d}, \]

where \( \mathbf{G} = [\mathbf{G}_B - \mathbf{G}_{SD}, \mathbf{G}_I] \), \( \mathbf{W} \) is a diagonal data weighting matrix containing the GPS data covariance matrix and triangular smoothing parameter \( \beta \), \( \mathbf{m}_{\text{est}} = [\mathbf{m}_{\text{est}}, \mathbf{t}_{\text{est}}] \) and \( \mathbf{d} = \mathbf{v}_i \) are interseismic velocities from annual to decadal scale GPS observations (Meade & Loveless 2009). The block models used here are constrained by horizontal motions only because a kinematically consistent block model formulation is not currently extended to vertical deformation.

Within a system of rotating microplates, a fault bounding two blocks will be active (i.e. have a non-zero slip rate) when the blocks have different rotation vectors, whereas if two blocks have an identical Euler pole location and rotation rate, those two blocks effectively behave as a single larger block, and the slip rate on the bounding fault will go to zero (Fig. 1). We may wish to find a solution in which many blocks have identical rotation vectors, that is, in which \( \mathbf{\Omega} \) is quantized. Estimating quantized rotation vector solutions provides a means for approaching ambiguity in block model selection: we may include all possible faults in a dense array of microplates, and then algorithmically estimate the boundaries at which strain is localized based on geodetic observations of interseismic deformation.

It is possible to estimate quantized solutions directly with a regularization technique developed for edge sharpening in image processing: TVR (Rudin et al. 1992; Chambolle 2004). TVR simultaneously minimizes the L1 norm of the data residuals and L1 norm of the variation in the estimated state vector. Applied to 3-D spherical block models, TVR minimizes the L1 norm of variation in the block rotation vectors, therefore localizing fault slip on the boundaries of these larger blocks,

\[ \min \| \mathbf{W}^{1/2} (G\mathbf{\Omega} - \mathbf{d}) \|_1 + \lambda \| \mathbf{D} \mathbf{\Omega} \|_1, \]

where \( \lambda \) controls the strength of the regularization term, and \( \mathbf{D} \) is a linear differential operator. Construction of matrix \( \mathbf{D} \) is discussed at the end of this section.

Absolute value, L1, regularization methods designed to recover sparse state vectors have been applied in reflection seismology for decades (e.g. Claerbout & Muir 1973; Santosa & Symes 1986; Yao et al. 2011), and recently applied to geodetic imaging of sharp coseismic slip distributions (Evans & Meade 2012). Under many circumstances, the L1 norm likely recovers the L0 pseudo-norm, which gives the number of non-zero elements in the vector of interest (Candès et al. 2006; Donoho 2006). Applied to earthquake slip distributions, L1 regularization minimizes the number of non-zero elements in the solution vector, and produces a compact representation of slip (Evans & Meade 2012). Applied to block models, applying the L1 norm to the vector \( \mathbf{Dm} \) limits the number of non-zero differences in the solution vector \( \mathbf{m} \), resulting in a grouped or quantized solution. The L1 regularization is non-linear and a global minimum can be found using convex optimization methods (Boyd &
Several solvers exist for variations of $L_1$ regularization including TVR. We have modified a one-dimensional version of the TVreg package for Matlab (Boyd & Vandenberghe 2004; Jensen et al. 2012; http://www.imm.dtu.dk/~pcha/Regutools/TVreg.m) to accommodate arbitrary problem sizes and constraint matrix structure.

In terms of a block model, every three rows of $D$ correspond to a block constraint, and each column corresponds to a rotation vector component of a block: $D$ has dimensions of three times the number of constraints by three times the number of blocks. Each constraint limits differences in the rotation vector between two adjacent blocks. For example, if block $i$ is adjacent to block $j$, we penalize models where the difference in the rotation vectors between these blocks, $\Omega_i - \Omega_j$, is not zero. For each block, we calculate the difference between all geographically adjacent blocks by specifying separate rows in the difference matrix for each of the three components of the rotation vectors. For example, the constraint matrix, $C$, for single pair of neighbouring blocks can be written as,

$$
\begin{bmatrix}
\cdots & 1 & 0 & 0 & \cdots & -1 & 0 & 0 & \cdots \\
\cdots & 0 & 1 & 0 & \cdots & 0 & -1 & 0 & \cdots \\
\cdots & 0 & 0 & 1 & \cdots & 0 & 0 & -1 & \cdots \\
\end{bmatrix}
\quad (5)
$$

Each of the constraint matrices, $C$, for adjacent block pairs, are stacked to form difference matrix, $D$.

3 GPS DATA, GEOLOGICAL SLIP RATES, AND BLOCK MODEL CONSTRUCTION

We constrain deformation in the western United States using horizontal interseismic velocities at 1686 locations (Mcclusky et al. 2001; Shen et al. 2003; Hammond & Thatcher 2005; Williams et al. 2006; McCaffrey et al. 2007; Loveless & Meade 2011; and the Plate Boundary Observatory Network velocity field, http://pboweb.unavco.org; Fig. 2a). These velocity fields are combined into a common reference frame by minimizing velocity misfit between collocated stations in the fields, using a six-parameter (three-component rotation and three-component translation) transformation (Loveless & Meade 2011, GSA Data Repository item 20115305). As discussed in Section 2, we focus our analysis on horizontal GPS velocities. We have omitted velocities north of the Canadian border because we do not model potentially complex deformation in western Canada or along the Aleutian trench, and velocities near Yellowstone that contain contributions from non-tectonic deformation.

We additionally constrain western United States tectonics with 48 geological slip rate estimates (Fig. 2b, Table S1). These observations are selected from the catalogue compiled by Dawson & Weldon (2013), and we include three slip rates on faults outside of California on the Annie Spring fault (Bacon et al. 1999), the Petrified Springs fault (Wesnousky 2005) and the Wasatch fault (Jewell & Bruhn 2013). We have considered only geological rates $>1$ mm yr$^{-1}$. To additionally account for epistemic uncertainties in the geological rates that may not be incorporated in the reported rates (e.g. Bird 2007; Gold et al. 2009; Zecchar & Frankel 2009), we expand the uncertainty magnitudes to be at least 50 per cent each respective reported rate. Where a single fault has multiple geological slip rate estimates associated with it, we select a single published rate to avoid ambiguities in combining palaeoseismic uncertainties (e.g. McQuarrie & Wernicke 2005). The rates, reported uncertainties, applied uncertainties, and sources for the geological slip rates are provided in Table S1.

In the block model, we incorporate geological slip rates as a priori slip rate observations (Meade & Loveless 2009), which modifies the components of eq. (3) such that:

$$
G = \begin{bmatrix} G_{d} - G_{SD} & G_i \\ G_{ap} & 0 \end{bmatrix}, \quad d = \begin{bmatrix} v_{GPS} \\ s_{ap} \end{bmatrix},
\quad (6)
$$
where $G$ contains the partial derivative functions of the a priori rates with respect to the block rotation vectors, and vector $s$ contains the a priori geological slip rate constraints. In this modification, the data-weighting matrix $W$ contains additional diagonal terms describing the relative weighing of the geological slip rates relative to the GPS velocities (Meade & Loveless 2009, eq. 13). We construct $W$ such that the total influence of the geological slip observations is down-weighted relative to the geodetic velocity observations by a factor of 10.

We develop a block model comprised of 137 microplates based on Quaternary fault maps (Jennings 2006; Fig. 2b and 3). Similar to other block modelling studies, all locking depths on block bounding faults are assumed to be 15 km (e.g. Meade & Hager 2005; Johnson 2013). We have incorporated two exceptions in which we model creeping faults with a locking depth of 0 km: on the Hayward fault in the east San Francisco Bay Area and on the creeping segment of the central San Andreas fault.

We divide the block modelling procedure into two steps: (1) we use TVR to reduce the number of uniquely rotating blocks based on the GPS observations and geological slip rate constraints. The grouped blocks define the block geometry to be used in modelling deformation in the western United States. Faults bounding these larger blocks are considered active, and the zero-slip-rate interior faults are removed from the block model geometry. In this step, we use a modified velocity field with a previously estimated elastic contribution due to Cascadia subduction (Loveless & Meade 2011) removed, so that the resulting velocity field may be attributed exclusively to block rotations and earthquake cycle processes on block-bounding faults.

In step (2), we use the block geometry selected by step (1) for a full block model solution constrained by the full velocity field and geological slip rate constraints on the selected fault geometry with a traditional block model (eq. 1) using a weighted least squares estimator (eq. 3) to estimate block rotations, fault slip rates, and spatially variable slip on triangular dislocation elements representing the Cascadia subduction zone (McCrory et al. 2009; Fig. 2b). For simplicity, we identify a single smoothing parameter $\beta = 1000$ for the subduction zone, which we apply to all models considered here, although this may be varied as well to obtain desired smoothness and goodness of fit properties of the subduction zone solution. For the full block model inversion we assume a priori rotation constraints on the motion of the Juan de Fuca plate due to a lack of direct GPS observations [Euler pole location $-26.6 \pm 0.1^\circ$N, $69.6 \pm 0.1^\circ$E, and rotation rate $0.810 \pm 0.001 \text{ deg Myr}^{-1}$ (Miller et al. 2001)]. This procedure is outlined in the flowchart in Fig. 4.

**Figure 3.** Input blocks with for original 137 block model (dark lines show initial block boundaries), with select regions labelled. State abbreviations in block, AZ, Arizona; CA, California; ID, Idaho; MT, Montana; NV, Nevada; OR, Oregon; UT, Utah; WA, Washington (and VI, Vancouver Island).

**Figure 4.** Flowchart outlining workflow for TVDN model selection and block model estimation. We use TVDN as a method of block geometry selection based on original dense block geometry and a modified velocity field (modified to remove the elastic signal due to coupling on the Cascadia subduction zone). The selected block geometry is then fed into the full block model using the full velocity field to estimate block rotation, fault slip rates, and coupling on the subduction zone.

**4 Quantized Block Model Results**

Total variation regularization reduces the effective number of blocks directly by simultaneously estimating a set of block rotations that are quantized. The parameter $\lambda$ controls the strength of the regularization such that increasing $\lambda$ reduces the number of unique rotation vectors (i.e. the number of kinematically distinct blocks). Very small values of $\lambda$ do not reduce the total number of independently rotating blocks. For large values of $\lambda$, model fit to the GPS observations is outweighed by the total variation constraint, resulting in models with very few independently rotating blocks, and therefore very few active faults. We consider block model solutions for $\lambda$ ranging from $\lambda = 50$ to $3150$, which incrementally reduces the total number of blocks in the plate boundary from 137 to 3, while data misfit, quantified in terms of mean residual velocity (MRV), increases from 1.4 to 4.1 mm yr$^{-1}$ (Fig. 5). We also track regional MRV in southern California, the San Francisco Bay Area, the Basin and Range and the Pacific Northwest. Vertical dashed lines in Fig. 5 identify $\lambda$ values of models that we discuss in this section.

As a benchmark and end-member, we first consider the $\lambda = 3150$ model, in which the plate boundary is made up of only three blocks: a Pacific block, a North America block, and a Juan de Fuca block (Fig. 6). In this extreme case, the best-fitting boundary between the Pacific and North American blocks follows the San Andreas fault for much of its mapped trace between the Cerro Prieto fault in Mexico and the central San Andreas fault, with one exception. South of 34.2°N in southern California, slip follows the San Jacinto fault west of the San Andreas fault, reconnecting with the Imperial fault south of 33°N. North of the central...
In this end-member case, slip on the Cascadia subduction zone accommodates strain that would otherwise be accommodated by faults in the northwest United States and in the Basin and Range. This is most apparent in a very high slip patch slipping at >40 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of normal-sense slip at the southern end of the Cascadia subduction zone (Fig. 6).

### 4.2 Reference and comparison models

We select a reference model of \(\lambda = 850\) that contains 30 blocks, and explains GPS observations with a MRV of 1.7 mm yr\(^{-1}\). Of the models considered, \(\lambda = 850\) is the largest \(\lambda\) value for all regional MRVs are less than 2 mm yr\(^{-1}\), with San Francisco Bay Area MRV = 1.8 mm yr\(^{-1}\), Southern California MRV = 1.9 mm yr\(^{-1}\), Basin and Range MRV = 1.2 mm yr\(^{-1}\), Pacific Northwest MRV = 1.6 mm yr\(^{-1}\) and overall MRV = 1.7 mm yr\(^{-1}\) (Fig. 7). To demonstrate the range of possible fault geometries and slip rate estimates, we additionally consider a less quantized model with \(\lambda = 650\), containing 41 blocks for an MRV of 1.6 mm yr\(^{-1}\) (Fig. 7a); and a more quantized model \(\lambda = 1150\) (the largest \(\lambda\) value to fit GPS velocities with MRV < 2 mm yr\(^{-1}\)) containing only 16 blocks, and with an MRV of 1.9 mm yr\(^{-1}\) (Fig. 7c).

In general, the \(\lambda = 650\) model produces lower slip rates (on more faults) than the \(\lambda = 850\) reference model, and \(\lambda = 1150\) model produces higher slip rates (on fewer faults). The residual velocity fields for the reference and comparison models do not contain large-scale systematic orientations or magnitude (Fig. 8), with consistently smaller residuals in the \(\lambda = 650\) model and the highest residuals in the \(\lambda = 1150\) model. Among all the models, the highest residuals occur along the southern and central San Andreas fault (especially in the \(\lambda = 850\) and 1150 models), northern California near the Oregon border, and Walker Lane (especially in the \(\lambda = 1150\)) model. Residuals are consistently low (<2 mm yr\(^{-1}\)) adjacent to the Cascadia subduction zone.

The block model formulation produces uncertainty estimates on slip for a given block geometry. These uncertainties therefore do not reflect uncertainties in block and segment geometry, and are therefore much smaller than differences in slip rate on a given fault between the models considered here. Because of this, when reporting model slip rates for a given block geometry, we do not report the formal uncertainties as reported by the block model.

For purposes of this discussion, we focus primarily on the strike-slip component of fault slip rates, especially on the westernmost edge of the plate boundary in California; and discuss specific examples of dip-slip and tensile deformation along the Cascadia subduction zone and in the Basin and Range.

#### 4.2.1 Southern California

Between the reference and comparison models, we identify 7–16 rotating blocks in southern California, with 11 blocks in the \(\lambda = 850\) reference model (Fig. 9). The reference model (\(\lambda = 850\)) fits GPS observations in southern California with a MRV of 1.7 mm yr\(^{-1}\), compared with 1.7 mm yr\(^{-1}\) (\(\lambda = 650\)) and 2.1 mm yr\(^{-1}\) (\(\lambda = 1150\)). This survey of the block model selection results in southern California begins in the eastern California shear zone and progresses west to the offshore Borderlands faults (Fig. 10).

The eastern California shear zone (ECSZ) accommodates significant combined right lateral slip of >13 mm yr\(^{-1}\) into the westernmost Basin and Range along the Lockhart/Lenwood fault, the...
Figure 7. Slip rates and spatially variable coupling on the Cascadia subduction zone for (a) $\lambda = 650$, (b) $\lambda = 850$, (c) $\lambda = 1150$. Coloured faults are faults that have been selected by the TVR algorithm as active and are included in the block model solution for each $\lambda$ value. Black faults were not selected and are not included in the block model solution.

Figure 8. Residual velocities for (a) $\lambda = 650$, (b) $\lambda = 850$, (c) $\lambda = 1150$. Residual velocity vectors are coloured by residual velocity magnitude.

Figure 9. Slip rates and in southern California for (a) $\lambda = 650$, (b) $\lambda = 850$, (c) $\lambda = 1150$. Coloured faults are faults that have been selected by the TVR algorithm as active and are included in each block model solution. Black faults were not selected and are not included in the block model solution. Geological slip rate constraints in coloured circles.
Harper fault zone, the Blackwater/Calico fault, and the Goldstone Lake fault. In the reference model, 12 mm yr$^{-1}$ of right lateral slip is fed into the ECSZ by the Hidden Springs fault (Jennings 1994). This structure is ∼30 km east of the Eureka Peak and Burnt Mountain faults, which have been suggested as candidates for bringing slip from the southern San Andreas fault into the ECSZ (Meade & Hager 2005; Spindler et al. 2010; Loveless & Meade 2011). To the north, ECSZ slip localizes on the Owens Valley and Panamint Valley faults, and the Death Valley fault is selected only in the $\lambda = 650$ model (Fig. 9a).

The resulting block geometries in the reference and comparison models contain thin oblong north–south-oriented blocks that span the length of the ECSZ. Estimated strike-slip rates reach up to 13 mm yr$^{-1}$, consistent with previous geodetic studies (Gan et al. 2000; McClusky et al. 2001; Peltzer et al. 2001; Savage et al. 2001; Meade & Hager 2005), but higher than geological rates (e.g. Oskin & Iriondo 2004; Oskin et al. 2007; Oskin et al. 2008). At $\lambda = 850$, deformation in the ECSZ is localized on four of seven possible structures, and slip is not distributed evenly between them (Fig. 9b). Our results are consistent with previous results in which ECSZ slip is distributed across a small number of faults (McClusky et al. 2001; Meade & Hager 2005). In the $\lambda = 650$ reference model, only one additional fault is active to the east, suggesting that adding additional faults to approximate continuous deformation may not be necessary to describe ECSZ motion (e.g. Peltzer et al. 2001; Chuang & Johnson 2011; Fig. 9a). However unlike Peltzer et al. (2001), we do estimate more than a single fault in the eastern Mojave.

In the reference model, we estimate 1–5 mm yr$^{-1}$ of right lateral slip on most of the Blackwater fault, increasing to 10 mm yr$^{-1}$ in the south (Fig. 9b). This range is consistent with the ∼7 mm yr$^{-1}$ of right lateral slip estimated by Peltzer et al. (2001). East of the Blackwater fault, we estimate 3–8 mm yr$^{-1}$ of right lateral slip Goldstone fault, which is the easternmost active ECSZ fault in the reference model. Immediately west of the Blackwater fault, we estimate 5 mm yr$^{-1}$ of right-lateral slip on the Harper fault zone. The next active faults to the east are the Lenwood/Lockhart faults, slipping right laterally at ∼6 mm yr$^{-1}$. We do not estimate any fault activity between the Lockhart and Lenwood faults and the southern San Andreas fault. Among the reference and comparison models, slip rates in the ECSZ vary within an order of magnitude, often with short-wavelength slip rate variations within a single model. This is apparent in all three models on Lenwood and Harper faults, which have high slip rates (>15 mm yr$^{-1}$) in the north near the intersection with the Garlock fault but low slip rates (<10 mm yr$^{-1}$) in the south (Fig. 9).

None of the models considered contain an active Garlock fault along its entire ∼200 km length (Fig. 9). Estimated slip rates on the Garlock fault are largely heterogeneous, reaching a local maximum near 118° W of 12–18 mm yr$^{-1}$ left lateral slip (17 mm yr$^{-1}$ in the reference model). East of the intersection with the Blackwater fault, slip rates on the active segments of the Garlock fault do not exceed 3 mm yr$^{-1}$. Instead the reference and comparison models all contain a fully active left-lateral White Wolf fault (e.g. Bawden et al. 1997).

We estimate an active southern San Andreas fault along its entire trace with the fastest San Andreas rates on the Cerro Prieto fault in northern Mexico of 41 mm yr$^{-1}$. In the reference and $\lambda = 650$ models, 5–8 mm yr$^{-1}$ of slip is transferred westward along the Elsinore fault. We estimate 9 mm yr$^{-1}$ on the San Jacinto in the reference model, and up to 11 mm yr$^{-1}$ in the $\lambda = 1150$ model (Fig. 9). In all three models slip follows Superstition Mountain section but not the Superstition Hills section. These San Jacinto rates are consistent with geodetic studies estimating 12 mm yr$^{-1}$ (Lisowski et al. 1991; Lindsey et al. 2013), and considerably lower than the 25 mm yr$^{-1}$ slip rate estimated by Lundgren et al. (2009) (who estimated ∼17 mm yr$^{-1}$ on the San Andreas), and to Fialko’s (2006) estimate of 19–20 mm yr$^{-1}$.

North of the juncture with the San Jacinto, slip on the Imperial segment of the San Andreas fault is 22–24 mm yr$^{-1}$, decreasing to 10–14 mm yr$^{-1}$ along the Indio segment. The San Andreas fault exhibits a local minimum along the San Bernardino segment, with rates as low as 5 mm yr$^{-1}$ in all three models. North of merging again with San Jacinto at 34.2 N, in the reference model we estimate 17 mm yr$^{-1}$ along the Mojave segment and 31 mm yr$^{-1}$ along the Carrizo segment (Fig. 9).

West of the San Andreas fault and offshore, the Agua Blanca fault in northern Baja California feeds as much as 12 mm yr$^{-1}$ of slip into borderlands and offshore faults (Fig. 9). In the reference model, the Palos Verdes fault, and the Newport/Inglewood fault zone are active at 0.5–5 mm yr$^{-1}$. We estimate 4.2 mm yr$^{-1}$ of right lateral slip on the Palos Verdes fault, which is consistent the geologically constrained rate of 4 mm yr$^{-1}$ (Brankman & Shaw 2009). In the Los Angeles basin, the reference model contains an active Newport/Inglewood fault and Compton thrust with up to 6.5 mm yr$^{-1}$ of convergence. This slip rate may be consistent the combined influence of actively uplifting Compton thrust (Leon et al. 2009), the Puente Hills blind thrust (Leon et al. 2007) and the Elsian Park thrust (Davis et al. 1989). In the $\lambda = 650$ model, slip is distributed across additional offshore faults: the San Diego trough fault zone and the San Clemente fault with right lateral slip rates of 2 and 4 mm yr$^{-1}$, respectively. In contrast, the $\lambda = 1150$ model has only one active structure in southern California west of the San Andreas fault consisting of the Rose Canyon-Palos Verdes faults with a strike-slip rate 4.4 mm yr$^{-1}$ (Fig. 9c).

Figure 10. Input blocks in southern California (dark lines show initial block boundaries), with selected fault labels.

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and the Sierra Madre fault are active with up to 20 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of oblique convergence on the San Gabriel fault immediately adjacent to the same magnitude of oblique extension on the Sierra Madre fault (Fig. 9a). These high rates and short wavelength variations are physically unlikely, suggesting that in this \(\lambda = 650\) case, the total variation constraint is not strong enough to avoid over fitting the GPS data.

In the reference model at latitude 35–36\(^\circ\) N adjacent to the central San Andreas fault, the reference model and \(\lambda = 1150\) models contain no active subparallel structures west of the San Andreas fault (Fig. 9). The \(\lambda = 650\) model does contain active San Juan and Rinconada fault zones immediately to the east of the San Andreas, as well as an active offshore San Lucia Bank fault zone (slipping 8, 6 and 1 mm yr\(^{-1}\), respectively; Fig. 9a). This fault geometry leads to high block rotations east of Parkfield, with extension rates on the west branch of the San Juan fault zone of up to 23 mm yr\(^{-1}\) immediately adjacent to convergence rates of 22 mm yr\(^{-1}\) on the east branch, again indicating over fitting in the \(\lambda = 650\) model. North of the Carrizo segment, we estimate 31 mm yr\(^{-1}\) at Parkfield, consistent with previous geodetic estimates (e.g. Murray & Langbein 2006), and slightly faster than the geological estimate of 24.8 mm yr\(^{-1}\) (Toké et al. 2011). Slip splits north of Parkfield with 33 mm yr\(^{-1}\) on San Andreas fault and 3 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of left-lateral slip on a subparallel structure to the east, the Valley Margin fault (d’Alessio et al. 2005).

Whereas the \(\lambda = 650\) constraint appears to over fit GPS observations, the total variation constraint at \(\lambda = 1150\) is likely too large to effectively reproduce the geodetic data in some areas. For example, none of the offshore faults are active, leading to high residual velocities offshore of \(>3\) mm yr\(^{-1}\) (Fig. 8). While individual geometries and slip rates in the comparison models may not capture all southern California deformation, southern California tectonics appear to be best described by the rotation of more than 7 but fewer than 20 rotating blocks.

### 4.2.2 San Francisco Bay Area

In the reference model (\(\lambda = 850\)) and comparison models (\(\lambda = 650, \lambda = 1150\)), slip in the San Francisco Bay Area is partitioned across four to seven closely spaced active faults, with six major faults bounding five rotating blocks in the reference model (Fig. 11). The reference model fits the regional Bay Area GPS observations with MRV = 1.8 mm yr\(^{-1}\). This is relative to a regional MRV = 1.8 (\(\lambda = 650\)) and MRV = 2.5 (\(\lambda = 1150\)) in the comparison models. Active faults include the San Andreas fault, the San Gregorio fault, the Hayward fault, the northern Calaveras and West Napa faults, and the Greenville fault. East of the southern Greenville fault, we include an active structure that was also included in the model of d’Alessio et al. (2005) as the Valley Margin fault (Fig. 12). Active structures are consistent between the reference and comparison models, although the \(\lambda = 650\) model contains an additional fault east of the Greenville fault, and the \(\lambda = 1150\) model does not include an active peninsula segment of the San Andreas fault (Fig. 11).

There is considerable variation in slip rates between the reference and comparison models, in particular in the western Bay Area. In the comparison models, the Zayante fault transfers 3.5–10 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of right lateral slip from the central San Andreas fault across the Santa Cruz mountains to the San Gregorio fault in the southwest Bay Area (Figs 11a and c). The reference model, however, estimates

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**Figure 12.** Input blocks in San Francisco Bay Area (dark lines show initial block boundaries), with selected fault labels.
left-lateral slip rates on the Zayante fault of 5 mm yr\(^{-1}\), which then connects to an 11 mm yr\(^{-1}\) left-lateral San Gregorio fault (Fig. 11b). Adjacent to the San Gregorio fault in the reference model, we estimate 23 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of right lateral slip on the peninsula segment of the San Andreas fault, but this segment is not active at all in the \(\lambda = 1150\) model. Previous block models of the San Francisco Bay Area have not included the Zayante fault (d’Alessio et al. 2005; Evans et al. 2012), and its presence in the comparison models may be interpreted as consistent with active interseismic strain accumulation near the epicentre of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake (e.g. Shaw et al. 1994), although in this study its behaviour appears to be poorly constrained.

In the East Bay, we allow the Hayward fault to creep at its full estimated rate in all of the models by setting its locking depth to zero. Our slip rates estimated on the Hayward fault are 6–9 mm yr\(^{-1}\), with 6.2 mm yr\(^{-1}\) in the reference model, similar to estimates from studies allowing partial creep (e.g. Bürgmann et al. 2000; d’Alessio et al. 2005; Schmidt et al. 2005; Evans et al. 2012). In the reference model, the southern Calaveras fault transfers 9–10 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of slip from the creeping segment of the San Andreas to the southern Hayward fault, which then splits between the 6 mm yr\(^{-1}\) Hayward fault and a 5 mm yr\(^{-1}\) fault cutting across the south bay to reconnect with the peninsula segment of the San Andreas fault (Fig. 11b). The Hayward fault extends to the Rodgers Creek fault to the north, slipping up to 17 mm yr\(^{-1}\), and to the Bloomfield fault slipping 4 mm yr\(^{-1}\). The Bloomfield fault connects the Hayward to the northern San Andreas fault. However, fault behaviour in the northern San Francisco Bay Area is variable among the models considered. The Bloomfield fault is inactive in the \(\lambda = 650\) model, but active in the reference and \(\lambda = 1150\) models, in which the Hayward–Bloomfield–Rodger’s Creek triple-junction accommodates up to 30 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of extension and compression on adjacent fault segments (Fig. 11).

East of the Hayward fault, the southern Greenville fault transfers slip from the central San Andreas fault, linking up with the northern Calaveras. In the reference model and \(\lambda = 650\) model, the Valley Margin fault slips left-laterally at ~5 mm yr\(^{-1}\) eventually connecting with the Greenville fault, although this fault remains right lateral in the \(\lambda = 1150\) model (Fig. 11). At the intersection between the Greenville and northern Calaveras faults, rather than transferring slip directly, the Greenville and northern Calaveras faults bound a small a small block in the easternmost Bay Area (Fig. 11) in all three of the models considered. We estimate a slip rate on the northern Calaveras fault of 10 mm yr\(^{-1}\), faster than the geological slip rate estimate of 5.6 mm yr\(^{-1}\) (Simpson et al. 1999), and geodetic estimates of 6.2–9.0 mm yr\(^{-1}\) (d’Alessio et al. 2005; Evans et al. 2012). Calaveras slip rate is transferred to the West Napa fault to its north, which slips 8–10 mm yr\(^{-1}\) in all of the models (10 mm yr\(^{-1}\) in the \(\lambda = 650\) reference model), and was the location of the recent \(M_w = 6.0\) South Napa earthquake (U.S. Geological Survey, earthquake.usgs.gov).

While there is considerable variability in fault geometry and slip rates, the reference and comparison models appear to constrain complexity of the Bay Area fault system as best described by 4–7 rotating blocks.

### 4.2.3 Basin and Range and Walker Lane

Slip is partitioned through the Basin and Range province similarly among the reference and comparison models. In the reference model (\(\lambda = 850\)), slip is bounded on the west side of the province by several faults in the eastern California shear zone and up through the Walker Lane belt (Stewart 1988), and on the east by the Wasatch fault (Figs 13 and 14). A fault following the Central Nevada seismic belt (Wallace 1984a) remains active in the western portion of the interior of the province, continuing up into Idaho. The \(\lambda = 650\) model estimates similar slip partitioning, with some geometry differences in Walker Lane, and the \(\lambda = 1150\) model does not include activity along the Central Nevada seismic belt (Fig. 13).

This set of active structures is similar to those described by Bennett et al. (2003), although we do not identify active slip on the Intermountain Seismic Belt (Smith & Sbar 1974). In the reference and comparison models, no slip rates on structures in the

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**Figure 13.** Slip rates and spatially variable coupling in the Basin and Range for (a) \(\lambda = 650\), (b) \(\lambda = 850\), (c) \(\lambda = 1150\). Note different colour scale from previous figures to highlight low slip rate features. Coloured faults are faults that have been selected by the TVR algorithm as active and are included in each block model solution. Black faults were not selected and are not included in the block model solution. Geological slip rate constraints in coloured circles.
interior of the Basin and Range exceed 3 mm yr\(^{-1}\), similar to slow rates estimated by Niemi \textit{et al.} (2004; Fig. 13). In the reference model, \(\sim 10\) mm yr\(^{-1}\) of right-lateral slip is transferred from the eastern California shear zone through the eastern Walker Lane fault zone, with slip rates up to 8 mm yr\(^{-1}\) in Walker Lane, somewhat higher than of total shear of \(\sim 7\) mm yr\(^{-1}\) (Hammond & Thatcher 2007). The more quantized comparison model of \(\lambda = 1150\) results in little deformation within Walker Lane, with 7 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of slip transferred instead from the eastern California shear zone into the Central Valley of California. Another 1–2 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of slip is accommodated on a structure in eastern Walker Lane (Fig. 13c).

4.2.4 Cascadia subduction and Pacific Northwest

For the full block model inversion we estimate spatially variable slip deficit rates on triangular dislocation elements representing the Cascadia subduction zone (McCrory \textit{et al.} 2009) in addition to block rotation rates and fault slip rates (Fig. 15). In all models considered, we use a single smoothing parameter \(\beta = 1000\). All three of the models considered fit the regional GPS observations with MRV <1.7 mm yr\(^{-1}\) (MRV = 1.6 mm yr\(^{-1}\) in the reference model). We estimate slip deficit rates of up to 22.7 mm yr\(^{-1}\) on the subduction zone (Fig. 15b). This increases to 28.2 mm yr\(^{-1}\) in the \(\lambda = 1150\) model (Fig. 15c). This range is consistent with the coupling rates estimated by McCaffrey \textit{et al.} (2007). Without modifying the smoothing parameter, the strain accumulation distribution on the subduction zone changes with the block geometry alone, and coupling rates on the subduction zone are particularly sensitive to the block geometry in the northwest Basin and Range. For example, a 21 mm yr\(^{-1}\) normal-sense patch on the southern tip of the subduction zone mesh in the \(\lambda = 1150\) model (Fig. 15c) is likely related to fewer active structures in the Basin and Range in this model.

At the eastern edge of the Basin and Range, the Wasatch fault is active in the reference and comparison models, and accommodates only 2–4 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of extension (2.8 mm yr\(^{-1}\) in the reference model). The interior structure along the Central Nevada Seismic belt accommodates a similar magnitude of extension: 0.5 mm yr\(^{-1}\) near the Idaho border to 3 mm yr\(^{-1}\) in western Nevada and 2 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of strike slip. The next active fault to the east is nearly purely extensional at another 3 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of extension. In southern Nevada a roughly east–west structure accommodates no more than 2 mm yr\(^{-1}\) of extension or strike slip (Fig. 13b). These low deformation rates are consistent with the Thatcher \textit{et al.} (1999) hypothesis that little active deformation takes place within the Basin and Range.

![Figure 15](http://gji.oxfordjournals.org/) Subduction slip deficit rates for (a) \(\lambda = 650\), (b) \(\lambda = 850\), (c) \(\lambda = 1150\). Bold fault lines show faults that are included in the relevant block model, and thin black lines are faults that have been deselected. Positive subduction zone slip rates (in red) represent thrust-sense slip deficit, and negative slip rates (in blue) represent ongoing thrust-sense slip.
All slip distributions estimate the highest slip deficit rates near
the trench of the subduction zone, where slip is localized in two
patches centred offshore northern California at 47° N and offshore
of the Olympic Peninsula at 41° N, similar to previous estimates
of strain accumulation on the subduction zone (e.g. McCaffrey
et al. 2007 McCaffrey 2009). Strain accumulation rates decay to
half of the plate rate at ~30 km depth. The slip distribution in our
reference model is equivalent to a moment accumulation rate of a
Mw = 9.2 earthquake every 600 yr, consistent with palaeoseismic
and recurrence interval estimates (Goldfinger et al. 2003; Satake
et al. 2003) and previous geodetic imaging within block models
(McCaffrey et al. 2007; McCaffrey et al. 2013).

In the reference model (λ = 850) and the λ = 650 compari-
on model, we identify five actively rotating blocks in the Pacific
Northwest region: the Juan de Fuca plate, a coast range block, a
large oblong block spanning Vancouver Island, eastern Washing-
ton, and northern Idaho, an eastern Oregon block and a southern
Oregon/northeast California/northwest Nevada block (Figs 6 and
14). At the southern edge of the subduction zone and east of the
Mendocino triple-junction, four roughly sub-parallel blocks accom-
modate northern California deformation. In Oregon and Washing-
ton, the coast range block is the only major block between the
trench and northern Basin and Range. This block is bounded on
the east by the Saint Helens Seismic Zone, the West Rainier Seis-
mic Zone and the Straits of Juan de Fuca fault (McCaffrey et al.
2007). The northern Basin and Range is bounded on the east by
the Bitterroot and Mission faults in western Montana, and to the
south by several faults along the eastern Oregon-Washington bor-
der. The eastern Oregon block is separated from the interior Basin
and Range block by a string of faults in western Idaho and the Broth-
ers fault zone in southern Oregon. The block geometry is simpler in
the λ = 1150 model, with a single coast range-northern Basin and
Range block, a single Basin and Range block, and three blocks in
northern California (Fig. 15c). As mentioned above, this simpler
block geometry is associated with higher slip rates on the Cascadia
subduction zone.

In all of the models considered in the Pacific Northwest, slip
rates on block-bounding faults are low (0–5 mm yr⁻¹; McCaffrey
et al. 2007). Although we do not include faults in western Ore-
go that may accommodate additional right lateral strike-slip (e.g.
McCaffrey et al. 2007), the lack of high fault slip rates especially in
southern Oregon northern California provide negligible indica-
tions of additional deformation in this region. However, we do estimate
right lateral strike-slip strain accumulation rates of 20 mm yr⁻¹
on the subduction zone just north of the Mendocino triple-junction
offshore northern California and southern Oregon (Fig. S2). These
high right-lateral strain accumulation rates on the subduction zone
may be consistent with deformation accommodated by instead block
rotations in southern Oregon (McCaffrey et al. 2007), but which we
have not included in these models.

Misfit in the Pacific Northwest remains consistently low (MRV <
2.5 mm yr⁻¹) up to λ = 3150 (Fig. 5), suggesting that spatially
variable slip on the subduction zone accommodates slip that is
not otherwise accommodated on faults, and illustrates a trade-off
between surface fault geometry and subduction zone slip. Therefore,
the estimate of an initial slip distribution (Fig. 4) may contribute
to final block geometries identified with the TVR algorithm. The
influence of the initial slip estimate on block geometry is limited by
the presence of a single coastal block over most of the subduction
zone. However, active faulting in coastal Oregon and Washington
not included in the initial dense block model may still map into
spatially variable slip estimates on the Cascadia subduction zone.

5 DISCUSSION

The application of a total variation regularization (TVR) algorithm
to an initially dense block model geometry allows us to identify
the simplest block models that fit geodetic observations at a given
resolution level. In this way, we have generated a suite of full plate
boundary scale block models of the western United States by algo-
arithmetrically identifying the tectonically most important block
boundaries. At a residual level of 1.7 mm yr⁻¹, plate boundary deforma-
tion can be described with 30 blocks (λ = 850) in which deforma-
tion is concentrated along the San Andreas fault, San Jacinto fault,
and the eastern California shear zone in southern California; the
San Andreas and Calaveras systems in the San Francisco Bay
Area; the Juan de Fuca plate boundary and Cascadia subduction
zone in the Pacific Northwest and on discrete but low slip rate
structures in the Basin and Range, as far east as the Wasatch fault.

The λ = 1150 model is the most quantized model that fits the
horizontal GPS velocities with a MRV less than 2 mm yr⁻¹ (Fig. 5),
providing a bound on plate boundary complexity at this level of res-
olution. To fit observations better than 2 mm yr⁻¹, at > 4 mm yr⁻¹
of slip is still required west of the San Andreas fault in southern
California. Furthermore, western United States plate boundary de-
formation cannot be described at this resolution without an active
Wasatch fault. The Wasatch fault remains included in the block
model selection up to an MRV = 2.4 mm yr⁻¹ (λ = 2100).

The reference 30-block model, can be decomposed into velocity
components due to block rotations (Fig. 16a), and velocities due
to elastic strain accumulation on locked faults and the Cascadia
subduction zone (Fig. 16b), and illustrates the relationship between
block rotations and the final interseismic velocity field. While the
final velocity field (Fig. 16b) retains large-scale block features,
especially along the central San Andreas fault and in the Basin
and Range, sharp block boundaries in the denser fault systems of
southern California and the San Francisco Bay Area are obscured by
deformation due to elastic strain accumulation. These earthquake
cycle elastic effects explain how the apparently smooth deformation
field across much of the western United States is well described by
slip on only a subset active of possible structures.

Also apparent in this decomposition are block rotations in the
northeastern Basin and Range block. Here we estimate block ro-
tations of 0.35 ± 0.034 deg Ma⁻¹ about an internal Euler pole
(47.19 ± 0.2°N, 116.32 ± 0.3°W). This is consistent with block ro-
tations for the eastern Oregon block estimated by McCaffrey et al.
(2007) of 0.41 ± 0.21 deg MA⁻¹ around an Euler pole located
at 45.99°N, 115.45°W for the eastern Oregon block in that study.
Internal rotations like this highlight and motivate the importance
of spherical block modelling approaches that avoid unnecessarily
attributing rigid block rotation to internal deformation or fault slip
rates and geometries.

In general, we do not observe a systematic discrepancy between
the geological slip rate constraints and our jointly estimated slip
rates (e.g. Meade et al. 2013). Of the 32 geological estimates in-
cluded in the λ = 850 reference model (on faults that remain active
after TVR selection), 21 of our estimated slip rates agree within the
geological uncertainty (Fig. 17). We estimate slip rates lower than
the geological rate on 4 faults, and greater than the geological rate
on 7 faults.

The eastern California shear zone is often cited as a region in
which geological slip rates are systematically less than geodeti-
cally estimated rates (e.g. Dolan et al. 2007). At the geological
study locations (Oskin et al. 2007; Oskin et al. 2008), we esti-
mate slip rates of 0.6–2.0 mm yr⁻¹, comparable to the reported
We estimate similar short-wavelength slip rate variation in the San Francisco Bay Area. This is perhaps apparent on the San Francisco peninsula segment of the San Andreas fault. The geological slip rate on the peninsula segment is $17 \pm 4 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$, and we estimate a slip rate of $23 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$. This slip rate is partially accommodated by unrealistic left-lateral slip on the Zayante and San Gregorio faults to the west. This suggests that the inland Bay Area faults may not be consistent with slip rates required to allow high slip on the peninsula segment and maintain kinematic consistency across the boundary. Similarly, we estimate left lateral slip rates on the Valley Margin fault in the East Bay adjacent to the $23 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$ slip rate on the creeping segment of the San Andreas fault. The San Francisco Bay Area and the eastern California shear zone are both notable for hosting several closely (<20 km) spaced strike slip faults. In these regions, the overlapping interseismic strain accumulation signals due to locking on each of these faults inevitably leads to ambiguity and trade-offs in identifying fault slip rates (e.g. Evans et al. 2012). At the GPS resolution and fault system density levels considered in this study, incorporating geological slip rate constraints does not necessarily resolve these ambiguities.

Furthermore, observation density appears to correspond with fault system density in the reference model. In particular, both southern California and the San Francisco Bay Area feature the densest fault systems within the reference and comparison models, which may be due to large number of GPS stations and geological slip rate constraints in both southern California (415 stations and 28 geological rates) and the Bay Area (184 stations and 7 geological rates). To mitigate this effect, we may wish to additionally reweight the observations by the inverse of their spatial density, and/or by interpreting GPS-only block models in addition to joint solutions like those performed here. Additional improvements in the TVR block modelling methodology could be made by incorporating more complex tectonic and earthquake cycle processes by allowing spatially variable creep on select faults (e.g. Evans et al. 2012) and by accounting for time-dependent viscoelastic deformation across the boundary (e.g. Nur & Mavko 1974; Savage & Prescott 1978; Hammond et al. 2011; Hearn et al. 2013; Johnson 2013).
5 CONCLUSION

The kinematic block models of the western United States developed here are based on the idea that fault slip results from the differential motion of tectonic plates. We have treated the identification of the most active of these tectonic microplates as a simultaneous part of a total variation regularization optimization strategy that maximizes the goodness-of-fit to both interseismic GPS velocities and geological slip rates, while minimizing the number of unique microplate rotation vectors. This methodology allows construction of initially spatially dense block models and then effectively answers the question: “How many kinematically distinct microplates (i.e. having a unique Euler pole) are required to explain the kinematic observables at a particular MRV?” For example, a three-block model (Pacific, North America and Juan de Fuca plates) with boundaries derived from estimation with a large differential rotation vector penalty, λ, fits the observed GPS velocities poorly with an MRV of 4.1 mm yr$^{-1}$, and localizes slip along the San Andreas fault. A reference model with 30 rotating blocks fits the GPS velocities with a MRV of 1.7 mm yr$^{-1}$. This approach to block model selection may be improved with the inclusion of additional deformation processes (e.g. spatially variable fault creep, time-dependent viscoelastic deformation), and serves as a step towards more algorithmic analyses of both plate boundary zone kinematics and earthquake cycle deformation.

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**Supporting Information**

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this paper:

**Figure S1.** Residual velocities for the end member model solution, $\lambda = 3150$. Residual velocity vectors are coloured by residual velocity magnitude.

**Figure S2.** Strike slip rates estimated on the Cascadia subduction zone for (a) $\lambda = 650$, (b) $\lambda = 850$, (c) $\lambda = 1150$. Bold fault lines show fault that are included in the relevant block model, and thin black lines are faults that have been deselcted. Positive slip values (in red) represent left-lateral slip, and negative slip values (in blue) represent right-lateral slip.


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