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Crisis of the Old Order:
American Populism and Political Institutions,
1780–1929

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Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Crisis of the Old Order:
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1780–1929

by

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The interplay of American political institutions provides a comprehensive framework for understanding populism. It is proposed that populist outbreaks are the result of obstructed representation and political institutions' inability to respond to constituent demands. It is demonstrated here that political institutions' failure to respond stems from the limited representation of aggrieved constituencies in the formulation of institutional action. The proposed framework is empirically illustrated in three historical junctures. A historically grounded and top-down approach is a novel method for coherently linking populism to issues of institutional arrangement in the American polity, filling an appreciable gap in the literature.

The dissertation of Eric Alexander Baldwin is approved.

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To my parents, Carolina and Russell

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CHAPTER 1

Research Questions & Theory

1.1 Introduction

Populism has become an omnipresent force in American politics. Indeed, there have been no fewer than five hundred papers on populism at each of the last four meetings of the American Political Science Association. Likewise, there is a near daily mention of populism in the nation's leading newspapers. The United States is not alone; constitutional democracies across the globe have experienced populist swells, with significant consequences. In Great Britain and Northern Ireland, populism is responsible for the nation's withdrawal from the seventy-five year project of European integration. In France, the *Gilets Jaunes* brought Paris to a fiery standstill for much of the Spring and Summer of 2018, unrest not seen since the riots of 1969. In Spain, populist movements on the left and the right formed new political parties—*Ciudadanos* and *Podemos*—that rapidly gained enough widespread traction to upend the two-party dominance in place since the beginning of Spanish democracy in 1977. What can explain the upswell of populism in recent years?

The literature is littered with differing and contradicting explanations for populism. Populism is difficult to define, in part, because of its malleability and association with diverse forms of political phenomena (Roberts 2006, 126). It has often been associated with fascism (Ferkiss 1957; Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch 2016; Funke 2017; Kaufmann and Goodwin 2018; Rodrik 2018) and considered a problem typically found in less developed nations. Commonly, populism has been viewed as a cult of personality surrounding a highly extro-

verted and disagreeable leader (Nai, Martinez i Coma, and Maier 2019). Populist leaders mobilize mass constituencies (Roberts 1995, 127; Roberts 2006) by using rhetoric that challenges the political elite, deriding establishment politicians, and emphasizes a deep bond between the leader and the people (Jagers and Walgrave 2007). As a result, populist leaders are considered responsible for stirring nationalist and racist hysteria. Such populist leaders gain popularity because economic crises push constituents' toward new forms of political representation that may bring relief (Norris and Inglehart 2016; Piketty 2014; Piketty and Saez 2003). Scholars attribute the rise of populism to dramatic changes in labor markets (Alvaredo et al. 2013; Burgoon and Dekker 2010), increasing demand for sophisticated skills (Case and Deaton 2015, 2017), the decline of traditional manufacturing (Case and Deaton 2015, 2017; Hacker 2008), increasing global trade (Alvaredo et al. 2013; Mughan, Bean, and McAllister 2003), rising economic inequality (Piketty 2014; Piketty and Saez 2003), the weakening of organized labor (Burgoon and Dekker 2010; Goldfield 1989), and diminishing social welfare programs (Norris and Inglehart 2016). The constituencies negatively affected by these economic crises perceive a threat to their group status by outsiders and the elite (Cramer 2016; Hochschild 2016; Inglehart 1997).

To the extent these studies have a theme, it is that populism is polemical and is the result of bottom-up, demand-side political activity. Furthermore, this scholarship fails to provide a generalizable framework that can be applied across cases. For example, the oft-cited association between populism and fascism falls apart in the case of American populism in the late nineteenth century in which progressive themes of equity and justice played a central role. Furthermore, contemporary explanations for the success of Trump and his populist platform often cite the Obama administration's response to the 2008 financial crisis, without considering more systemic and historical factors in American politics. Moreover, much of the existing literature assumes populism is polemical rather than considering historically progressive facets of populism. Here, I challenge the conventional wisdom.

I argue that populism is the result of blocked pathways of representation. In the case

of most movements of aggrieved constituents, participating in the political process serves as a release valve for frustrations. However, when the representation of aggrieved constituencies is blocked and conventional political participation is ineffective, pressure builds and populism erupts. Aggrieved constituencies that are unsuccessful seeking relief through conventional politics, pursue atypical and new means of political participation to achieve their aims. Often, this involves disrupting the political status quo, calling for a new class of elected representatives, and new modes of democratic engagement that makes Everyman the protagonist. In the American case, the majoritarian character of populism has agrarian roots.

1.2 Foundations of American Agrarian Populism

“If the nation was a democracy, it was an agrarian democracy.”

—GRANT MCCONNELL, *The Decline of Agrarian Democracy*

“Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God if ever He had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.”

—THOMAS JEFFERSON, *Notes on the State of Virginia*

For many American farmers living between the beginning of the nation and the early twentieth century, economic decline and social isolation were mainstays of agrarian life. At the nation’s founding most Americans were scattered in rural desolation. Many of whom left the old country, striking off the chains of feudalism and religious doctrine, to begin anew on an untamed frontier. In colonial settlements and in the early Republic, agriculture was the lifeblood of the economy; Everyman lived by their own hands, tilling the soil, sustaining themselves, bartering the rest. During these nascent years, early settlers, distrustful of concentrations of power, emphasized local governance, civil liberties, popular rule, and equal representation in the formation of political institutions. Such agrarian principles are the bedrock of American democracy.

The agrarian roots of American democracy are justified, in part, because farmers were the majority at the nation’s beginning and for much of its history ([McConnell 1953](#), 1-3). In the first census of the new nation in 1790, 95% of the population is rural; in 1890 it is 64%; in 1920, 49% ([U.S. Bureau of the Census 1960](#); [McConnell 1953](#), 1-6). The agrarian principles imbued in American democracy at the founding created a political archetype in which the agrarian majority embodied essential American values: hard work, virtue, prudence, self-

reliance, and land ownership. If there is an iconic protagonist in the nation's history, it is a farmer.

Despite farmer's much vaunted place in the American tradition, their reality was in stark contrast. "The characteristic product of American rural society was not a yeoman or a villager, but a harassed little country businessman who worked very hard, moved all too often, gambled with his land, and made his way alone," writes [Hofstadter \(1955\)](#), capturing the upheaval and despair of agrarian life. Several transformations are underway shortly after the beginning of the nation that continue through the first half of the twentieth century. Economic modernization casted aside the pre-industrial ways of rural America, with its bartering and trading, and absence of formal banking. Industrial capitalist modernization brought the widespread use of paper currency, market competition, higher demand, a push for efficient production, and the introduction of commercial finance. Despite great strides in science and technology and vast fortunes wrought from industry's unflagging advance, such transformations brought about a reorganization of the social and political order that leaves rural communities on the margins and brought despair and precarity to the life of Everyman. These transformations prompted searching critiques of the American political and economic order.

Such transformations animated a search for alternative perspectives about America's programmatic future, grounded in newfound interpretation of interests and ideology. From the misfortune set upon farmers and the search for alternatives to the status quo, emerged agrarian populism. Agrarian populism was a response to the raw and unbridled power of industrial capitalism. Outbreaks of agrarian populism were protests against the injustices committed against farmers who found themselves left behind in the race toward a commercial society. Agrarian protest was not only an insurgency against injustice to farmers but also against injustice to all common men; agrarianism spoke for all in the struggle against power ([McConnell 1953](#), 1). Agrarian populism was comfortable in taking up the mantle of the struggle of all common men, in large part, because they were in the majority; agrarian

populism can not have special interests because its interests are those of the nation (Clemens 1997, 145-152; McConnell 1953, 6-9).

Agrarian populism raises fundamental questions about political institutions: the ability to participate in the political process, how to coherently organize and channel interests and preferences, the morality of economic modernization, the right of the state to intervene, and the role of government in providing remedy to the crises brought on by industrial capitalism. Over time, such debates translate into concrete policy platforms and specific demands of political institutions, eventually gaining traction in national politics. Improvements in agrarian organization pushed national leaders, policymakers, and established political parties to contend with agrarian demands, eventually incorporating agrarian proposals into policy and institutional action. The force exerted by agrarian populism altered the path of political institutions with lasting implications for the scope and character of American democracy.

This dissertation examines agrarian populism between 1780 and 1929. In the intervening years, agrarian populism is characterized by sporadic outbreaks, explosive moments, spasms of protest, insurrections, and rebellions (Clemens 1997, 145-146; McConnell 1953, 3-6). At its best, agrarian populism symbolized the pursuit of egalitarian political institutions, clear pathways of representation, and greater political participation for Everyman (Mooney and Majka 1995, xi-xii). At its worst, it was a destabilizing force, fracturing governments, stirring up nativist and nationalist hysteria, and is the cause of “some of the most disturbing passages in American politics” (McConnell 1953, 1). This dissertation looks across this spectrum to study the timing and path of agrarian populism and how such a movement goes about achieving its goals. This dissertation also seeks to consider the effect of agrarian populism on American political institutions.

The historical junctures examined are Shays’ Rebellion, agrarian populism in the late nineteenth century, and agricultural discontent in the 1920s. In each juncture there is a signal that the arrangement of political institutions is not responsive to distressed farmers. Each case punctuates American politics with demands for reform to political participation

in order to unblock obstructed pathways of representation. The reforms brought about by the sum of the junctures are the catalyst for the breakdown of the system of “courts and parties” that dominated the long nineteenth century, setting the stage for the emergence of an empowered and equipped bureaucracy with a broad policy portfolio designed to answer the demands of Everyman in the 1920s. The reforms of each juncture transformed the role of political institutions in the lives of Everyman. Each juncture is defined by its turbulent transformation and the incongruence between popular demands and the responsiveness of representative and governmental institutions. From the turbulence of such junctures, the American state is forged.

In the chapters that follow, I develop an institutional perspective on the the timing and causes of outbreaks of agrarian populism, one in which representation of constituent’s demands are at the center of explaining populist outbreaks. I argue that interference with the ability of constituents to participate politically and channel their preferences coherently are the result of blockages in representation. I show such blockages cause distressed farmers to pursue alternative forms of representation. Alternatives, diverse in form, are shaped by the character of the blockages. I conclude that agrarian populism is a progressive force responsible for the expansion and development of representative, intermediary institutions.

1.3 The Path of American Agrarian Populism

“Out of the West and out of the South populism rose, like one of the great storms that sweep the plains: unpredictable, incalculable, and elemental.”

—GRANT MCCONNELL, *The Decline of Agrarian Democracy*

“We desire a proper equality, equity and fairness; protection for the weak, restraint upon the strong; in short, justly distributed burdens and justly distributed power. These are American ideas, the very essence of American independence and to advocate the contrary is unworthy of the sons and daughters of an American republic.”

—The Declaration of Purpose of The National Grange, 1874.

“Relief will come, I believe this inspiration will be found in every heart. I believe the effort will be made by the people. Our path will be in conflict, but it will also be in conquest. It must be so! The demands of the people will be heard. They must be heard.”

—LORENZO D. LEWELLING, *Governor of Kansas*. July 28, 1894.

Over the long sweep of American history, the inconstant and convulsive protests of agrarian populism have shattered the sclerosis of old political orders, ushering in sea changes to the role of political institutions in the life of Everyman. Despite the sporadic and explosive character of people’s movements, such movements did not seek to upturn the industrial economy

¹Because agrarian movements are the majority and thus represent all common people, they may be considered popular movements. Following this logic, *popular*, *people’s*, and *agrarian* movements are referred to interchangeably.

nor remove the existing model of government.¹ Rather, agrarian populism sought to reform existing structures of power. Agrarian populism sought to make the arrangement of political institutions more inclusive and egalitarian, free of corruption and patronage, and more responsiveness to popular demands. Agrarian movements sought to remedy the ills wrought by industrial modernization and further the self-determination of agrarian constituencies.

Agrarian movements are prompted by the economic fallout caused by the boom and bust cycles of industrial capitalism. Bust cycles have consequences for agrarian communities: first, changes in the market economy. Depressed commodity prices are often dictated by broader regional and global phenomenon that may have little bearing on the day-to-day life of farmers. Supply issues in agriculture are often the result of weather patterns that are out of farmers' control. Delivering farm goods to market is complicated by distribution problems—moving goods in a way that is both timely and cost efficient is a consistent problem for American farmers in the nineteenth century.

Second, unanticipated changes in relations with industry and banks may negatively affect agrarian communities. Production issues and downturns in particular sectors that supply needed material to agrarian operations or are consumers of agrarian goods may cause economic hardship for farmers. Additionally, downturns among industrial operations trigger broader economic issues negatively affecting the consumption of farm goods, thus causing economic hardship for agrarian communities. Relations with banks also exacerbate conditions faced by agrarians. Debt-interest burdens, payment terms, and the seizure of farm assets aggravate farmer's hardships.

Third, agrarian movements are stimulated by changes in the arrangement of representative institutions. Agrarian populists seek to stave off changes detrimental to agrarian interests. When representative intermediary institutions are organized in such a way that agrarian demands go unanswered, populism is induced. This new, institutional perspective of American populism builds from the long tradition of scholarship on American agrarian politics and American populism.

Many formidable minds have taken up the task of explaining populism. Nevertheless, there is no consensus on an answer to the question, “what is populism?” Scholars continue to find new information or analyze existing information in new ways, revealing new conclusions. Varied schools of thought beginning from different initial assumptions about the character of populism and what is meaningful to investigate skews conclusions. Moreover, the literature is fragmented by the fact that populist outbreaks take place in very different geographies; historically, studies focus on populism in the Middle West, the West, and the South (McMath 1992, 9). Furthermore, scholars use the lens of concerns and theories of the day, thus coloring their view of populism of the past (McMath 1992, 9). Diverse intellectual traditions, selection of evidence, geographic focus, and the “intrusion of the present” betray a unified framework of populism (McMath 1992, 9).

A century has passed since American agrarians lost their majority. The first great works to take up American populism came out in the ensuing years. Hicks (1931) looks at farmer populism in the Middle West and the South during the late nineteenth century. Between 1880 and 1890, Middle western and southern farmers faced a cascade of economic challenges: the continuous decline of commodity prices, high railroad rates, heavy debt burdens, and bad crops caused by unpredictable weather. The sum of these economic challenges causes farmers to rebel and foments a populist swell (Hicks 1931; McMath 1992). Farmers looked to state and federal political institutions for relief. Their demands went unanswered. Moreover, farmers believed that the forces causing them distress –banks, railroads, and industry– colluded with representative institutions. Having no other recourse, farmers turned to means outside of the status quo to obtain the relief they so desperately sought. Farmers organized voluntary associations that coördinated political action. Hicks (1931) concludes that the protest of late nineteenth century farmers was the precursor to the farm legislation of the 1920s and 30s (McMath 1992, 8-11). While Hicks (1931) saw a populist swell geared toward obtaining relief and reforming political institutions to become more responsive, other scholars saw populism as a more unprincipled and nefarious crusade. Populism is less a

mass movement seeking reform and more resembles fascism and McCarthyism, concludes [Ferkiss \(1957\)](#). Agrarian communities see their majority lost, their social status in decline, and broader society turning more enthusiastically to urban and commercial life. As a result, agrarian peoples turn to extralegal measures, prejudice, and scapegoating rather than reform-oriented goals that respect the sanctity of the overarching arrangement of political institutions ([Ferkiss 1957](#); [McMath 1992](#), 12).

[Hofstadter \(1955\)](#) takes the middle ground between [Ferkiss \(1957\)](#) and [Hicks \(1931\)](#). Economic hardship contributes to causing farmers to take up populism, but those hard times were not grounded solely in economic woes. Economic precarity and social anxiety cause farmers to turn to populism, [Hofstadter \(1955\)](#) concludes. Farmers had voluntarily entered into the commercial realm and when the boom and bust cycles of industrial capitalism did not favor agricultural commerce, agrarians retreated to the high ideals of an agrarian myth and an agrarian democracy. The nostalgic longing for times past feeds into the “cranky pseudo-conservatism of our time” ([Hofstadter 1954](#); [Hofstadter 1955](#), 20; [McMath 1992](#), 12). [Hofstadter’s \(1955\)](#) view of populism has been widely praised for integrating nuanced processes of alienation of labor, economic modernization, the social system, and elements of political discourse and psychology. However, [Hofstadter’s \(1955\)](#) work is fiercely criticized for his depiction of all populist movements as having a tendency toward xenophobia and racism, his assumption that rural communities are disorganized, and his Durkheimian presumption that the proper functioning of society entails the total absence of political conflict ([Collins 1989](#); [Durkheim 1893](#); [McMath 1992](#), 12-14). Nevertheless, [Hofstadter’s \(1955\)](#) argument has stood up to scrutiny over time and serves as a template for much later analysis grounded in the presumption that economic grievance is a necessary condition for the development of populism but is not a whole explanation for populist swells ([Hofstadter 1955](#); [McMath 1992](#), 10-14). This school of thought builds on the longstanding literature on movements and activism.

Populism developed into a mass movement through the strategic recruitment and mobi-

lization of millions of rural Americans, concludes [Goodwyn \(1976\)](#). Grievances serve as the basis for the populist movement. Resources and political opportunity structures are the catalyst that takes movements from disparate grievances to organized interests. In the case of populism, charismatic politicians and speakers traveled rural America, advocating voluntary agrarian associations and promoting the potential benefits of coöperation. [Goodwyn \(1976\)](#) contends the Farmers' Alliance did just this, and once entered into voluntary association, the Farmers' Alliance pushed farmers toward populism ([McMath 1992](#), 15).

[McConnell \(1953\)](#) takes up yet another thread: development of federal agricultural policy in the early twentieth century is the result of targeted lobbying efforts by the Farm Bureau Federation and a vast apparatus of farm advocacy. This is a break from the record of agrarian populism, which had been historically disorganized and not focused on specific policy issues or engaged in the business of lobbying government ([McConnell 1953](#)). Federal agricultural policy is the result of the interaction between the Department of Agriculture, interest groups, elected representatives, and political parties. [McConnell \(1953\)](#) posits a sharp break between the movements of agrarian populism of the past, and those of the twentieth century. [McConnell's \(1953\)](#) model assumes a discontinuity in the development of political institutions.

On the other hand, [Pollack \(1962\)](#) takes the view that agrarian populism is an ongoing process, long in its history. Agrarian populism is a progressive movement that arises in response to the upheaval caused to rural communities by rapid industrialization ([Pollack 1962](#)). The seminal works on American agrarian populism, while taking up diverse views, are unified in their focus on the connection between institutions of government, pressure groups, and political parties. This tradition is not carried into the contemporary literature on populism.

Much of the contemporary literature is occupied by an attention to behavioral explanation: economic backlash, resistance to cultural change, racial resentment, nativism, and nationalism. The spread of populism across not only multiple American geographies but

across nations, further obscures a unified framework. The contemporary literature is littered with contradictory arguments and lacks a unifying definition of populism. Populism is difficult to define, in part, because of its malleability and association with diverse forms of political phenomena (Roberts 2006, 126). One school of thought defines populism as a political movement embodied in a single individual representing personalistic and paternalistic leadership; that is to say, populism is a cult of personality in which populist leader challenges established elites in order to mobilize mass constituencies (Roberts 1995, 127; Roberts 2006). A personality-based definition raises questions about what constitutes the attributes of a populist leader. Some populist leaders opt for direct, unorganized relationships (Roberts 2006, 128).² On the other hand, populist leaders use sophisticated political organizations to carry their message and rally followers.³

A second school of thought suggests populism manifests as a communication style displaying proximity to the people (Jagers and Walgrave 2007). In this view, emphasis is on the homogeneous nature of the “ideal” population and deriding establishment politics. In a similar vein, it is suggested populist leaders are highly extroverted and disagreeable (Nai, Martinez i Coma, and Maier 2019). Populist leaders also lack conscientiousness and emotional stability, Nai, Martinez i Coma, and Maier (2019) finds. Additionally, populist leaders use negative emotions in their rhetoric and character attacks in their campaigns (Nai, Martinez i Coma, and Maier 2019, 634-635). However, Kazin (1998) and Laclau (1977, 2005) conclude populism is a solely rhetorical device, with little relevance to leader’s attributes.

Populism is also defined on solely ideological grounds as a far right movement (Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch 2016; Funke 2017; Kaufmann and Goodwin 2018; Rodrik 2018). Scholars in this vein claim populism is characterized by the embrace of xenophobia, culture

²e.g., Ross Perot in 1996, Donald Trump in 2016, and Huey Long in the 1920s and 1930s.

³e.g., William Jennings Bryan in the late nineteenth century, his use of a periodical, *The Commoner*, and his association with the People’s party and the Democratic party, as well as James Baird Weaver and his association with the Greenback party and later, the People’s (Populist) Party.

homogeneity, extreme nationalism, and protectionist trade policy (Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch 2016; Funke 2017; Kaufmann and Goodwin 2018; Rodrik 2018). Populism is also defined as a combination of all of the above: a political style involving a charismatic leader, the employing of nativist themes, and fearful language (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Moffitt and Tormey 2014).

In yet another line of inquiry, populism is defined on the basis of economic grievance (Norris and Inglehart 2016; Piketty 2014; Piketty and Saez 2003). In this vein, economic shocks and financial crises are responsible for constituents' turn to populism (Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch 2016; Piketty 2014). This scholarship argues populism is the result of dramatic changes in labor markets (Alvaredo et al. 2013; Burgoon and Dekker 2010), increased demand for sophisticated skills (Case and Deaton 2015, 2017), the decline of traditional manufacturing (Case and Deaton 2015, 2017; Hacker 2008), increasing global trade (Alvaredo et al. 2013; Mughan, Bean, and McAllister 2003), rising economic inequality (Piketty 2014; Piketty and Saez 2003), the weakening of organized labor (Burgoon and Dekker 2010; Goldfield 1989), and diminishing social welfare programs (Norris and Inglehart 2016).

In recent years, populism in the United States has been popularly defined as a reactionary political movement of historically dominant racial and socioeconomic groups in response to the perception of reduced status (Cramer 2016; Hochschild 2016; Inglehart 1997). Populist movements are an attempt by historically dominant groups to rectify the perceived imbalance, reestablish lost status, and make government work for Everyman, conclude Cramer (2016) and Hochschild (2016).

To the extent these studies have a theme, it is that populism is the result of bottom-up, demand-side political activity. In this vein, political institutions are cast aside, their broader position in the political system and historical development in relation to populism left unstudied. Moreover, such scholarship fails to reach a consensus on basic notions of what constitutes populism, how to pursue research on populism, and the complexities of comparing cases across time, geography, and political systems (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013, 1-5). The

tendency toward behavioralism and ahistoricity found in such analysis leaves a considerable gap in understanding contemporary American populism. Further complicating the matter of populism is the issue that it is used to describe eclectic forms of political phenomena: political movements, special interest groups, and party organizations without careful attention to the distinct definitions of these labels ([Gidron and Bonikowski 2013](#), 3).

From such a morass, I suggest blocked pathways of representation –intermediary political institutions– are at the heart of American agrarian populism. Blocked representation prevents agrarian communities from gaining access to policymaking processes. Representation is about one’s share of influence in policymaking. In the case of agrarian populism the swells of protest come when the forces of economic precarity are exacerbated, social isolation is highlighted, and farmer’s demands go unanswered. In this trifecta, agrarian frustration has no “pressure valve,” frustration builds, and populist eruption ensues. To stymie populist outbreaks, there must be pressure valves. Such valves take the form of alternative political actions and alternative organizational forms. Agrarian populism has been expanding the range of possible political action since the early years of the nation.

Agrarian populism in the early Republic is characterized by violent resistance over taxes, debt, and monetary policy. Insurrection in New England is caused by the underdeveloped cash economy of rural communities while urbanization and commercialization gains momentum. The conflict is exacerbated by an assertive judiciary and voting restrictions that oppress the political participation of rural communities. Shays’s Rebellion begins with the pursuit of relief through formal political participation and lobbying ([Mooney and Majka 1995](#), xix). Such efforts prove ineffective resulting in violent insurrection against unyielding political institutions. In preparty era, the natural advantages of elites allows elites to informally organize and pursue their interests, to the disadvantage of the rural yeoman, unorganized and without resources.

Depressed commodity prices and unrelenting industrialization are the foundation for the vigorous pursuit of organized agrarian political action in the late nineteenth century.

Some of the most recognized American farmer's advocacy organizations –the Grange and the Farmer's Alliance– come into existence during these turbulent years. Such vigorous and organized political action is the basis for the American People's Party. The People's Party is a significant voting bloc in the 1892 election, and more so in the 1896 election. Agrarian organized interests, in backing the People's Party, cause a tectonic realignment of the party system and contribute to the decay of political parties. Political parties no longer monopolize the pathway between popular representation and the institutions of government. By the early twentieth century, organized interests groups are firmly within the array of political institutions, serving as a conduit between distinct voting blocs, political parties, policymakers, and the institutions of government.

My own telling of the story of populism pays careful attention to intermediary political institutions. Intermediary institutions are fundamental in each step of development, shown in each juncture examined. The presence of such intermediary institutions raises critical questions about the development of organized agrarian interest groups and its implications. To further unpack this, I now turn to a treatment of organized interests.

1.4 The Organization of Agrarian Interests

“Among laws controlling human societies there is one more precise and clearer, it seems to me, than all the others. If men are to remain civilized or to become civilized, the art of association must develop and improve among them at the same speed as equality of conditions spreads.”

—ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, *Democracy in America*.

Representation is at the heart of agrarian populism. Conventionally, political parties are the conduits of representation, the intermediary between constituents and the institutions of government. Such intermediary political institutions are the repository and aggregator for the grievances and policy preferences of discrete constituencies. When political parties are absent or unresponsive to the demands of discrete constituencies, constituents pursue alternatives outside formal parties. Constituents form voluntary associations in an effort to obtain policy responsiveness. Such voluntary associations serve to use organized action to obtain and wield political influence for the benefit of their constituents.

The prevalence of interest groups is a departure from the classical conception of political parties as the dominant channel between voters and the institutions of government. Organized interests seek to influence policymaking by drafting legislation, lobbying elected representatives and bureaucrats, and mobilizing public opinion. The ability of such voluntary associations to congeal agrarian grievances and preferences affords them the ability to effect election outcomes by using the influence of a large voting bloc to support candidates and policies aligned with their interests. Organized interests causes constituents to abandon traditional party affiliations and to associate more closely with group interests. In the long run, such groups seek to affect lasting reform to existing political arrangements—the rules, procedures, programs, laws, and statutes—in order to provide redress for grievances and satisfy the demands of their constituency (Clemens 1997, 2).

The subject of organized interests in American politics is highly charged. There is no shortage of scholarship on organized interests and their implications for American democracy. However, much of this scholarship is limited to the analysis of organized interests over the past seventy years (Tichenor and Harris 2002). Scholars of organized interests often blame a lack of comprehensive or reliable data on interest group activity before the early twentieth century (Tichenor and Harris 2002). In so doing, a significant body of qualitative and archival material on organized interests in earlier periods is given short shrift. The inattention to the development of organized agrarian interests prior to the twentieth century is a major barrier to our understanding of broader issues of institutional development and theory building in American Political Development.

At the outset of the early twentieth century there exists a monumental structure of political power emanating from a vast network of local agrarian associations. This structure of political power wields its political influence to shape policy, “from thousands of localities through every level of government to the highest councils of the nation” (McConnell 1953, 1). The Farm lobby in the first half of the twentieth century is responsible for the grand agricultural programs enacted in the 1920s and 30s, including the Agricultural Adjustment Act and Administration, the creation of the Department of Agriculture, sundry programs to promote agricultural coöperation, and the litany of agricultural programs enacted as part of the New Deal.⁴ The rise of the farm lobby in the twentieth century is conventionally thought of as a consequence of two factors: first, as a natural byproduct of the confluence of the expanded regulatory, welfare state and the hard times faced by farmers in the 1920s; second, it is often assumed that the highly organized structure of the farm lobby is built on the foundation of popular, agrarian movements in the late nineteenth century. These conventional assumptions are, in part, accurate. However, by relying on a more narrow

⁴The Civilian Conservation Corps, the Farm Security Administration, the Social Conservation Service, the Rural Electrification Administration, The Resettlement Administration, the Forest Service, the National Youth Administration, and The Tennessee Valley Authority.

timeframe, they neglect to consider the farm lobby's longer trajectory.

Much of the literature on historical organized interests takes up the organization of private sector interests, tending to focus on the consolidation of industrial interests in the nineteenth century and its implications for American democracy. This vein of research advances the notion that organized interests are associated with big business, and only serve to further consolidate the political power of industry. The perception is well established among common men that organized interests are the epitome of corruption and at odds with the political virtue of Everyman. Nevertheless, between 1780 and 1930, there is the gradual development of an agrarian lobby that parallels the great industrial lobbies, in terms of both breadth of influence and scope of organization. Yet, the agrarian lobby is often perceived as virtuous, distinct from the corrupt organization of industrial interests. Nonetheless, industrial and agricultural organized interests share organizational forms and tactics in order to gain and wield political influence.

The formation of organized agrarian interests begins long before the eminent farm lobbies of the twentieth century and the grassroots associations of the late nineteenth century. The influence of “group pressures” was a concern for policymakers at the beginning of the nation. [Madison \(1787\)](#), describes man's natural tendency toward association and its role in popular governments ([Clemens 1997](#); [Madison 1787](#); [Truman 1951](#), 2). Furthermore, [Tocqueville \(2003\)](#), in his study of American political life, observes the tendency toward political association among the citizenry. Rural farmers in the early republic—which were the majority—did not have a powerful political lobby to come to their defense against the turbulent advances of commercial society. After having exhausted standard routes of political participation, farmers resorted to what [Scott \(2008\)](#) calls “everyday forms of peasant resistance”; violent insurrection—blocking the sitting of courts, preventing the ongoing functioning of local government, and disrupting civil society.

While it was rare for agrarian resistance to reach the point of violent insurrection, such revolts are quickly suppressed by state militias. Nevertheless, even failed insurrection may

achieve something in the long run (Scott 1986, 5). In the case of New England farmer revolt in the 1780s, rules on voting and officeholding are changed to make it possible for those in agrarian communities to more actively participate in politics. Such reforms are used in the popular movement of the 1820s to seek relief. In the 1820s, Everyman, while able to participate more fully in politics, was still unorganized in conveying views and ideology to the institutions of government. On this basis, modern American political parties arise. When such political parties become consumed by patronage in the late nineteenth century, farmers move to obtain responsiveness outside the party system. The rise of agrarian political associations and the agrarian populist movement in the late nineteenth century is then the basis for the rise of a national agrarian lobby in the early twentieth century. The path of agrarian populism is a progressive one, disrupting the status quo at each juncture, shaping the array of political institutions so as to be more responsive, and pushing government to be more popular in character.

Populist outbreaks expand the repertoire of possible political participation, giving voice to Everyman. To do this, the tool upon which agrarian populism most relies is association-building. The continuous growth of organized agrarian interest groups carries three significant areas of implication for American politics: first, agrarian populism is a force in the formation of alternative intermediary institutions in the late nineteenth century. In so doing, agrarian populism draws away substantial support from the extant political parties. Second, such political cannibalization brings about the end of the dominance of courts and parties in the nineteenth century. Interest group politics requires a dissembling of the politics of party. Constituents abandon their learned political affiliations and instead coalesce around group interests and vote according to group identification rather than party identification. Third, the introduction of alternatives and the decay of traditional parties leads to reforms rendering the arrangement of political institutions more responsive to popular demands—primary elections, initiative and referendum, and the considerable expansion of government services.

As part of this transformation, legislatures, parties, organized interests, government bu-

reaucracies, and mass opinion all come into focus as part of the process of political participation. Moreover, these transformations represent a seismic shift in the role and arrangement of political institutions. To better fill in the story of American populism unfolding here, one must take a closer look at political institutions.

1.5 Political Institutions

“...Institutions must advance and keep pace with the times. We may as well require a man to wear still the coat that fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.”

—THOMAS JEFFERSON

“Like the city itself, the Republic always appeared on the point of bursting with the fissile tensions contained within it. Yet just as Rome not only endured but continued to swell, so the constitution appeared to emerge stronger from every crisis to which it was subjected. And why, after all, should the Romans not cling to an order that had brought them such success? Frustrating, multi-form and complex it may have been, yet these were precisely the qualities that enabled it to absorb shocks and digest upheavals, to renew itself after every disaster. The Romans, who had turned the world upside down, could be comforted by knowing that the form of their republic still endured unchanged. The same intimacies of community bonded its citizens, the same cycles of competition gave focus to its years, the same clutter of institutions structured its affairs. And even blood spilled in the streets might easily be scrubbed clean.”

—TOM HOLLAND, *Rubicon: The Last Years of the Roman Republic*

The literature on interest group politics is occupied by an attention to behavioral explanations, fixed in the rational actor paradigm. This literature largely assumes that organized political groups are the result of rational self-interest. However, how and why particular interests become politically salient and mobilize individuals into collective action are still

widely debated topics. The transition from grievance to group consciousness to collective action remains murky. The aggregation of interests clearly takes place, that is not in question. However, the mechanisms through which interests are aggregated is problematic (Clemens 1997, 8; Olson Jr 1965). The existing models rely on rational actor theory and advance explanations for the aggregation of interests through numerous theories: theories of resource mobilization (Klandermans 1984; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Snow et al. 1986); notions of critical elections (Burnham 1965, 1970; Key 1955); racial and ethnic identity (Antunes and Gaitz 1975; Babchuk and Thompson 1962; Bobo and Gilliam 1990); socioeconomic solidarity (Blakely, Kennedy, and Kawachi 2001; Brady 2003; Hansen 1985; Uslander and Brown 2005); and political opportunity structures (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Meyer 2004).

A common theme throughout these studies is the notion that individuals engage in collective action when it is in their self-interest and that such interests and preferences are exogenous to the arrangement of political institutions. Such theories may be criticized: first, because of their reliance on the rational actor paradigm, particularly the assumption that interests are exogenous to political institutions; second, because of their assumption that organized interests are homogeneous; third, for assuming a behavioral orientation without regard to the role of political institutions; and fourth, for selecting on the dependent variable. What is at stake is determining how and why particular interests become politically salient and become the basis for group organization. From this morass, a broader question emerges: what may explain the emergence of agrarian organized interests and the recurring pattern of populist outbreaks over American history? The answer: institutions.

In rational actor theory individuals are rationally interested and driven by the pursuit of utility maximization (Orren and Skowronek 2004, 13). However, rational actor theories often neglect to consider that rational political action takes place in the context of extant rules and institutions (Clemens 1997, 8). In the institutional context, rationally interested political actors pursue change by way of implementing new rules and procedures to govern

particular activity, so as to induce an equilibrium (Orren and Skowronek 2004, 13). For example, laws and statutes regarding the sale of pharmaceutical products, who they may be marketed towards, and who, with what authority, may dispense such products (Carpenter 2014).

In this example, rules and procedures are a balance between the interests of pharmaceutical manufacturers, who seek to make their products widely available and boost their bottom line, and other organized interests who seek to promote scientific innovation, protect public health, and ensure safe and equitable availability. The process of political influence of each perspective is conducted in the context of the rules and procedures of representative government, an understanding that rules governing the pharmaceutical industry are determined by the Congress, that legislation in Congress passes through various phases of drafting, deliberation, and open debate—all processes governed by additional rules and procedures (i.e., political institutions). Additionally, there are rules, procedures, and norms in regards to how organized interests may attempt to persuade representatives to vote or sponsor legislation that supports a given organized interest. Moreover, consequences of the outcomes of political institutions (i.e., policy) and its impacts are the subject of political contention that triggers the formation and mobilization of organized interests.

In sum, political institutions are both the venue in which change is effected *and* the source of the constraints that determine how political change is attained. In so doing, institutions shape the possible range of organized interests, group associations, and the tactics used to effect political change and engage with political institutions. Recognizing the role of institutions in both the supply and demand sides of political action necessitates a “theoretical gestalt-switch” (Clemens 1997, 8-10). In such a model, the formation of interests, organizational forms, and the modes of political participation are endogenous.

An endogenous account of political participation is supported by two theoretical paradigms: first, historical institutionalism (Orren 1974, 1991, 1995*a,b*, 1996, 2000; Orren and Skowronek 1986, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2004, 2016, 2017; Skowronek 1982, 1995). The American polity is

an “aggregation of outward-reaching, interactive, mutually impinging institutions and the reactions it provokes” (Orren and Skowronek 2004, 85). Political institutions organize constituents, marshal resources, and implement policy (Orren and Skowronek 2004, 82). Political institutions are distinct from social institutions in seeking to control the actions of other institutions and constituent’s political behavior (Orren and Skowronek 1994, 325-326; Orren and Skowronek 1995; Orren and Skowronek 2004, 81-82; Skowronek 1995, 95). Political institutions provide order to political life and uphold policy despite the coming and going of political fads. Moreover, the array and arrangement of heterogeneous political institutions generate the range of possible actions that individuals may take, thus enabling reform. Ultimately, political institutions are a paradox: on one hand institutions are the ballasts of enduring order, policy, and norms, while on the other hand, institutions are the locus for shaping political action and are the catalysts for sociopolitical change (Orren 1995a; Orren and Skowronek 2004, 78-82; Sheingate 2003).

Assuming an endogenous account of political institutions –that preferences, interests, and actions taken by political actors are shaped by the constraints of the arrangement of political institutions–brings one to the second theoretical paradigm: the new institutionalism of organizational sociology (Abbott 1992; Clemens 1997, 8-10; Koelble 1995; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Powell and DiMaggio 2012). The new institutionalism of organizational sociology rejects assumptions of rationality-driven interest formation and mobilization in favor of a model in which individuals are limited by information costs, risks, and the actions made available through macropolitical structures (Clemens 1997, 8-9).⁵ Political preferences and interests are derived from an, “archaeology of schemas, a reconstruction of the scripts available within particular societies at particular times” (Clemens 1997, 9). Likewise, the set of possible political actions taken individually or collectively is also shaped by the constraints imposed by the overarching institutional structure. An “archaeology” of

⁵Macropolitical structures may be understood as the overarching structure and configuration of political institutions.

the possible schemas, scripts, and templates available for political action may be thought of as repertoires of tactics, interests, contention, and organizational forms (Clemens 1997, 8-11). Such repertoires are, in effect, a menu, from which individuals craft a composite of preferences, interests, and actions. Different individuals, different groups of individuals, in distinct junctures draw from the repertoire, combining different elements thus constituting preferences, group interests, organizational forms, aims, and tactics to achieve such aims. As much as this creates the ability to reconstitute preferences and organizational forms to match different situations, it is a limitation on the range of possible political action.

An endogenous account of political change takes advantage of the paradox of political institutions, proposing institutional heterogeneity as the basis of social change (Clemens 1997, 1-15). Indeed, institutional heterogeneity separates institutions from institutional arrangements and “structure[s] the passage of time—the sequences and cycles, the changes and lulls,” and in so doing, drives change because, “the institutions that constitute the polity at that time will abrade against each other and, in the process, drive further change” (Orren and Skowronek 1994, 320-321; Orren and Skowronek 2004). Orren and Skowronek (1994) make clear that the overall institutional structure affects change because the various political institutions within the overall structure operate distinctly and not in lockstep—such abrasions create openings that may be exploited, thus inducing change.

The combination of these two institutionalisms, the historical institutionalism of American Political Development and the new institutionalism of organizational sociology, allows for an endogenous account of political change that recognizes two political realities: first, that the political order in a given juncture is the result of the overarching structure of heterogeneous political institutions, and second, the configuration of political institutions and the

⁶Such a conception may be linked to the theory of political opportunity structures originally posited by Meyer (2004). However, Meyer’s (2004) account continues to assume grievances and interests are exogenous, assumes an integrated social system rather than a macro assemblage of political institutions, and relies heavily on notions of resource mobilization.

dynamic among political institutions “constitute a set of opportunities for, and constraints on, action” (Clemens 1997, 9-12).⁶ The linking of these two paradigms is the foundation for an institutional framework of political change that is, “the historical production of a political world where individuals follow scripts of self-interested utility maximization and where formal political institutions not only accommodate but elicit such behavior” (Clemens 1997, 11).

The work of Orren and Skowronek (1994, 2004, 2017) and Clemens (1997) are the basis for the understanding of organized interests and political change laid out here. I use this logic as the launching pad for a novel understanding of American agrarian populism. By understanding where American agrarian populism came from, we may better understand today’s populism, and where it may be going. To make such a leap requires first elucidating the distinction between populism—or populist outbreaks—from other forms of political action, political organization, and political movements.

In the case of organized interests and political movements, those seeking to change the arrangement of political institutions use tactics, drawing upon a repertoire of different schemas, scripts, templates, and organizational forms that may be effective given the configuration of institutions and in relation to relevant social and political variables.⁷ In light of this, one must take a step back and ask: why do particular preferences and interests serve as the basis for formal political organization? Why and how do particular interests become politically salient? Preferences and interests and the tactics used to achieve political goals serves to solidify notions of collective identity. However, the dynamic between collective identity and repertoires of political change are mutually reinforcing. In the case of conventional movements and interest groups, particular subsets of society are drawn into formal organization on the basis of collective identity *a priori* the salience of a given political grievance or demand

⁷ *Political movements* refers to the broader, and more loosely defined coalition of groups and individuals that share a particular set of goals and values. *Organized interest* refers to the formal association of individuals engaged in the collective pursuit of specific political goals.

(Clemens 1997, 8-13). Social forces such as racial and ethnic identity, socioeconomic class, labor-based associations, and preference-based associations serve to create collective identities. Such grouping are shaped by the constraints imposed by political institutions. There is an existing set of organized interests on this basis. Such groups turn to political action when their interests or grievances become politically salient. Particular interests become politically salient because the arrangement of political institutions are in flux, continuously being reconstituted. Familiar forms of organization and political action, scripts, and schemas, are combined in new ways when conditions change, settings are moved, and new needs emerge. With reconstitution of the political order, some interests fade and other interests become salient.

The continuous and dynamic process of reconstitution –of institutions as well as that of organizational forms, interests, and preferences– yields the very reconstitution of political action; a new key to fit an old lock on an old church door. Reformulation of politically salient interests, tactics, and modes of political participation alters the calculus of political change. Nevertheless, reconstitution is just that –the retooling of familiar forms of political action in new contexts and junctures. Just as the ironmonger who melts and recasts an old church key is limited by the mass of the key’s iron, the dimensions of the keyhole, and the cut of the lock, organized interests are limited in effecting political change by the constraints imposed by political institutions, both the set of possible political actions and organizational forms, as well as by the channels for soliciting change that result from the configuration of political institutions. The circumscribed scope of political participation just described is the domain of conventional political participation. Populism takes it further, pushing on those constraints. A church key may only be melted and recast so many times before the iron degrades and a new key must be forged or risk it breaking in the keyhole, blocking entrance, disrupting the abbots’ ritual. Populism is, in a metaphor, a heat that forges new modes of political participation, clearing blocked channels of representation.

Populism reflects and effects political institutions. Populism is characterized by the

pursuit of political change through atypical means, expanding the boundaries of political participation. Populist outbreaks begin through conventional political participation; the arrangement of political institutions generates a range of possible political actions, including the organization of interests at the group level, from which aggrieved constituencies draw upon to pursue the rectification of perceived injustices by way of soliciting government intervention. In the case of populism, conventional political participation fails to garner the sought response. The aggrieved constituency has exhausted the repertoire of conventional political participation without attaining any tangible outcomes, and as a result, look to alternatives outside the extant repertoires.

The ever evolving nature of participatory modes as laid out in organizational sociology is employed in this dissertation to show how when routine forms of participation are corrupted or ineffective in channeling constituents preferences, and standard modes of reforming political institutions fail, then constituents are left with no alternative but to seek the wholesale reform of the political system. In cases of populism, the effort to create new modes of political participation assumes that the existing arrangement of political institutions is configured in such a way that intermediaries, the channels between popular demands and political institutions, are blocked and require clearing. Following from that logic, agrarian populism is not only the pursuit of particular demands, but it is the pursuit of reforming the very ways in which demands are made and channeled to the arrangement of political institutions. Moreover, populism seeks to reform the arrangement of political institutions so as to make it more agile and nimble, responsive to popular demands. Whereas conventional political participation works within the existing constraints, populism pushes on such constraints, breaking down such constraints and causing some of the “most disturbing passages in American politics” ([McConnell 1953](#), 1).

Historical institutionalism is put to work to show the interoccurrence of political institutions that induces populism. The inability of representative institutions to channel the preferences of agrarian communities into policymaking nor the ability of government bu-

reaucracy to implement large-scale policy programs, shows the lack of connectivity between institutions. When political institutions are not in lockstep with one another, when each cannot carry its own weight, then there is a failure of representative politics. Both historical institutionalism and organizational sociology is employed to show the paradoxical nature of American agrarian populism.

American agrarian populism is both *regressive* and *progressive*. Populism is regressive in that it disrupts the status quo, upends political parties, obstructs the functioning of some aspect of society in a given juncture. In each case examined, the upheaval of conventional politics is highlighted: in 1780s Massachusetts, residents of the least commercial-cosmopolitan towns rise up and seek to get rid of the status quo of elite control over political institutions; to do so, the farmers stop the courts from sitting and disrupt society. Agrarian populism in the 1890s again illustrates the regressive nature of populism; seeking to slow the progress of industrialism and return the nation to a nostalgic memory of agrarian dominance.

Furthermore, agrarian populism is regressive in that it seeks to maintain and protect traditional agrarian communities despite their persistently reduced and marginalized place in the broader economy and society. Populism is a progressive movement in that, in the long run, it seeks to reform political institutions as to be more representative, as well as more capacious and effective in their operation. Adding to this paradox is the fact that agrarian populism symbolizes two, contradictory trends: first, the steady decline of traditional agriculture and the degrading of the symbolic virtue of the American farmer, and second, the persistent push for organized political action and the rise of a sophisticated apparatus for agrarian political influence (i.e., the farm lobby). The whole of the story of populism is one of contradiction and paradox.

To that end, in the section that follows, I lay out the architecture for a novel framework of American agrarian populism. A framework that doesn't reconcile such contradictions and paradoxes, but takes advantage of them, revealing the transformative nature of populism and its central role in the development of American political institutions and the rise of the

American policy state.

1.6 Architecture

Agrarian movements are characterized by the congealing of agrarian concerns and preferences that are transformed into organized interests by voluntary advocacy associations. Populist outbreaks are characterized by the heightened agitation and consciousness of agrarian communities. During the routine course of agrarian movements, advocacy sticks to standard forms of political participation. Periodically, there are disruptions that adversely impact agrarian communities. Typically, disruptions are part of the boom and bust cycles of industrial capitalism. In these moments, economic hardships are exacerbated and the pursuit of relief, of representation in policymaking, is insufficient or absent. Thus erupts populism. A populist outbreak is the *cri de coeur* of Everyman aggrieved, signaling their demand not only for relief, but to reform the very means of representation and the operation of the institutions of government. Agrarian populist outbreaks are further distinguished from other forms of advocacy or movement activity because political institutions, policymakers, and their policies are perceived as out-of-touch, unfair, or misguided, and there is a systemic corruption of popular sovereignty. Moreover, populist moments further seek to upend political institutions by replacing the political elite with an elected class of common people. To that end, this study asks the question: how does the arrangement of political institutions induce populist outbreak?

I suggest that blocked pathways of representation are the result of the abrasions between distinct political institutions; while institutions do not operate in lockstep, when the abrasions and chasms become too great, representation is obstructed. I advance an endogenous account of political institutions that shows that aggrieved constituencies engage in advocacy for their demands through conventional political participation. I argue that populist outbreaks are sparked when conventional political participation fails to be effective. Moreover, I argue that populism is a further iteration of protest in which aggrieved constituencies push on the constraints of conventional political participation to find new tactics, organizational

forms, and ways of being represented. I claim that populist outbreaks constitute a recognition that the very means of political participation and representation require reformation.

Just as much as populism breaks the constraints on political action, my framework for American populism requires the breaking of some of the norms of scholarly analysis. In order to pursue such a topic, numerous traditions are drawn from: American politics and history, historical institutionalism, empirical political analysis, political activism, organizational theory, and special interest politics. I draw on these traditions and the theoretical premise laid out here, to construct a framework for understanding populism that is empirical and historical, while also forward-looking and agile.

To build such a framework, I examine three, discrete historical junctures. In looking to a discrete juncture, both the precipitants of populism and the extant configuration of political institutions may be investigated *in time*.

The first historical juncture looks at voting and officeholding in the first decade of the Republic. It is argued that Shays's Rebellion is the result of the inability of Massachusetts' farmers to obtain relief because of blocked pathways of representation. Residents of the least developed communities in Massachusetts attempted to gain relief for their distress through standard modes of political participation in the era: letter-writing, petitions, and town hall meetings. However, such modes of participation proved futile. Rules on voting and officeholding prevent most agrarian political participation, thus hindering agrarian's ability to participate in politics. As a result of elite control of political institutions, the preferences of the least advantaged constituents were ignored. Such a situation lead to a populist outbreak, with farmers blocking court houses and disrupting law and order. This first juncture is unique in that it shows populism in a pre-partisan context.

The second juncture illustrates obstructed pathways of representation when political parties are dominated by patronage in the late nineteenth century. The franchise had been greatly expanded by the 1890s and the advent of political parties, in principle, created a vehicle for conveying constituent's preferences. However, political parties were consumed with

patronage, seeking only to serve the needs of the industrial patrons that enriched the party bosses and lubricated the wheels of political machines. Ordinary American farmers and the agrarian economic fallout caused by industrialization were neglected. Corrupted nomination processes and opaque means of policymaking, left little room for considering economic concerns of American farmers. Facing a futile situation, farmers organized themselves with the Farmers' Alliance and then the People's Party. The Farmers' Alliance and then the People's Party, the embodiment of agrarian populism, was successful as a movement in that it mobilized ordinary Americans to participate and vote, it pushed for democratic reforms such as direct election of senators, direct primary elections, initiative and petition referenda, and transparent nominating procedures. The People's Party ushered in a legitimate third party faction into the Congress. Yet, the People's Party proved ineffective as a political party in Congress. The entrenched old parties had a firm grip over the levers of congressional power: the Speaker's prerogatives, the committee system, and the back room politicking emblematic of Gilded Age and machine politics. Such barriers proved insurmountable for the People's Party in Congress. However, the democratic reforms mentioned initiated the process of disempowering political machines and made room for the Progressive movement which would push for apartisanship and the development of government capabilities. The Progressive movement would set up the expectation that government can and should have the ability to intervene in people's lives and improve life through policy. This juncture is unique in that it illustrates populism in a partisan context.

In the third juncture, the professionalization of bureaucracy and the expansion of administrative capacities in the early twentieth century is pivotal in preventing widespread populist outbreak during the economically tumultuous years between 1920 and 1929. In the 1920s, agrarianism is no longer associated with populism. In the 1920s, agrarianism strikes out on its own in the form of the notorious Farm Lobby. The American Farm Bureau was the central organization in the Farm Lobby. The Farm Bureau collected political intelligence in the form of surveys and grassroots beliefs, and communicated such information

to representatives in Congress. Additionally, when representatives were hesitant to vote on a bill favored by the Farm Bureau, the Farm Bureau lobbyists would mobilize grassroots constituents to flood representatives with letters and telegrams in order to push the representative to vote in the way the Farm Bureau wanted. The Farm Bureau was concurrently working with representatives, marketing itself as a conduit of grassroots preferences among their electorate, while also convincing ordinary farmers that the Farm Bureau was flexing its power in order to defend agrarian interests. The Farm Bureau was, in effect, playing both sides against the middle. The product of such lobbying efforts was significant intervention in the agricultural markets and consideration of the McNary-Haugen bills over nearly five years. Such advocacy cemented the Farm Lobby as a power center in Washington. Such a juncture is unique, not the least of which, because it illustrates populism in a post-partisan context.

The three cases have been selected because of their long recognized and iconic historical significance. Furthermore, the cases have been selected because of their starkly different institutional landscapes: pre-partisan, partisan, and post-partisan. By taking advantage of this natural variation, American history affords scholars the opportunity to assess the impact on recurring populist political agitation on a developing polity increasingly thick with large-scale political institutions.

It is the contention of this dissertation that American agrarian populism constituted the most important force in the development of the American state. Agrarian populism –the sporadic and explosive protests that punctuate the long march of agrarian movements– are critical moments of disruption, calling into question the political status quo, and highlighting the absence of representation for Everyman.

CHAPTER 2

Shays's Rebellion and Populism in Early New England

“I’ve labored hard all my days and fared hard. I have been greatly abused, have been obliged to do more than my part in the war; been loaded with class rates, town rates, province rates, Continental rates, and all rates...been pulled and hauled by sheriffs, constables and collectors, and had my cattle sold for less than they were worth. I have been obliged to pay and nobody will pay me. I have lost a great deal by this man and that man and t’other man, and the great men are going to get all we have, and I think it is time for us to rise and put a stop to it, and have no more courts, nor sheriffs, nor collectors, nor lawyers, and I know that we are the biggest party, let them say what they will...We’ve come to relieve the distresses of the people. There will be no court until they have redress of their grievances.”

—JEDEDIAH PECK (“PLOUGH JOGGER”), c.1785

2.1 Introduction

As the epigraph indicates, residents of the least commercial-cosmopolitan communities in Massachusetts were at their wit’s end by 1785-86. At daybreak on August 29, 1786, rebels armed with muskets and swords raided the courthouse at Northampton, Massachusetts. One week later, rebels carrying bayonets blocked the Worcester courthouse. Scenes like this continue in the rural western communities of Massachusetts through the Fall of 1786 and the

first half of 1787. What was the cause of rebels frustrations leading to blocking the courts in 1786-87?

In this chapter I argue Shays's Rebellion is the result of the absence of party competition. The absence of political parties also means the absence of the political institutions that accompany political parties: the ability to coördinate political activity, the ability to compile a unified list of candidates, the ability to disseminate information, and the ability to mobilize a unified voting bloc. Despite the absence of political parties, the most commercial-cosmopolitan communities were able to use the natural advantages of elites to organize in a quasi-party fashion.

Drawing on empirical evidence, I show that the most commercial-cosmopolitan towns have advantages in four areas that allow for the organized exercise of political influence: control of executive and judicial offices; a stranglehold on the state senate and placeholders in the house of representatives; ownership of newspapers and general ease of information dissemination in the most commercial-cosmopolitan towns; and, control of social, religious, and cultural organizations. The least commercial-cosmopolitan interests were without such institutions and resources.

At a disadvantage in each of these areas, the least commercial-cosmopolitan towns were unable to mount a response. Despite having a roughly equal distribution of the population and roughly equal seats in the House of Representatives, the most and least commercial-cosmopolitan communities were anything but equal in terms of real representation. Unable to influence the political system through preparty methods, frustrated inhabitants resorted to violent insurrection in order to achieve their political goals.¹

¹For more on the cultural and economic milieu of Shays's Rebellion in historical context, see [Richards \(2003\)](#), [Smith \(1948b\)](#), [Starkey \(1955\)](#), and [Szatmary \(1980\)](#).

2.2 Two Coalitions of Interests

There were no political parties in the first full decade of the Commonwealth. Nonetheless, interest groups exist and they use their political power to attain economic and political goals and defend their judicial, political, and economic institutions. The organization of such political efforts is the driving force behind the arrangement of preparty politics in Massachusetts. The ability of particular interests groups to organize effectively and influence politics is grounded in their access to resources. A careful analysis of the social and economic characteristics of 1780s Massachusetts is required in order to understand the political behavior of the era.

To grapple with the competing interests, a typology –adapted and modified from [Hall \(1972\)](#)– is laid out: the commercial activity of Massachusetts’ 343 towns is measured using an index of commercialization, with Boston at one end and rural towns in the Berkshires and Maine at the other end ([Condon 2015](#); [Hall 1972](#)).² Four variables are used to construct the gradient: stock in trade, silver, money lent at interest, and average vessel tonnage. Towns are ranked along these four variables. The rankings in each of the four categories are used to calculate a commercial index number for each town, generating a gradient of commercial activity. Appendix 2.2 contains a breakdown of these variables.³

Each town’s social institutions are measured using a nine-point scale. Each town is evaluated for the presence or absence of the following: newspapers, court sessions, barristers present in 1786 or 1791, two or more barristers present in either 1786 or 1791, one or more barrister present in 1786 or 1791, the presence of a clergyman in the town for two of three

²The “District of Maine” as it is known prior to 1820, is a territory that pertains to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts until 1820, at which point it becomes the independent state of Maine ([Williamson 1832](#), 658-679).

³[Hall \(1972\)](#) has given his written permission for the raw data and material to be used and replicated without attribution or consent. However, in the interest of disclosure, he is named and attributed here ([Hall 1972](#)).

years (1780, 1786, or 1791), representatives in the lower house of the General Court for at least nine of the twelve years from 1780 to 1792, and representatives in the lower house for at least six of the same twelve years. Based on the total number of points, towns are placed into one of nine groups. Appendix 2.3 contains a breakdown of these nine groups.

The commercial index and social scale are combined into a single gradient that reflects each town's commercial-cosmopolitan character. Each town was assigned one to ten points based on its commercial decile and from one to eight depending on the number of social variables present. These points are summed and then divided into three groups. Towns with more than twelve points fall into group A; nine through twelve points fall in group B; fewer than nine points, group C. Appendix 2.4 contains a breakdown of the commercial-cosmopolitan gradient.

The 54 group A towns are the site of the most significant commercial activity and are home to nearly all social and cultural institutions as well as the institutions of state government. Group B contains 88 towns with moderate commercial activity and has some connections with important social and cultural institutions. Group C contains 201 towns that are the least commercial-cosmopolitan and have little connection to any significant social or cultural institutions. In placing the towns on a commercial-cosmopolitan gradient, one is better able to see the division among the towns. Furthermore, this allows for the political activity of each group to be associated with its social and economic characteristics.

⁴Eastern Massachusetts includes the following counties: Barnstable, Bristol, Dukes, Essex, Nantucket, Plymouth, and Suffolk. Western Massachusetts includes the following counties: Berkshire, Hampshire, Middlesex, and Worcester. Maine was legally part of Massachusetts at the time. Maine includes Cumberland, Lincoln, and York counties.

Table 2.1: Number of Towns, by Region

<i>Towns</i> ⁴	Eastern Region	Western Region	Maine	Total
Group A	31	20	3	54
Group B	35	42	11	88
Group C	19	107	75	201
Total	85	169	89	343

Table 2.2: Commercial Wealth by Town Groups

<i>Group</i> ⁵	Inventory	Tonnage	Money on Hand	Value of Enterprises
Group A	92.7%	81.3	84.8	50.6
Group B	5.5	10.7	8.6	25.1
Group C	1.7	7.9	6.5	24.3

Across the three groups of towns, interest groups seek to influence politics. The most commercial-cosmopolitan category is found in the 54 group A towns. Individuals in the group A towns work as commercial businessmen, bankers, investors, lawyers, clergymen, shipowners, coastal and global traders, manufacturers, and commercial fishermen. Group A residents are most concerned with advancing their own economic interests and seek to uphold the 1780 constitution and its accompanying judicial, administrative, and political

⁵Source: Tax Valuation Lists, found in *Acts and Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (1780-1797, 1:903-906), *Abstract of the Report of the Committee on the Valuation* (1793, 1-13), and Hall (1972, 4).

institutions.⁶ Artisan craftsmen, merchant sailors, and small manufacturers comprise a moderately commercial-cosmopolitan category that are also found in the group A towns. Commercial farmers fall into a third category with the most significant presence in the 88 group B towns. The political interests of this third category tend toward those of the group A towns; commercial farmers in the group B towns vote and think along the same lines as the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests because they benefit from being in sync with the group A interests, who hold the reins of powers. On the other extreme of the gradient are the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests, largely composed of subsistence farmers in the 201 group C towns.

Ultimately, the four, general categories of interests and the three towns boil down as two coalitions of interests, particularly in terms of polarization. One on hand, there is the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests, motivated by the pursuit of commercial expansion, financial success, and upholding the 1780 constitution. The most commercial-cosmopolitan interests organize diligently in order to preserve their advantages. The political interests of the second and third categories very often aligns with the interests of the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests. Through placeholders that may formally represent or live in the group B or group C towns but act in line with the interests of the most commercial-cosmopolitan, group A holds significant political clout.

On the other hand, the least commercial-cosmopolitan towns tend to be located in rural Massachusetts, western Massachusetts, and the inland areas of Maine. Residents of the least commercial-cosmopolitan towns focus on subsistence farming with little eye on profit-driven enterprise. These farmers participate in a bartering economy, and tend to be uneducated. Those living in such communities that are not farmers are the merchants and artisans who subsist in the rural, agrarian economy, providing services and goods to the inhabitants of the group C communities. The group C towns possess a dearth of social and professional

⁶Many of the residents of the group A towns are involved in the creation of the 1780 state constitution and are also involved in the founding of the nascent nation, and are active as Whigs during the colonial era.

institutions, resources, and the means for political organization.

As I will show in the following pages, the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests are able to use their advantages in terms of social cohesion, resources, information sharing, and representation, to ensure the levers of policymaking and governance are in their favor. At the same time, I will show how the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests, lacking such advantages, are unable to mount an effective political response.

2.3 Politics by Other Means

Each group of towns contained roughly one-third of the total population and roughly one-third of polls.⁷ In principle, the political power of each group should've been roughly equal. However, despite the roughly equal distribution of population and polls across the towns, the group A towns were disproportionately well represented in policymaking and governance. The disproportionate presence of the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests was the result of four advantages possessed by the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests: control of the Senate, placeholders in the House, control of the press, and inter-generational social standing. Illustrating the four advantages shows how divided society was in 1780s Massachusetts and how the agrarian class became frustrated at the total inability of their concerns and preferences to be conveyed into policymaking.

Table 2.3: Percentage of Polls by Region, 1784

<i>Group</i> ⁸	Eastern Mass.	Western Mass.	Maine	Total
Group A	24.9%	7.6	1.8	34.3
Group B	13	14.1	4.6	31.7
Group C	3.6	21.7	8.7	34
Total	41.5	43.4	15.1	100

⁷A poll(s) or rateable poll(s) is a *taxpaying*, landowning, adult white male that is also eligible to vote. In this context, eligible voters are white, male, property holders. Other voting qualifications, such as poll taxes, asset value minimums, and tax status are often on the books but are rarely enforced (Pole 1957). I also want to attribute Dr. Charles H. Stewart, department of political science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Dr. Stewart provided invaluable help and discussion of polls in the early American context.

⁸Sources: primary source information is found in Tax valuation Lists, found in *Acts and Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (1780-1797, 1:903-906) and *Abstract of the Report of the Committee on the*

2.3.1 The Power Brokers

The most commercial-cosmopolitan interests monopolized the major executive, legislative, and judicial offices in Massachusetts during the 1780s. Such a monopoly on power gave the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests an advantage in setting the policy agenda and using the institutions of the state to pursue their interests at the expense of the least commercial-cosmopolitan communities.

At the apex of the executive branch were the governor and lieutenant governor. The Massachusetts constitution of 1780 provided for the annual election of the governor and lieutenant governor ([Pole 1957](#); [Condon 2015](#); [Hough 1872](#)). The governor held veto power and both offices were elected by direct popular vote, with the lieutenant governor sitting on the Governor's Council. Furthermore, more than half of the nine seats on the Governor's Council were held by residents of group A towns from 1780 to 1791. During these same eleven years, the governorship and lieutenant governorship passed between John Hancock, James Bowdoin, Thomas Cushing, Benjamin Lincoln, and Samuel Adams during the same years. All of these men had longstanding social and professional ties, all graduated from Harvard College, and all had homes near each other in Boston. Additionally, all of these men were important political leaders in the years prior to Independence.⁹ With the governorship, the lieutenant governorship, and the Governor's Council, controlled by residents from group A towns, the executive branch of government was a bulwark against the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests.

Qualifications for holding the governorship and lieutenant governorship gave further advantage to the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests. To qualify for the governorship, a resident must possess a minimum property value of £1,000 ([Hough 1872](#)).¹⁰ The high qual-

Valuation (1793, 1-13). Compilation of primary source information is found in [Hall \(1972\)](#).

⁹All of these men, with the exception of Lincoln, are major Whig figures prior to independence.

¹⁰Respectively, when adjusted for inflation and converted to United States Dollars: £1,000 = ~

ifications for holding such offices posed an insurmountable barrier for any polls other than the most affluent in the group A towns.

Table 2.4: Holders of Major Offices, 1780-1791

<i>Groups</i> ¹¹	Governor	Lt. Governor	Supreme Court Justices	President of Senate	Speaker of House	Confederation Congress	National Congress	Governor's Council
Group A	100%	100	100	100	91	84	69	62
Group B	0	0	0	0	9	16	31	20
Group C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Harvard Alumni	100	91	94	n/a	n/a	79	77	n/a

The justices of the state supreme court were cut from the same cloth. The supreme court was composed of four men who ride circuit throughout Massachusetts and Maine. During the eleven years from 1780 to 1791, the eight men who served as justices are all from group A towns. Moreover, all but one justice graduated from Harvard College.¹² All

\$230,186.06.

¹¹Sources: primary source information is found in [Johnson and Malone \(1928-1944\)](#), [Acts and Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts \(1780-1797\)](#), and the Legal Papers of John Adams ([Wroth and Zobel N.d.](#)). Further information regarding residence of state leaders is found in [Fleet \(1779-1789\)](#). Additional information regarding the supreme court is found in [Cushing \(1960\)](#). Compilation of the information is found in [Hall \(1972, 63-68\)](#).

¹²Justice Sullivan did not graduate from Harvard College.

eight justices had significant ties to commercial activity. Justices Cushing, Sargeant, Paine, Sewall, all appeared in the record of interest payments in 1786 and 1787 indicating their significant involvement in speculative or investment activity.¹³ Additionally, during the era it was customary for supreme court justices to deliver addresses before grand juries throughout the commonwealth. These addresses often veered far from legal matters and were opportunities for the justices to soliloquize, advocating their own political views to local audiences throughout the commonwealth ([Cushing 1965](#)).

Table 2.5: Percentage of Polls, Lawyers, Court Sessions, and Justices, 1786

<i>Groups</i> ¹⁴	Polls (1784)	Lawyers	Court Sessions (1786-91)	Total Justices
Group A	34%	84	64	47
Group B	32	13	18	28
Group C	34	4	18	25

In addition to the justices of the supreme court, the judiciary's rank and file as well as administrative officers were often occupied by placeholders. In this context, placeholders were leading local politicians, lawyers, officers, judges of the court of common pleas, and

¹³Primary source information regarding the financial dealings of the justices is found in the unpublished Interest Payment Books in the archives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Additional primary source information is found in [Fleet's \(N.d.\)](#) Register for the years 1780-1791. This information is compiled in [Hall \(1972\)](#), footnote no.54.

¹⁴Total justices refers to justices of the peace and justices of the quorum (i.e., justices of the peace).

Sources: population figures are found in [Bureau of the Census \(1908\)](#) and number of polls are in the tax evaluations lists for 1784 and 1786 found in the [Journal of the House of Representatives \(1780, vol.163\)](#). Information regarding judges of the common pleas is found in the [Fleet \(1779-1789\)](#). Partial compilation

justices of the peace, who lived throughout the commonwealth. Many of these placeholder positions were appointed by the governor without the democratic safeguards provided by civil service rules and popular elections.

Such appointed positions came with cash income, something that was rare throughout the hinterlands of Massachusetts. Desperate to hold onto their posts and their income, many of these placeholders supported the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests. Others, particularly the more important positions like those on the Governor's Council and those selected for national office, came largely from the group A towns and have close social and commercial ties with commercial entrepreneurs and learned professionals in group A towns. Ultimately, inhabitants of group A towns held more than half of the terms as judges in the court of common pleas. Judges use their position to engage in lending and other commercial activity, using their influence as judges to secure favorable terms.

Justices of the peace also exercised significant influence in local matters. Justices of the peace sat at the county level, in general sessions of the peace. The justices of the peace hand down decisions in criminal and civil cases as well as act as policymakers. Justices of the peace approved local infrastructure plans, issue business licenses, and set local tax rates. Justices also served as mediators for disputes among residents. Justices of the peace received fees for providing judicial and government services. Such fees were often determined by the volume of cases and matters taken up, thus giving incentive to add layers of bureaucracy and try any number of minor criminal or civil cases.

In the eleven years from 1780 to 1791, more than half of the justices of the peace were from group A towns. However, those justices who live in the group B and C towns are placeholders and often serve in the General Court. Those justices of the peace and judges of common pleas who also served in the senate and the house of representatives, supported the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests in exchange for support of the judiciary and the

of this information is found in [Hall \(1972\)](#).

Table 2.6: Percentage of Terms of Judges on the Court of Common Pleas, 1780-91

<i>Groups</i> ¹⁵	Polls (1784)	% of Terms in Common Pleas
Group A	34%	52
Group B	32	35
Group C	34	13

judicial fee system that enriched the justices and judges.

Congregational ministers also served as placeholders for the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests. Ministers were visible and trusted members of society and thus played an important public role in early Massachusetts. The Congregational church was the *de facto* establishment church and has strong ties to the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests. The upper ranks of church hierarchy and the Congregational seminaries were anchored in the group A towns. Many Congregational ministers were educated, preach, and worked in the group A towns. Congregational ministers who were dispatched to the peripheries of the commonwealth answered to the senior clergymen located in the group A towns. As a consequence, the interests of the Congregational church and the interests of the most commercial-cosmopolitan overlapped. The shared interests of the Congregational Church and the most commercial-commercial communities began nearly a century earlier.

Beginning in 1692, the General Court determined the geographic jurisdiction of particular Congregational churches and set the boundaries for parishes. The General Court also imposed statewide parish taxes, levied on the residents of each parish ([Cushing 1969](#)). The

¹⁵Sources: For information regarding polls, see source information in footnote 7. Information regarding judges of the common pleas is found in the 1787 edition of [Fleet \(1779-1789\)](#). Partial compilation of this information is found in [Hall \(1972\)](#).

church taxes, levied by the state, were the primary source of revenue for the Congregational church. Moreover, the General Court passed legislation that endowed each parish with the same powers of a municipal corporation, but limited to the scope of administering a system of worship (Cushing 1969). As a result, Congregational ministers wielded significant political influence in local politics.

Prior to the constitution of 1780, religious organizations established outside of the formal system of municipal, Congregational parishes were not endowed with the same authority nor benefitted from levied taxes. Non-congregational denominations were widely considered subversive organizations during the colonial era and early Republic. All residents falling within a particular parish were required to pay taxes to support their respective Congregational parish, regardless of whether they regularly attended the Congregational church or attended services for an unrecognized denomination. However, the 1780 constitution disestablished the Congregational church. The formal disestablishment of the Congregational church led to an increase of petitions to the General Court for recognition of previously unrecognized denominations.

Successful petitions to the General Court for recognition afforded a newly recognized denomination the same corporate powers and tax support as a Congregational parish. After 1780, when parishioners within an existing Congregational parish splintered off, those parishioner's levied taxes were reallocated to their newly recognized denomination. The proliferation of newly recognized denominations threatened to reduce tax revenue and local political influence for the Congregational church. In order to stymie the proliferation of new denominations, the congregational ministers were compelled to support the programs and policies of the most commercial-cosmopolitan class, who also had a monopoly over the executive, judiciary, and much of the General Court. In a *quid pro quo*, the Congregational ministers pushed the agenda of the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests in their preaching and ministerial work in exchange for support of the Congregational church in the General Court, the executive, and judiciary. While some new denominations do emerge after the rat-

ification of the 1780 constitution, the General Court was reluctant to recognize new religious denominations, thus preserving the Congregational church’s revenue and political power.

Table 2.7: Percentage of Towns with at Least 1 Minister Present, 1780-91

<i>Group</i> ¹⁶	At Least 1 Minister
Group A	100%
Group B	97
Group C	69

However, on the other hand, the presence of new, non-Congregational denominations in the group A towns also contributed to the polarization between group A and C towns. As a result of the presence of new and non-congregational denominations there was greater religious diversity, primarily in the group A communities. In the 1780s, 100% of group A towns have at least one minister and 57% of those same towns have only congregational ministers, as seen in table 2.8. 43% of group A towns have ministers from denominations other than congregational. However, on the other extreme of the gradient, only 69% of group C towns had at least one minister, 52% of those same towns had only a congregational minister, and a mere 10% of towns had ministers of a denomination other than congregational.

The presence and diversity of ministers in group A towns exposed the residents to various organized religions and makes residents more tolerant of religious ideas other than their own, thus making group A residents more cosmopolitan. However, the group C towns, a third

¹⁶Source: primary source information regarding ministers and minister’s residences is found in the 1787 edition, pp.51-57, in [Fleet \(1779-1789\)](#). Information is partially compiled in [Hall \(1972\)](#).

¹⁷Sources: see sourcing information in footnote 16.

Table 2.8: Types of Ministers by Denomination, 1780-1791

<i>Group</i> ¹⁷	Congregational Only	Congregational & Other	Non-Congregational Only
Group A	57%	43	0
Group B	60	33	3
Group C	52	10	7

of which had no minister and only a tenth of which had any religious diversity, highlights the absence of different ideas and the social isolation of the group C towns. The lack of religious diversity in the group C towns also points to the near monopoly over religious institutions held by the Congregational church thus giving Congregational ministers –who are placeholders for the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests– a bully pulpit from which to effect public opinion in the group C towns.

2.3.2 Masters of the Senate

The commercial-cosmopolitan elite have a stranglehold on the state senate. The commercial-cosmopolitan elite's control over the upper chamber is linked to two factors: first, qualifications for holding office. State senators were required to have a freehold worth of £300 on property with a value of at least £600. Senators had to be residents of Massachusetts for at least five years as well as residents of the constituency they represented ([Pole 1957](#)). Senators often had homes in Boston or Salem in addition to second homes in the hinterlands. Many of the residents of the group A towns had owned their homes for more than five years at the time of the ratification of the 1780 constitution. It was easy for residents of group A towns to meet the 5 year residency requirement. Polls in the least commercial-cosmopolitan communities often worked as itinerant farm laborers in their early years, before settling in a specific location, putting them at a disadvantage in the early years of the Commonwealth. If a given farmer established his own farm in 1780, he was unable to run for office until at

least 1786, given the senate election cycle. The political institutions surrounding the senate gave the elite a clear advantage in winning senate seats while disadvantaging polls in the least commercial-cosmopolitan communities.

Second, a disproportionate number of senators were also judges of the court of common pleas. The outright numerical advantage of the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests in the senate was compounded through placeholders. The combination of senators elected from group A towns and those who also serve as judges represents roughly 70% of all senate seats. Antifederalist senators held less than one-tenth of the seats in the senate while roughly half of the senators support the new constitution of 1788.¹⁸ Group A towns and judges often had aligned interests; throughout the 1780s, the senate was a bulwark against measures sent up from the lower house that are contrary to the interests of group A towns and the judiciary, including proposals for tax reform, suspension of debt cases before the courts, once again implementing legal tender notes, and the softening of punishment for Shaysite rebels in 1786.

Table 2.9: Allocation of Senate Seats

<i>Regions</i> ¹⁹	% of Population	% of Polls	% of Seats Allotted
Eastern	40%	42	50
Western	40	43	40
Maine	20	15	10

¹⁸While there are no formal political parties in 1780s Massachusetts, there are two, vague, informal, political factions: Federalists and Antifederalists. These factions do not resemble formal political parties at all. Federalists tend to be those who support a strong central government and a strong judiciary; Federalists tend to be from the group A towns. Antifederalists support local governance and a weak central government. Antifederalists tend to be from the group C towns.

¹⁹Source: primary source information regarding the apportionment of senators in Massachusetts is found

Table 2.10: Senate Composition

<i>Groups</i> ²⁰	% of Population	% of Senate Seats	% Served as Judges
Group A	33%	47	23
Group B	29	38	39
Group C	39	16	38

Seats in the house of representatives –the lower chamber of the General Court– were more equally apportioned. The commercial-cosmopolitan interests were unable to monopolize the lower chamber with a numerical advantage. To the contrary, the western counties had forty-four percent of the eligible voters and were represented by fifty-two percent of the total representatives in the lower chamber. Representatives from Maine were ten percent of the seats in the house while having twenty percent of the population. As a result, the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests were overrepresented in the lower chamber. Nevertheless, the commercial-cosmopolitan interests were able to make in-roads in the lower chamber through placeholders.

Like in the upper chamber, there were a significant number of representatives who are also justices. Representatives with dual status as justices account for one-third of the seats in

in [Thorpe \(1909\)](#) and [Acts and Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts \(1780-1797\)](#). This information is partially compiled in [Hall \(1972\)](#).

²⁰Source: primary source information regarding population is found in [Bureau of the Census \(1908\)](#). Information regarding senate apportionment is in [Acts and Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts \(1780-1797\)](#) and [Thorpe \(1909\)](#). This information is partially compiled in [Hall \(1972\)](#).

²¹Percentage of polls in this context refers to the total number of polls in that particular group of towns. Percentage of members refers to the percentage of the total body is comprised of members from a particular

Table 2.11: House Composition, 1780-1791

<i>Groups</i> ²¹	% of Polls	% of Members	% of Justices
Group A	34%	33	52
Group B	32	34	33
Group C	34	33	25

the lower chamber. When justices of the peace and group A representatives are combined, they represented more than half of the seats in the lower chamber. While in the upper chamber, the presence of senators with dual status as judges contributed to the commercial-cosmopolitan interests' utter monopoly on the upper chamber.

However, in the lower chamber, the justices of the peace were not as reliable. The justices of the peace were sometime swayed by the interests of their constituency. While the commercial-cosmopolitan interests were unable to exert sufficient pressure on the lower chamber to advance their agenda, they were able to halt unfavorable legislation when it reached the senate and through their control of the governorship and the Governor's Council.

Group A town's effective control over the legislature impacted national representation. The General Court, charged with electing representatives to the Confederation Congress, choose individuals along the same lines. Roughly four-fifths of the Confederation congressmen lived in group A towns. From 1788 to 1791, seventy-seven percent of representatives sent to the National Congress lived in group A towns.

In controlling the upper chamber outright and having significant influence in the lower

group of towns. Percentage of justices refers to the number of representatives from a particular group of towns that also has the status of justice or judge.

Sources: primary source information is found in [Acts and Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts \(1780-1797\)](#). Information is also found in [Greene and Harrington \(1932\)](#). This information is compiled in [Hall \(1972\)](#).

chamber, the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests set the agenda, control policy, and halt countervailing interests. In also controlling the executive branch and the judiciary, the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests cemented their advantages over the least commercial-cosmopolitan communities.

2.3.3 Control of the Press

The group A towns were the informational epicenter of the Commonwealth. The widespread circulation of newspapers and magazines in the group A town served as a unifying force for the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests. In the eleven years between 1780 and 1791, all of the newspapers and magazines published in the commonwealth were published in group A towns (table 2.12). These publications were owned and manned by residents of group A towns. Furthermore, advertisers in the press are merchants, artisans, and other service-based professionals, who overwhelmingly live in the group A towns. The press's dependence on advertising revenue gives further strength to the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests in controlling *what* and *how* information was communicated. The most commercial-cosmopolitan interests were able to make the case for their programs and policy positions through propagandizing in newspapers and magazines.

A notable example, John Adam's *Defense of the Constitutions of the Government*, of which four-fifths of all subscribers lived in group A towns. The concentration of periodicals in the group A towns highlights the cultural sensibilities and learnedness of those individuals living in group A towns. This also highlights the remote desolation in which many of the residents outside group A towns found themselves.

²²Sources: information regarding newspapers is found in [Brigham \(1947\)](#). Information regarding magazines is found in [Matthew \(N.d.\)](#). Information regarding post offices is found in [Fleet \(1793, 63\)](#) and [Fleet \(1786, 51-52\)](#). This information is compiled in [Hall \(1972\)](#).

Table 2.12: Periodicals & Post Offices, 1780-91

<i>Group</i> ²²	Newspapers	Magazines	Post Offices (1786)	Post Offices (1791)
Group A	100%	100	100	70
Group B	0	0	0	13
Group C	0	0	0	17

The press served as a means to inform and unify constituents holding shared interests and thus the press, and those who control the press, were able to shape public opinion ([Bachrach and Baratz 1962](#); [Lane 1965](#); [Zaller 1984, 1992](#)). In a context without parties, periodicals served as a form of quasi-party organizing. In the case of political parties, party newspapers and pamphlets serve to counteract the influence of elite press. However, in the preparty era, the elite press dominates communication in Massachusetts and as a result, had a high degree of influence over public opinion and thus, the policy agenda.

The least commercial-cosmopolitan communities had a dearth of periodicals. Even if residents of one town managed to come together for a convention and agree upon grievances and action steps, the residents of an adjacent town were unaware and thus unable to participate, thus fracturing the less commercial-cosmopolitan interests. Without periodicals, the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests were unable to get their constituents on the same page. Without periodicals, those same interests were unable to promote particular candidates or advocate for or against particular bills.

In controlling the press, the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests control what information is shared. In the eleven years from 1780 to 1791, the press did not cover the proceedings of the General Court. Constituents were unable to know the roll call votes of their particular delegates. During those same years, the senate did not keep a journal and the house kept an unpublished journal of its proceedings. Constituents had no way of knowing the specific work of the General Court. Additionally, the press did not publish details

on the holders of the Commonwealth's debts or other details regarding the financial status of the state. Furthermore, the state government did not publish such financial information independently. As a result, the details of the legislature and the state's finances were obscured from public view. Consequently, information was doled out in the currency of social contact –valuable information is transmitted by word of mouth.

Those with social contacts in public office were able to find out the internal details of the legislature and the state government. The members of the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests had a high degree of social contact with government officers, judges, and delegates to the General Court, with many group A residents serving in such capacities. As a consequence, members of the group A towns often had greater access to valuable information. This valuable information was then shared through an informal network of commercial entrepreneurs, public officers, and learned professionals across the state. That same information was kept hidden from other citizens, particularly those citizens in the communities outside the group A towns.

The matter of communication was further exacerbated by the mechanics of mail. From 1786 and 1791, between 70% and 100% of post offices are in group A towns. As a consequence, group B and C residents were forced to travel into group A towns to retrieve their mail. The difficulty and length of travel in the era made dissemination of information slow and sporadic. Without post offices or with few post offices by 1791, there was little ability to physically transmit information or disseminate a unified policy agenda, posing another obstacle for the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests.

Ultimately, the control of the press by the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests had two advantages: first, the periodicals circulated among the group A communities helped unify and put public opinion behind bills or policies that are advantageous to the group A interests. Furthermore, elite control of the press also allowed the few periodicals that were read by residents of the peripheral communities to only see one side of any given story; the opposing views, the views of the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests were not included,

thus giving additional advantage to elite's in shaping public opinion.

The lack of press coverage on important matters before the legislature and the commonwealth's financial status, the concentration of post offices in the group A towns, and the need for social contact with government officers to obtain such information, all point to the elite's clear advantage in terms of information sharing.

2.3.4 The Means of Ascent

Education was a social infrastructure that advantages the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests in the group A towns. The strong social ties in the group A communities begins in the private academies where the affluent send their children.²³ The effects of the social ties formed in private academies and later in college on reproducing social class stratification are well documented ([Aries and Seider 2007](#); [Karen 1991](#); [Martin 2009](#); [Persell and Cookson Jr 1985](#)). Graduation from an elite private academy and Harvard were common features in the backgrounds of nearly the entirety of the governing class and the most commercial-cosmopolitan communities.

In the executive branch of government, all of the governor's and lieutenant governor's, with the exception of Benjamin Lincoln, attended Harvard College. Among the eight men who serve on the supreme court between 1780 and 1791, only one is not a graduate of Harvard College. Additionally, more than three-quarters of the men selected to represent the commonwealth in the Confederation and National Congress are graduates of Harvard College. Seventy-five percent of Confederation congressmen from Massachusetts graduated from Harvard and more than four-fifths of the congressmen live in group A towns. The 1788 change to popular election of congressmen does not increase popular control, despite reformer's intentions. From 1788 to 1791, 77% percent of congressmen graduated from

²³Common private academies in the group A towns are the Roxbury Latin School, Phillips Academy Andover, and the Governor's Academy.

Harvard and seventy-seven percent live in group A towns.²⁴

In attending Harvard College, many members of the commercial-cosmopolitan elite became socially acquainted and receive similar educations. Moreover, affluent parents in the group A towns established private schools for their children that serve as pipelines to Harvard College. From there, Harvard College serves as the pipeline for commercial ventures, political careers, and lives of affluence, power, and influence.

In addition to the social reproduction of elite stratification brought on by elite schools and colleges, the nature of education of the era was itself a source of polarization between the group A and C towns. School and college create literate and informed citizens. Literacy allows for citizens to read newspapers, magazines, political treatises, and the popular pamphlets of the era. The educational system of the day also contains a significant religious and moral component. This leads citizens to develop ideas about political principles and how society should be governed. The payment of the state debt is seen not only in economic terms but also in terms of moral virtue. The issue of allowing the courts to sit in 1786 and 1787 in face of armed insurrection is a matter of maintaining civil society and ensuring the continued and proper functioning of the judiciary, one of the three pillars of republican democracy. Ultimately, such issues were viewed in light of principled ideas about right and wrong. Such moral principles were commonly learned and discussed in the classroom of private academies and Harvard.

Schools and colleges provided a forum for discussions of social ills and the state of politics. Ultimately, the varied consequences of education, a privilege largely experienced by the most commercial-cosmopolitan class, creates a chasm between the educated citizens of the group A towns and the often illiterate and poorly educated residents of the group C towns, whose lives were dictated by visceral and practical considerations. Education also produced learned professionals who interacted socially, further bolstering the unity of interests and political

²⁴A minority of the 77% graduate from Yale College, effectively the same in terms of its effect on reproducing social stratification.

advantages of the most commercial-cosmopolitan class.

The varied learned professionals who first form social ties at Harvard College, then have those social ties continued and reinforced by the many social, professional, and voluntary organizations of the era. Many of such organizations have longstanding presences in Massachusetts society beginning well before the Revolution. The Masons, by the 1780s were wholly integrated into elite society. Eighteen of the nineteen Masonic lodges in Massachusetts were located in group A towns.²⁵ As for the leadership, 100% of the holders of the office of Grand Master and other senior Masonic offices are residents of the group A towns ([Fleet 1793](#), 80-81).

The merchant marine societies hold significant sway in the ten leading shipowning towns as well as in the ninety additional shipowning towns. The marine societies function as an early version of an industry lobbying group, promoting the cause of merchant mercantilism and the interests of shipowning communities. As for the societies for advanced degree professionals –physicians and barristers– have officers and members that are nearly exclusively from group A towns ([Fleet 1792](#), 84). The most commercial-cosmopolitan interests control these organizations and use the organizations to their advantage in terms of political organizing. This gave the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests a platform for organizing in the preparty era, a platform for which the residents of the least commercial-cosmopolitan communities did not partake and were actively excluded.

Honorary and cultural institutions were also controlled by the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences was founded by the Massachusetts General Court in 1780. The Academy was directed by leading commercial entrepreneurs and learned professionals, exclusively from the group A towns. The ranks of the Academy were populated by placeholders and other learned individuals from the group A towns. The Massachusetts Historical Society was founded by leading politicians in the 1780s and was

²⁵Machias, Massachusetts is the site of the only Masonic lodge outside of the group A towns.

charged with studying and documenting the history of Massachusetts. Charitable and voluntary organizations were founded by senior Congregational ministers with the financial support from the affluent residents in the group A towns.²⁶ The Massachusetts Agricultural Society, an early version of the farm lobby, was founded and led by members of the most commercial-cosmopolitan class and hosted its regular meetings in central Boston ([Fleet 1792](#), 75; [Fleet 1794](#), 32).²⁷

Professional, social, and voluntary associations in the early commonwealth unified the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests. Strong social ties began with education in the private academies of the group A towns and later in the ties formed at Harvard College. This foundation lead to lifelong ties through professional and social organizations such as the Masonic Lodge, marine societies, merchant societies, physician and barrister associations, honorary societies, and charitable associations. Through the interactions brought on by such associations, the commercial-cosmopolitan elite were able to advance their economic interests through collaboration. In collaborating in business, society, and politics, the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests were able to monopolize the levers of power and exclude dissent, in this case, the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests.

²⁶Additional academic, scientific, and charitable associations are: Massachusetts Historical Society, Massachusetts Humane Society, Society to Propagate the Gospel, Scots Charitable Society, Massachusetts Congregational Society. For primary source information see [Fleet \(1779-1789\)](#). The compiled information may be found in [Hall \(1972\)](#).

²⁷The president of the Massachusetts Agricultural Society was Thomas Russell, a leading financier; John Lowell, a respected merchant, served as vice president; Moses Gill, a judge with significant commercial activities, also served as vice president ([Hall 1972](#), 76).

2.4 Legislating without Parties

The most commercial-cosmopolitan interests were organized in primitive fashion compared with modern political parties. Furthermore, any organization of the most commercial-cosmopolitan was, in principle, non-political. The basis of the organization of the Massachusetts elite is through the natural forms of social and institutional organizing that is commonly found among elites. Such organization became political in Massachusetts because there were no formal parties, and elite's social infrastructure serves political ends. As a *result* of their non-political associations, the most commercial-cosmopolitan interest's control the levers of political power –the General Court, the judiciary, the executive, the Church, social and educational institutions– thus allowing for the implementation of favorable policy. The most developed interests were able to pass laws to consolidate the commonwealth's debt and pay it back at a high rate of interest –to the benefit of speculators and lenders, who are residents of group A towns–, pay the commonwealth's share of Continental debt, quash tender laws, quash stay laws and debt relief, and raise taxes.

The least developed interests opposed all of these measures. The least developed interests tried to make their opposition known through their representatives in both chambers of the General Court. However, such efforts are futile. The most developed interests exerted their will in the lower chamber through placeholders; in the rare instance a reform bill passed the lower chamber, it is swiftly quashed in the elite-controlled senate. Politics without parties brought significant frustration for the least developed communities.

The political strength of the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests came from their high degree of political involvement. Between 1780 and 1791, 98% of representatives from the 54 group A towns served for 9-11 years, as compared to the 201 group C towns, in which only 14% of towns had representatives serving 9-11 years. On the contrary, the bulk of towns in the 201 group C towns, 61%, sent representatives for 0-5 years. The 10 leading shipowning towns of Massachusetts –considered the most affluent– contain 12% of the polls

while having 16% of all senate seats and 11% of seats in the House. On the other hand, 57% of polls lived across 243 non-shipowning towns and held 53% of senate seats and 64% of seats in the House.

Table 2.13: Percentage of Towns with Reps by Length of Time, 1780-91

<i>Group</i> ²⁸	9-11 Yrs.	6-8 Yrs.	0-5 Yrs.
Group A	98%	2	0
Group B	70	24	6
Group C	14	25	61

The substantive political disagreements between the most and least commercial-cosmopolitan interests arose over matters of taxation, credit, and judicial policies, pitting the coalitions against each other. The most commercial-cosmopolitan interests supported a taxation program that favored commercial property, keeping taxes low on the merchant class. The ten leading shipowning towns within the group A towns contained 12% of rateable polls in 1784. This same set of individuals holds two-thirds of commercial warehouse inventory in the state, 72% of the state's total vessel tonnage, and 87% of the state's wharfage.

Despite the significant concentration of commercial value among this 12% of rateable polls, total tax payments from this group only account for 14% of the state's total tax bill.²⁹ Half of collected tax revenue in the 1780s comes from taxes on rateable polls and personal

²⁸Length of political involvement refers to the percentage of towns who sent representatives to the General Court for certain number of years.

Sources: primary source information may be found in the tax evaluations for 1784 and 1786 found in *Acts and Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (1780-1797) and [Hall \(1972\)](#).

²⁹Primary source information is found in (*Acts and Resolves of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1780-81 1782*, 903-906). Partial compilation of this information is found in [Hall \(1972\)](#).

real estate. Taxes must be paid in paper tender, specie, or in financial securities. The most commercial-cosmopolitan towns, with significant cash flow and affluence, had no issue meeting their tax obligations. However, in the group C towns, hard currency or specie were nearly nonexistent.

Table 2.14: Polarization in Roll Call Votes, 1780-1786

<i>Towns</i> ³⁰	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Group A	58%	76	80	78	77	75	80	60	48	69
Group B	23	39	45	46	51	42	47	30	13	46
Group C	29	32	42	42	42	47	33	24	20	34
Total	37	54	58	58	59	54	54	38	26	49

Table 2.15: Polarization in Roll Call Votes, 1780-1786

<i>Towns</i> ³¹	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Group A	58%	76	80	78	77	75	80	60	48	69
Group B	23	39	45	46	51	42	47	30	13	46
Group C	29	32	42	42	42	47	33	24	20	34
Total	37	54	58	58	59	54	54	38	26	49

³⁰The numbers correspond to the 19 roll call votes for which there was no consensus. The 19 bills are enumerated and described in appendix A, section 1. Appendix A also contains information regarding sources.

All roll call votes for both table 2.14 and table 2.15 are reported as percentage of yes vote, except for when it is reported as percentage of no vote, as indicated in appendix A, section 1.

³¹See previous footnote for information and details on sources.

The most commercial-cosmopolitan interests in the group A towns were able to present a united front to achieve policies to their benefit or quash disadvantageous policies. The data presented in table 2.14 and table 2.15 shows the polarization between the poles of the commercial-cosmopolitan gradient. Furthermore, the roll call votes in table 2.14 and table 2.15 are evidence that the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests are, in large part, able to push through legislation in their interest, and quash countervailing legislation. Ultimately, this points to the unified and organized front of the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests.

The group C towns were unable to present a united front. The representatives sent to the General Court, while in principle sent to the General Court to represent their constituents' interests, often vote in line the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests. The lack of information sharing and the absence of parties creates a situation in which those individuals who have public profiles and are most widely visible, win elections. Judges and justices are very often the most visible persons in the least developed communities. However, the interests of judges and justices are often in line with those of the group A towns and the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests and not in line with those of the constituents that elected them to office.

Looking at table 2.16, one sees a granular breakdown of the western communities –site

³²The percentages listed show the proportion of Representatives opposed to the measures proposed. For this table, the first roll call vote is the consolidation act of January 1781. This bill seeks to consolidate the commonwealth's debt and refund the debt at a higher rate of interest. Much of the debt was held by speculators and lenders based in the group A towns, particularly Boston and Salem. Thus, it is to their advantage to consolidate and refund the commonwealth's debt at a higher rate of interest. The second roll call vote refers to the Excise tax bill of March 1785 seeking to implement an excise tax at a higher rate than had been previously considered. Elite interests want to use the Excise tax to pay for the Commonwealth's share of the Continental government's expenses. Both of these bills were very much favored by the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests and vehemently opposed by the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests.

Sources: primary information is found in *Journal of the House of Representatives* (1780). Information is compiled in Hall (1972, 168-170).

Table 2.16: % of Reps Voting Against Two Pro-Elite Roll Call Votes

<i>Towns</i> ³²	Debt Consolidation Bill	Excise Tax Bill
Western Group A	33%	31
Western Group B	59	77
Western Group C	73	78
Total	61	69

of the bulk of the least developed communities— by commercial-cosmopolitan development, in the context of only western communities. Nonetheless, representatives from the group A towns within the western counties voted at a lower rate than their counterparts from the western group B and C towns when considering bills that were favorable to commercial-cosmopolitan interests. One also sees that those representatives who were also justices or judges generally vote against such bills at an even lower rate than their colleagues who only served as representatives. Such voting patterns points to the judges and justices in their role as placeholders, even within the generally less developed western counties of Massachusetts. This data also illustrates the polarization between the two extremes of the commercial-cosmopolitan gradient.

Table 2.17: Voting of Dual, Representative–Justices on Same Two Roll Call Votes

<i>Group</i> ³³	Debt Consolidation Bill	Excise Tax Bill
Western Group A	50%	25
Western Group B	56	67
Western Group C	50	70
Total	52	56

Table 2.18: Voting of All Other Representatives on Same Two Roll Call Votes

<i>Group</i> ³⁴	Debt Consolidation Bill	Excise Tax Bill
Western Group A	22%	50
Western Group B	69	83
Western Group C	78	82
Total	64	78

The group C towns pushed for tender law reform to increase the legitimacy and flow of paper currency. However, the commercial-cosmopolitan elite opposed tender law reform, so as to keep high the value of their assets. Furthermore, the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests support the judiciary's judgments and the enforcement of debt judgments. The elite were opposed to legislation suspending debts. Underlying debt suits is the sanctity of contract, a central tenet of Common Law. Furthermore, suspension of debt judgments would have imperiled the flow of credit upon which the commercial economy depends. Views on suspending debt are distinctly polarized along the commercial-cosmopolitan gradient.

Elite control of major public offices, outright control of the senate, substantial influence

³³See footnote for table 2.16 for information regarding the bills and for information regarding sources.

³⁴See footnote for table 2.16 for information regarding the bills and for information regarding sources.

³⁵Sources: primary source information is found in *Debates and Proceedings in the Convention of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Held in the Year 1788, and which Finally Ratified the Constitution of the United States* (1856, 87-92). Primary source information regarding roll call votes is found in *Journal of the House of Representatives* (1780, 1786:294-295) and *Journal of the House of Representatives* (1780, 1787:367). The compiled and aggregated data is found in Hall (1972, 270-272).

Table 2.19: Votes Against Extension of Debt Stay Measures, 1786 & 1787

<i>Group</i> ³⁵	1786	1787	Change
Group A	68%	58	-10
Group B	26	36	+10
Group C	31	26	-5

in the house, network of placeholders in the church, business, and the judiciary, as well as control of the press and control of social, professional, and voluntary associations, gave the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests the ability to implement their programs and laws that were to their advantage. The advantages of the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests came at the cost of the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests. Without the ability to gather information, disseminate political ideas, and organize, the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests were unable to exercise influence in the political system and their frustrations began to accumulate.

In the years prior to the insurrection of 1786, questions raised pertaining to state and national taxation lay bear the deep chasm between the most and least commercial-cosmopolitan interests. The most commercial-cosmopolitan interests advances a policy program that included legislation for repaying the state's debt as well as legislation for collecting direct and poll taxes to be used for paying the national debt. The most commercial-cosmopolitan interests pushed a narrative that rapid repayment of state and national debt would benefit Massachusetts' economic health and that it was a moral imperative to repay the state's debts. However, the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests were opposed to these measures, seeing such high taxes and moral imperatives as serving elite interests, enriching those already at the top. However, attempts to counteract the elite's policy agenda by the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests were futile. The most commercial-cosmopolitan interests are organized and always a step ahead of the least commercial-commercial interests.

Bills for greater taxation pass through both chambers of the General Court with little ability of the least commercial-cosmopolitan to put a stop to such bills. The least commercial-cosmopolitan's numerical advantage is ineffective because of placeholder representatives that vote in line with elite interests. Once bills pass the lower chamber, the outright monopoly of the senate and the governorship by the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests ensured the smooth passage of bills. Between 1780 and 1786, three-quarters of the votes taken in the General Court pertain to bills regarding taxation, state and national debt, and private debt. Of the 20 bills regarding such matters, only 1 received consensus support. On 19 roll call votes, there was polarization between the most and least commercial-cosmopolitan interests, as displayed in table 2.14 and table 2.15. The same table also points to the binary nature of the polarization, with the greatest difference between the group A and group B towns. This evidence points to the fact that the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests attempted to get relief from their economic distress. Their efforts turned out to be fruitless.

2.5 Populist Backlash: from Discontent to Uprising

At the outset of the economic crisis beginning in 1780, Massachusetts farmers had faith in the political system to provide relief ([Starkey 1955](#), 7-19). Between 1780 and 1786, rural constituents hold scores of conventions, where grievances are aired and efforts are organized. Political conventions generated many and sundry petitions and letters with a unifying theme: rural communities are in distress and state government is exacerbating the conditions. Records of such conventions show the conditions farmers were most concerned with were: private debts, burdensome taxes, lack of currency, and the courts ([Starkey 1955](#); [Richards 2003](#), 5-7; [Warren 1905](#)).

In 1781, attendees of political conventions in Hampshire and Berkshire counties declared the farmer's opposition to the repeal of paper currency as legal tender. The farmer's argued repeal of paper currency would cause further currency contraction, further depress farm prices, and render what little paper currency farmers possess invalid in debtor's court ([Taylor 1954](#)). Aggrieved farmers at a convention in Lancaster sent a letter to their representative at the General Court, Ephraim Carter, with instructions to pass "a law to ease the burden of taxation upon the husbandman" ([Smith 1948a](#), 83-86). The letter also included instructions for "the abolition of the courts of common pleas and general sessions of the peace and a transfer of their jurisdiction to the supreme judicial court, and in other matters to justices of the peace" as well "the reduction of salaries" ([Smith 1948a](#), 83-86). To mitigate the effects of high taxes, Carter was instructed to use "the payment of fines into the public treasury and lighten the poll tax" ([Smith 1948a](#), 83-86). The letter reveals rural constituent's distrust of distant power by instructing Carter to seek the "removal of the legislature to some other place than Boston" ([Smith 1948a](#), 83-86). The many and sundry instructions from the Lancaster convention points to rural constituent's concern with taxes and court judgments, as well as emphasizing their desire for local governance.

By 1786, common men in the group C towns realized that the participating through

the conventional means of political change was in vain. Conventions that had once been the venue for civil political discussion, became the venue for organizing armed insurrection. In August 1786, the participants of a convention in Hatfield draft a pledge committing the signers “to prevent the sitting of the court of common pleas for the county, or of any other court that shall attempt to take property by distress and to prevent at the risk of their lives and fortunes the public sale of property seized by distressed” (Smith 1948a, 83-86). In September 1786, Job Shattuck sends a letter to the judges of the court on behalf of the rebels from Middlesex county stating, “that it was the voice of the people of the county that the court of general sessions of the peace and of common pleas shall not sit in this county until such time as the people shall have a redress of a number of grievances they labor under at present, which will be set forth in a petition or remembrance to the next General Court” (Smith 1948a, 83-86).

At a Hampshire county convention of distressed farmers, the participants write: “the expensive mode of collecting debts which by the reason of the scarcity of cash will fill the gaols with unhappy debtors and thereby hinder a respectable body of people from being serviceable either to themselves or community” (Smith 1948a, 83-86). In January 1787, attendees at a convention in Brookfield send a petition to Governor Bowdoin demanding the “[adjournment] of the court of general sessions, and of the common pleas, for the three western counties, until after the next general election and session of the legislature” (Smith 1948a, 83-86). The petitions generated from political conventions are useful only in so far as they are acted upon by the politicians receiving the petitions. In the case of Massachusetts in the 1780s, not at all.

Popular discontent became popular insurrection. The insurrection in Massachusetts begins in late August 1786 and lasts until August 1787. The insurrection persists farmer’s in the western counties of Massachusetts continue to perceive their grievances as falling on deaf ears.

Governor Bowdoin convened the legislature in November 1786 to address the ongoing

insurrection. The conservative elite in Boston, led by Samuel Adams, were vehemently opposed to appeasing the farmers and argued for harsh punishment for agitators stating: “in monarchies the crime of treason and rebellion may admit of being pardoned or lightly punished, but the man who dares rebel against the laws of a republic ought to suffer death” (Pencak 1989, 64; Richards 2003, 16). Governor Bowdoin, while not sympathetic to the farmers, was more interested in bringing the insurrection to an end and restoring law and order. The legislature passed a series of measures that were not as harsh as what Adams wanted, but instead reflect a compromising approach (Richards 2003, 16-17).

To help farmers, the legislature passed measures to ease the tax burden by allowing payment in paper currency, specie, or in the form of land, services or other assets. The legislation also extended the due date for current taxes from January 1 to April 1, 1787. Moreover, the legislature approved a plan to sell 1,800 square miles of Maine to pay publicly held debt. In terms of private debt, a measure passed postponing legal fees for two years for farmers brought to debtor’s court. Additionally, between January and September 1787, farmers are permitted to pay private debts with land and other property (Cain and Dougherty 2016; Richards 2003, 16-17).

To further mollify rebel farmers the legislature passed an act of indemnity pardoning all individuals who had partaken in blocking the courts. However, to receive pardon, individuals are required to come forward, name themselves, and take an oath of allegiance to the state and its leaders (Richards 2003, 16-17). One individual eventually came forward to receive a pardon.³⁶ The legislature considered these measures generous and believes such concessions to the farmers would work to quell the rebellion.

On the other hand, the legislature also passed measures to help the state quash the rebellion, inflaming the polarization between the two coalitions of interests, elite and common. In a bill passed on November 10, the legislature suspended habeas corpus until July 1, 1787 and

³⁶The single individual to come forward and receive a pardon is William Bemis of Spencer (Richards 2003, 17).

gives Governor Bowdoin the right to imprison “all persons whatsoever” who are dangerous to the public welfare ([Richards 2003](#), 19). Another such measure, the Riot Act, gives legal immunity to sheriffs for killing rebels who resist capture or fail to disperse. The Riot Act also specifies punishment for captured rebels: the forfeiture of their land, personal property, livestock, and other goods to the state. Furthermore, rebels “shall be whipped 39 stripes on the naked back, at the public whipping post and suffer imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months” as well as an additional thirty-nine lashes every three months during imprisonment ([Richards 2003](#), 16-17). The legislature also passed the Disqualification Act, barring all rebels from serving on juries, holding office, or voting in elections ([Richards 2003](#), 33).

The legislature also passed the Militia Act, punishing those members of the militias who defect in support of the farmers, proclaiming ““whosoever officer or soldier shall abandon any post committed to his charge, or shall speak words inducing others to do the like in time of engagement, shall suffer death” ([Richards 2003](#), 17). The Militia Act speaks to a serious obstacle for state leadership in quashing the insurrection: the defection and weakness of the state militias.

In the western counties, militiamen are reluctant to comply with the orders of the state leadership in Boston. The militias are composed of local, able-bodied men. The very men who are expected to form the militia are often sympathetic to rebel farmers and many are active in the rebellion. Militias in the eastern counties were compliant with Governor Bowdoin’s orders. However, the few compliant militias are ill-equipped. The Continental government has an arsenal with ample artillery in Springfield. However, the state did not have access to the artillery in the Springfield arsenal without the permission of Secretary of War, Henry Knox, who is unwilling ([Richards 2003](#), 23-25).

Without effective state militias to quash the insurrection, Governor Bowdoin hired a mercenary army of 4,400 men. The mercenary army was summoned without legislative authorization, thus making no funds available to pay for the mercenaries. Instead, the governor

contributes £250 from his own pocket and gathers an additional £6,000 from businessmen in Boston. Governor Bowdoin and General Lincoln, who was in charge of the mercenary army, persuaded businessmen to contribute by justifying the contributions as a small amount to pay in order to preserve the bulk of their fortunes from the effects of the insurrection ([Richards 2003](#), 23-25). The use of private donations from businessmen points to the divide between the most and least commercial-cosmopolitan communities. Moreover, it points to the ability and willingness of the elite to organize collectively for the sake of their best interest: the resumption and maintenance of law and order, the absence of which negatively impacts commercial enterprise.³⁷

Measures passed by the legislature and the hiring of a standing army further stoked the agitation of farmers in the western counties. The deployment of the mercenary troops to the western counties was initially met by rebel farmers in kind, with an escalation in violence. However, the rebels were overwhelmed by the better equipped and trained troops.

Shays's Rebellion began with the bravado of halting the courts causing the breakdown in law and order. Shays's Rebellion ends in mundane failure. The insurrection is finally put down by the mercenary army in a string of ever smaller skirmishes across the Berkshires in the Spring and Summer of 1787. The rebels did not get what they wanted. The taxes, debts, courts, and system of representation that frustrate common men and lead to insurrection, remain in place.

The War for Independence promised greater equality and freedom from tyranny. Yet, for the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests, life under colonial rule and reality in the early Republic are starkly similar. The Revolution had been an elite transition.

³⁷Later in 1787, the state legislature authorizes £40,000 for paying for the mercenary army and for reimbursing the donations of Boston businessmen.

2.6 The Tyranny of Geocracy

In 1780s Massachusetts, polarization is about where one lived. Where one lived determines one's social place, one's economic fate, and ultimately, one's political fate. The variables described in previous pages, all of which demonstrate the formidable advantages of the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests, shows the power of geography in early New England.

The structure of representation in Massachusetts advantaged the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests and precluded the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests from active political participation. The advantages of the elite were reinforced by their physical proximity to each other and the venues of government: the General Court, commercial centers, social clubs and associations, the state house, the press, and the church.

The utter inability of commercial-cosmopolitan interests to mount a response stems from the geographic mechanics of political participation. For example, rural communities, where the bulk of group C towns were found, have no post offices or government services. If one takes a look, for example, at the small coastal town of Hull, a group C town across the bay from Boston, one can see the effect of location on political participation. By land Hull is roughly 43 kilometers from Boston. Using approximations from historical records, a stagecoach could travel roughly 60 kilometers, if traveling for a full day along a well worn path.³⁸ This does not take into consideration weather and road conditions of less worn paths most typically used by common men.³⁹ The weather plays a major role in the ability to travel—a meter of freshly fallen snow, not uncommon in a typical New England winter snow

³⁸Commercial stagecoaches are able to move more quickly because they can drive the horses harder over a shorter distance. This is because commercial stagecoach companies set up predetermined stops where the horses are changed out for fresh horses. The ability to change out tired horses for fresh horses allows commercial stage coaches to move more quickly.

³⁹Weather is a significant source of delay and obstruction to travel in New England, as anyone who has spent any considerable time in New England will know.

storm— entirely obstructs travel for weeks.⁴⁰ Rain storms could muddy the paths, breaking the wooden carriage wheels, stranding travelers along the route. Thus, a resident of Hull traveling to Boston had to wait for good weather and then dedicate much of a day to travel, each way. A simple trip to Boston was a multi-day journey. Today, residents of Hull may reach Boston either by motor vehicle, taking roughly 45 minutes, or by ferry, taking roughly 23 minutes.

If a common man in Hull wished to retrieve his mail and newspaper at the nearest post office 12 kilometers away in Hingham (a group A town) he had to account for his round trip travel —roughly 24 kilometers. A 24 kilometer round trip took roughly 10 hours, not including time spent in Hingham retrieving the mail and letting the horses recover for the return trip.⁴¹ Ultimately, the simple trip to Hingham by a common man from Hull took as many as 12 hours. To put this in perspective, today, a one way trip by motor vehicle from Hull to Hingham takes roughly 16 minutes.

A common man, a poll, residing in New Salem (a group C town), who was answering a summons to the Court of Common Pleas had to travel to the county seat at Northampton, 38 kilometers away. If such a common man was traveling alone by horseback, he had to travel on average roughly 32 kilometers per day. Thus, a one way trip from New Salem to Northampton required an overnight stop. To put this in perspective, today, a one way trip by motor vehicle from New Salem to the Northampton court house takes roughly 38 minutes.

Geography was a significant factor for residents of the least commercial-cosmopolitan communities in a way that the most commercial-cosmopolitan communities did not face.

⁴⁰There is no method to clear the paths of snow in the 1780s. Travelers had to wait until conditions allowed for travel.

⁴¹Using the calculation that a commercial stagecoach could travel 60 kilometers on a well worn path in 24 hours, then 20 kilometers should take 8 hours. However, most common men don't often travel by commercial stagecoach on well worn paths, rather, he travels using his own horse(s) and carriage on lesser known and less maintained paths, thus adding more travel time.

Casting one's ballot, attending conventions, court hearings, running for office, paying one's taxes, and other political participation or getting government services required complex travel logistics. The relatively vast distances of Massachusetts and laborious forms of travel further weakened the political strength of the group C communities.

Low voter turnout was pervasive among polls in the group C communities, particularly those in western Massachusetts and the district of Maine. Without political parties, there was no means of political organization. The absence of organization means the absence of the tools used for mobilizing voters: policy platforms, political advertising, endorsements, vote canvassing, party conventions. Residents of group C communities found it difficult to acquire information about government because of the lack transparency and press coverage and the lack of available periodicals in the group C communities. Underlying the lack of informational dissemination, is the fact that many of the group C residents were uneducated and illiterate, causing them further confusion about the intricacies of tripartite republican government.

As a consequence of this lack of available information and lack of understanding, political participation was depressed among group C communities. Voter turnout eventually increased after 1787 as the result of persistent and accumulated frustrations held by the least commercial-cosmopolitan interests, as a backlash to the response of the Bowdoin government's heavy-handed, military response to the Shays's Rebellion, and as a consequence of reforms to voting rights: the lowering of property requirements and the waiving of debt issues as cause for disenfranchisement.⁴²

2.6.1 A Tale of Two States

During the same years and despite facing similar conditions, insurrection is averted in neighboring Rhode Island. In Rhode Island, geography prevented polarization. Comparing Mas-

⁴²As has been previously noted, such rules on voting are rarely enforced. The formal expansion of the

sachusetts’ with its smaller and less populous neighbor, Rhode Island, illustrates how the geographic mechanics of political participation fundamentally altered the economic and political experience for Rhode Islanders in the tumultuous 1780s.

In Rhode Island the distance between the seat of state government, Providence, and the most distant location by radial distance is roughly 77 kilometers. All other towns fell within a radius of less than 77 kilometers of the capital. Closer proximity of polls and the population as a whole, lead to greater social integration, and thus, a more egalitarian political landscape in the 1780s.

Table 2.20: Comparative Basics for Massachusetts & Rhode Island, c.1780

<i>Variables</i> ⁴³	Massachusetts	Rhode Island
Size	119,010 sq.km.	3,144 sq.km.
Population	317,760	52,946
Newspapers	35	7

franchise is symbolic.

⁴³The size of Massachusetts c.1785 includes the district of Maine, which was an annex of Massachusetts until 1820.

Population estimates are based on 1780 modeling projects found in chapter Z, “Colonial and Pre-Federal Statistics” contained within [U.S. Bureau of the Census \(1960\)](#). Additional sources: [U.S. Bureau of the Census \(1960\)](#), [Lemons \(2020\)](#).

The number of Rhode Island newspapers (7) is based on an analysis of newspapers published from 1780-1791 or for some part of the intervening years. The Rhode Island newspapers are the following: Newport: Gazette Francoise, The Newport Herald, The Newport Mercury; Providence: The American Journal, The Providence Gazette and Country Journal, The Providence Journal, and the United States Chronicle: Political, Commercial, Historical. Sources on newspapers and post offices are: [Eighteenth-Century American Newspapers in the Library of Congress](#) (N.d.), [First U.S. Post Offices](#) (2019), [First U.S. Post Offices by State](#) (2019), [Gallagher \(1977\)](#), and [Lawrence Merolla and Jackson \(1977\)](#).

The same natural advantages that give the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests in the group A towns in Massachusetts an upperhand –significant social associations, press availability, and physical proximity– applied to the whole of Rhode Island. Rhode Island possessed 7 newspapers. However, Rhode Island newspapers were widely distributed across the state because the distances were significantly smaller thus making distribution easier. Additionally, post offices were more widely distributed and in closer proximity to the population, facilitating the dissemination of information. Furthermore, Rhode Island did not possess the same entrenched elite class that was found in Massachusetts. Boston was the focal point of British control during the colonial era and was long an economic and political engine of New England. Providence, is substantially smaller geographically, with less residents, and less commercial activity. Without a longstanding and entrenched elite class, there was greater space for common men to participate. The greater political integration facilitated by the relative geographic proximity of the population is evidenced in the political events of 1780s Rhode Island.

In 1785 distressed rural residents of Rhode Island formed the Country Party. Common people living outside the urban centers were able to do so because of more fair access to periodicals and more fair access to including information in such periodicals, thus helping get voters on the same page. In 1786, the Country Party sweeps statewide elections and took control of the legislature, campaigning under the slogan “to relieve the distressed” ([Richards 2003](#), 83). The ability of the rural communities to hold a majority in the legislature is due to Rhode Island’s low requirements for voting and holding office. Qualification to vote requires property ownership of £40 or annual rent of at least £2, as well as not having any delinquent tax debt ([Hough 1872](#), 246-271).⁴⁴ Veterans of the Revolution and currently enlisted troops were permitted to vote regardless of income or assets. Moreover, private debts, delinquent or

⁴⁴Respectively, and when adjusted for inflation and converted to United States Dollars: £40 = ~\$9,206.16; £2 = ~\$460.30.

otherwise, were not cause for disqualification. Despite the rule on delinquent tax debt, it was rarely enforced. All polls were able to hold elected office without additional qualifications. Low barriers to vote and hold office allowed for rural constituents to participate in politics.

The allocation of representation was more evenly distributed in Rhode Island. Elections for governor, lieutenant governor, the house of representatives, and the senate are held annually. Representatives in the lower chamber were elected at the town level and the number of representatives from each town was contingent on population, with each town receiving at least one representative. The number of representatives from any given town could not exceed twelve or one-sixth the total number of representatives in the lower chamber. The lower chamber was limited to seventy-two representatives. Each town elects one senator for the upper chamber with ten senators in total. The lieutenant governor, elected separately in statewide elections, presided over the upper chamber ([Hough 1872](#), 246-271). In 1786, the Country Party held forty-five seats in the lower chamber and five seats in the senate. The Country Party won majorities in either one chamber or both in each annual election until 1795. The ability of rural constituents to be aptly represented in the legislature gave voice to the concerns of common people in Rhode Island and served a pressure valve, relieving frustrations.

The effective representation of rural constituencies in the legislature yielded significant relief for those communities. In 1786, The Rhode Island legislature, passed laws instituting the legal status of paper currency, increasing access to currency for farmers, and enforcing the legitimacy of paper money ([Szatmary 1980](#)). Additionally, the legislature voted not to make simultaneous payments on its war debt and its share of the continental government's war debt. As a result, the tax burden was far lighter for Rhode Island's constituents.

The use of paper currency as legal tender was of particular consternation for the merchant class in Rhode Island. The merchant class preferred specie, gold and silver coins, because of its value in global trading markets. Merchants often attempt to skirt the tender law by refusing to accept paper money. The legislature answers with strict legislation punishing

creditors or merchants who refuse to accept paper currency with a fine of £100 per instance of refusal.⁴⁵ Creditors and merchants who refused paper currency were banned from seeking elected office and have commercial licenses revoked, including the prohibition of sailing in or out of Rhode Island ports, a draconian measure in the day ([Szatmary 1980](#), 47-55).

⁴⁵When adjusted for inflation and converted to United States Dollars: £100 = ~\$23,015.40

⁴⁶Map of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is reproduced from [Hall \(1972, 10-11\)](#) with permission. It is also Fair Use.

Figure 2.1: Commonwealth of Massachusetts, c.1785⁴⁶

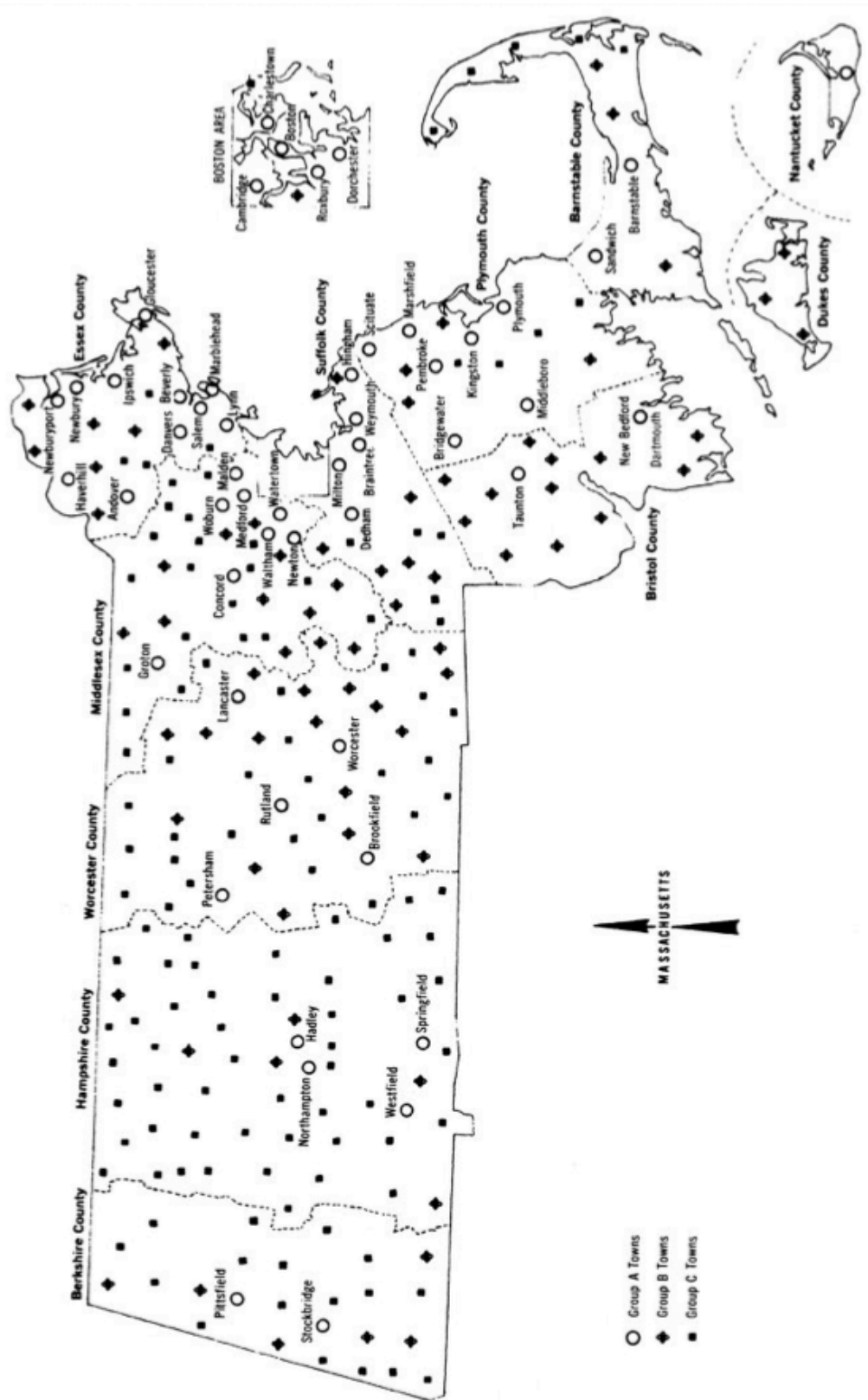
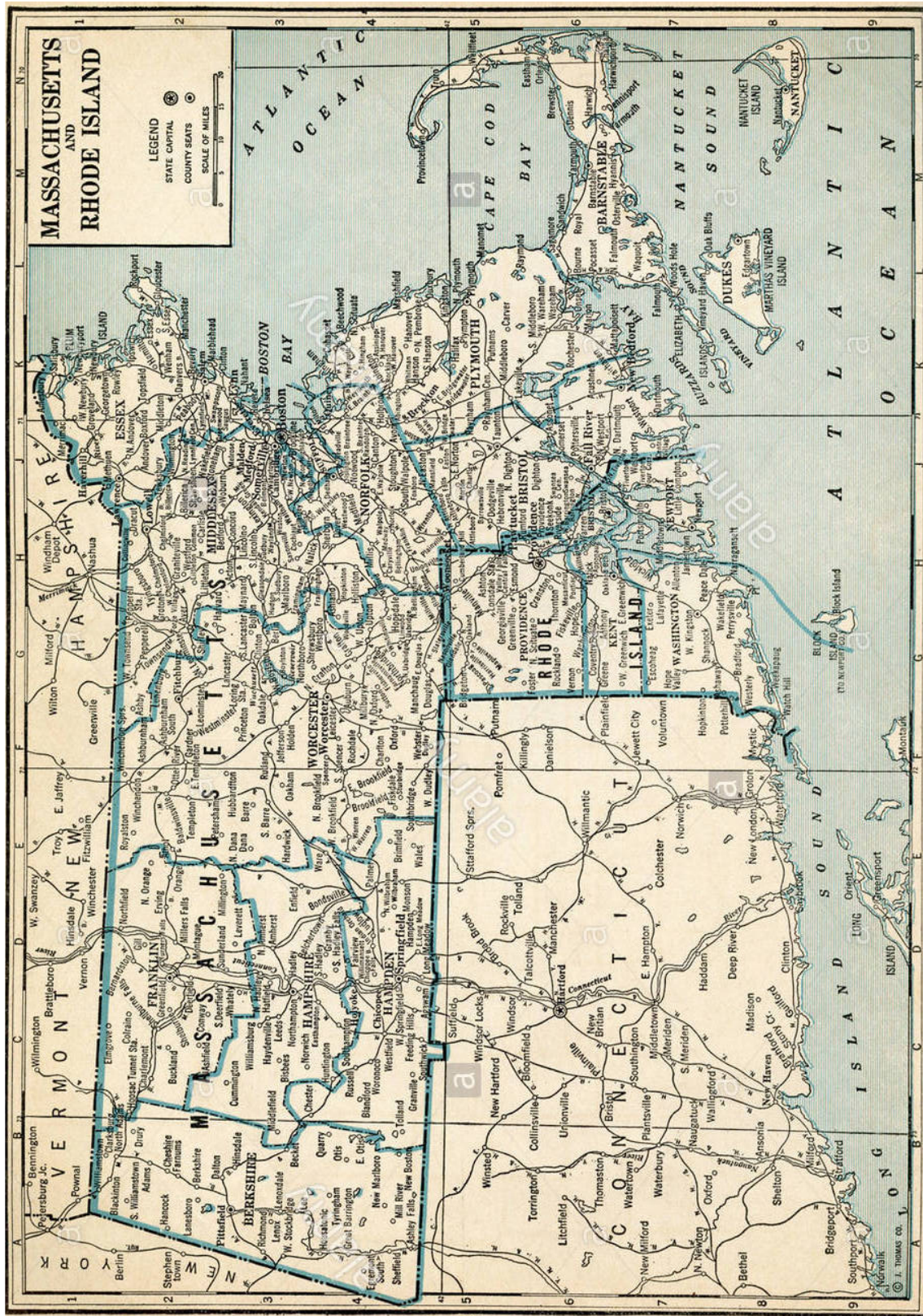


Figure 2.2: Comparative View of Massachusetts and Rhode Island⁴⁷



This map is in the public domain.

Figure 2.3: State of Rhode Island⁴⁸



Two additional proposed bills point to the egalitarian nature of the legislature. First, a

⁴⁸The map in figure 2.3 was found in [Lemons \(2020\)](#) and is Fair Use.

bill proposing a requirement for all constituents to swear an oath supporting the use of paper currency. Failure to take the oath would result in the suspension of an individual's voting rights. Another bill proposes seizing all commercial enterprises, giving control of trade to the state government ([Szatmary 1980](#), 47-55). The consideration of such measures indicates the legislature's impatience for exploitation and its zeal in defending the interests of common men.

Further helping distressed common men was the legislature's supremacy over the judiciary. The Rhode Island Constitution did not vest the judiciary with separate and independent power ([Hough 1872](#), 246-271). Instead, the state constitution vests the legislature with authority over judicial matters.⁴⁹ The legislature was responsible for appointing justices and was able to override court decisions. Once the Country Party was in the majority in the legislature, court decisions perceived to favor commercial interests and disadvantage farmers were swiftly reversed by the legislature. In a 1786 case involving a merchant's refusal to accept paper currency as payment, a local court dismissed the case without remedy. The legislature overrode the court's decision, ordered the merchant to accept paper currency and provided compensation as remedy to the plaintiff ([Szatmary 1980](#)). Furthermore, the justices responsible for the decision were summoned to the legislature, dismissed from their positions, and issued criminal charges, evidencing the pro-debtor and populist orientation of the Rhode Island legislature. The legislature's character as more representative of common people, and the legislature's ability to rein in the judiciary, prevented the judiciary from placing undue burden on common people, as witnessed in neighboring Massachusetts.

Massachusetts and Rhode Island faced similar economic circumstances in the 1780s. Both were new states within the nascent nation. Both had significant state debts and had large sums to pay for the Continental government's requisition. The credit contraction and economic fallout that impacted Massachusetts, from the wealthy merchants and landowners down to the subsistence farmers, also impacted Rhode Island. The states diverged in the

⁴⁹The Rhode Island judiciary is granted independent and coequal status in 2004 ([Gerber 2011](#)).

reaction to such an economic fallout. In Massachusetts, the group C towns were unable to mount a response because of the lack of ability to communicate, receive information, and mobilize for collective political action. At the same time, the most commercial-cosmopolitan interests monopolized the levers of power, further weakening the political power of common men. Massachusetts' common men also contended with the vast distances over which they must travel to participate in politics and governance.

Rhode Island's common men contended with a far smaller geography; Rhode Island is roughly one-fortieth the size of Massachusetts. Rhode Island's population is roughly one-sixth that of Massachusetts. Rhode Island also possesses seven post offices, evenly distributed throughout the state.⁵⁰ On average, each post office serves 7,564 residents. The newspapers published were better able to reach a broad swath of the population. Many newspapers include portions that were specifically dedicated to rural life.⁵¹ Moreover, Rhode Island papers provided coverage of political affairs in the state. Among the most popular Rhode Island periodicals, *The United States Chronicle: Political, Commercial, Historical*, provided Rhode Island residents with a thorough breakdown of the political happenings of the day; vote counts, names of representatives, bills passed, vetoed, and signed into law. In so doing, Rhode Island residents were able to have an understanding of the political landscape in their state.

A confluence of variables yields better representation of common men in Rhode Island: more evenly distributed allocation of seats in the legislature, low barriers to qualify to vote and hold office, better press coverage of politics, and the benefits of a relatively small geography: shorter distances to travel to participate in politics and retrieve periodicals and other forms of communication through the postal service. The arrangement of such variables in

⁵⁰Rhode Island post offices: East Greenwich, Newport, Providence (x2), Tower Hill (now known as South Kingston), Warren, and Westerly. Sources on post offices in 1780s Rhode Island: *First U.S. Post Offices* (2019), *First U.S. Post Offices by State* (2019), Gallagher (1977), and Lawrence Merolla and Jackson (1977).

⁵¹See *The Providence Gazette and Country Journal* [emphasis added].

Rhode Island served as a pressure valve for the frustrations of Rhode Island's common men. The relief of common men's frustrations prevented persistent and accumulated frustrations from boiling over and triggering insurrection.

2.7 Discussion

In the 1780s, politics is geographic. Where you lived determined what representation you got. At the beginning of the nation Americans struggled with how to extend the Republican ideals of the Revolution across the vast land that was now theirs. The new nation was larger than the ideal size for republics claimed by Montesquieu and Locke. In the first years of the Republic, states of different sizes faced different problems ([Zagarri 1987](#), 4-5; [Soja 1971](#)).

Policymakers in small states dealt with a generally homogeneous and static population. Cities and towns were densely packed, there was limited land for which to spread out in, and no residents tend to possess large tracts of land. In this context, political institutions did not need wholesale reforms. Rather, policymakers in small states like Rhode Island “tinker” with their political institutions; pass relief bills, form new political factions/parties, and change the composition of the courts. All of this took place well within the parameters of routine Republican government. In the context of small states, cyclical elections suffice to usher in change. In small states, apportionment of representation by geography works both in principle and in practice. However, in large states like Massachusetts, such tinkering and geographic representation does not suffice.

Geographic representation was incongruent with reality in a large state like Massachusetts. Policymakers in Massachusetts confronted a different set of problems: a significantly larger and growing population, demographic and socioeconomic diversity to a much greater extent than in their small neighbor, Rhode Island. The dispersed population over great distances made mobility a central issue. As a result of the unstable and evolving communities in Massachusetts, legislators incorporated representative institutions based on population rather than solely on geography. In name, this is representative by demography and population. However, in Massachusetts, representative institutions determined by demography and population were ineffective in practice because of the ability of elite’s to manipulate republican government through placeholders and the exercise of influence and affluence.

The ineffectiveness of Massachusetts' representative institutions was a consequence of the lack of parties. Between 1780 and the summer of 1786, roughly between one-third and one-half of Massachusetts' population lived in the less developed parts of the state. While in principle they had representation, sending delegates to the General Court, and while formal rules on voting were on the books, such rules were rarely enforced. At first glance, one would not understand why frustrations accumulated among the constituents in Massachusetts' less developed areas. Despite Massachusetts' policymakers reforms to expand voting further in 1787 and further apportionment on the basis of demography and population, such reforms were meaningless without oppositional political organization.

The absence of formal parties as we understand parties today, allows the most developed communities to exercise their natural advantages: their interconnectedness through education, professional ties, social associations, and shared interests. The elite were able to exercise their will by holding important public offices and putting into office a sweeping network of placeholders. Such placeholders, on paper, represent a particular, less-developed community, but in reality, were planted to bolster the political strength of the elite. The unified front put forward by the most developed communities was bolstered by control of the press. The press was used to get residents on the same page in the most developed communities. Furthermore, the issue of mobility again further expands the chasm between communities, making information difficult to access for those outside the most developed communities. Moreover, the press did not provide crucial political information, thus denying common men the ability to learn about their government or know how their delegate voted on a given bill.

In such ways, the elite were organized by nonpolitical forces, but use such organization for political ends. At the same time, the elite's counterparts, common men, were utterly unorganized politically or otherwise. In the face of such a formidable adversary, common men in the group C communities were compelled to take alternative action. Common men hold conventions, send petitions to the governor and the General Court. Conventions were

futile because of mobility issues already discussed –even if residents of one community were able to come together to discuss their grievances and send those grievances in writing to their delegates in the General Court, only those who were nearby and hear by word of mouth attend. The residents of a neighboring town remained utterly unaware because of a lack of communication systems (i.e. post offices) and the vast distances between rural towns (using the transportation methods of the day). Petitions to governors and instructions to legislators fell on deaf ears. Governors were solidly part of the elite and governed as such. In the General Court, placeholder delegates from western communities were inclined to vote for elite interests. Even on occasion when western delegates voted in line with their constituent's interests, the grip on power of the elites through other placeholders in the lower chamber, and the elite's outright stranglehold on the upper chamber, rendered meaningless the individual votes of western delegates. The frustrations of common men in western and rural Massachusetts came to a head in 1786 and 1787; the courts were blocked from sitting, halting the judiciary and more broadly disrupting the order of society.

Despite armed insurrection, the demands of common men were left unanswered. In the second half of the 1780s, political participation increased. Voter turnout surged; on election day in 1787, with the plight of common men brought to the fore by the insurrection, voters turned out in mass. In 1787 there is nearly 200% greater voter turnout for the governor's election than in 1786 and 175% greater turnout in the senate elections. The greatest increases in turnout were in Bristol and Plymouth counties, 582% and 547% respectively. In Hampshire and Berkshire counties, turnout increased by 41% and 52% respectively.⁵²

Despite much greater voter turnout from the less developed communities, little changes in the overall configuration of political institutions. Bowdoin lost the governorship and Hancock

⁵²In Hampshire and Berkshire counties, the epicenter of Shays's Rebellion, a great many polls were disenfranchised because of their participation in the armed insurrection. Those charged with crimes pertaining to insurrection were legally barred from voting. This explains the less spectacular increase in voter turnout in Hampshire and Berkshire counties when compared to Bristol and Plymouth counties.

—an entrenched member of the elite— took office. The most developed communities continued to monopolize the senate with the senate becoming a de facto social club. The elections of 1787 and the mild reforms put into place by the General Court —laws suspending debt suits, reduction in court fees, anti-corruption laws for judges, and reduced specie requirements for certain import taxes— did little to reform the overall political situation.

In the absence of political parties, important political issues of the day were subject to the reaction of distinct groups with their own interests. Without parties to mitigate between constituencies and policymaking, informal factions based on socioeconomic characteristics were more divisive and polarizing, less willing to engage in discussion and compromise. The political tensions of Massachusetts in the 1780s illustrates the combustible potential for populism to run roughshod over society and democracy if political parties are not present to give order and structure to grievances and to advocate for particular constituencies.

CHAPTER 3

Agrarian Discontent & Populist Mobilization, 1870–1899

“This is the generation which has come to the rescue. Those in distress who cry out from the darkness shall not be heard in vain. Conscience is in the saddle! We have leaped the bloody chasm! We have entered a contest for the protection of home, humanity, and the dignity of labor.”

—LORENZO D. LEWELLING, Governor of Kansas. January 9, 1893.

“We do not come as aggressors. Our war is not a war of conquest. We are fighting in the defense of our homes, our families, and posterity. We have petitioned, and our petitions have been scorned. We have entreated, and our entreaties have been disregarded. We have begged, and they have mocked when our calamity came. We beg no longer; we entreat no more; we petition no more. We defy them!”

—WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN, Cross of Gold Speech, July 9, 1896.

3.1 Populism Redux

In the 1780s, American politics was a distinctly local matter. The first generation of independent Americans were wary of centralized power and distrustful of concentrations of power. The first iteration of the American republic, prior to the Constitution, placed the bulk of governing authority with the states. Politics in the preparty era were conducted through informal organizations. In a situation without formal parties, the natural advantages of elites lent themselves to organizing around political issues. The natural organization of elites allowed for elites to control the levers of state power. Such a monopoly excluded Everyman's voice and lead to Shays's Rebellion. However, by the late nineteenth century, there were political parties and a national politics. Despite the presence of representative institutions, populism arose once again.

On January 9, 1893, Lorenzo Lewelling was inaugurated as the first Populist governor of Kansas. Lewelling rode to office as a third party candidate on a wave of popular discontent. For two decades, middle western, western, and southern farmers faced declining farm prices, a currency shortage, usurious mortgages, and high railroad rates. In his inaugural address, delivered from the dais of the Kansas House chamber in the crumbling capitol building in Topeka, Lewelling spoke to the issues that galvanized his supporters and won him the election: a call for making more hard currency available, tariffs on foreign farm goods, protection from predatory lending, breaking up the railroad monopolies, and a general sense of despair among common men at being left behind in a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing country. More importantly, Lewelling spoke to the perception that government and political parties had abandoned common Americans, and that in electing a populist, relief had arrived.

Lewelling's rhetoric and electoral success in Kansas was emblematic of the populist fervor sweeping the west, middle west, and south in 1890. By 1890 common men had had enough of their calls for relief going unheeded. Prior to 1890, common men had attempted to obtain relief but found their ability to participate in political life hampered by party machine's

stranglehold over politics and government. Party machines were wholly uninterested in representing poor common men who could not buy representation. Party machines were concerned with maintaining their grip on power and responding to the political preferences of the industrial patrons that helped keep them in power. Indeed, party machines were apt instruments of representation, if only in selectively representing those constituencies that helped satisfy the parochial aspirations and acquisitive appetites of party bosses ([James 2006](#), 39-40). The issues of representation and participation that came about in the late nineteenth century are the symptoms of corruption from patronage and party machines. The party system at the heart of populist ire in the late nineteenth century had come about since Shays's Rebellion in the 1780s.

The populism of the late nineteenth century, similar to the Shaysite rebels in Massachusetts in the 1780s, has its roots in agrarian economic distress. While during the era of Shays's there were no parties, by the late nineteenth century, parties had come about and were thriving as patronage machines. However, the 1890s also contains the episode of the People's Party. The People's Party is among only two episodes in American history in which a third party gained any real national traction.¹

Third party politics in the U.S. has almost always been a dead end, both today and in years past. Movement actors –and scholars such as [McConnell \(1953\)](#)– have long romanticized the party form for what it symbolized: popular mobilization, majoritarianism, the organized expression of democratic will, and political equality –that is to say, one person, one vote. Nevertheless, this view of party politics is –and always has been– out of sync with politics on the ground; what one might call a political mirage.

One may draw the wrong lesson from the rise of the Republican Party in the 1850s – the early and still fluid days of an emerging party system. Moreover, third-party politics is incompatible with fundamental realities of the American two-party system. It was cer-

¹The other being The Bull Moose Party.

tainly incompatible with the highly institutionalized stranglehold of the Democratic and Republican Parties on late-nineteenth century national politics. Whether that was because of patronage practices, the strongly partisan-reinforcing legacies of the Civil War, or the myriad ways Republican and Democratic elites had by then ensconced themselves within the sinews of political and governmental power, it was difficult – indeed, impossible– for a third party to seriously dent that structure, let alone seize control. Even at populism’s pinnacle in the 1890s, populist states comprised slightly less than 50% of both the nation’s total population and the nation’s congressional districts.

Populism at the close of the 19th century was never a truly national movement, despite what scholars and populists prefer to tell themselves. It was highly regionalized in nature, and regional movements faced even harder times breaking through the institutional roadblocks that had to be breached on the way to amassing national power—even if they succeeded in maximizing their political strength in the region under their sway. Of course, the populists never came close to doing this.

In this chapter, I show how an agrarian economic crisis caused farmers to pursue relief through intermediary institutions. When those pathways of representation were found blocked, agrarian populists organized themselves and formed the Farmers’ Alliance and The People’s Party in an attempt to garner the representation, and thus the relief, they sought. I show how this aspiration was stopped by the entrenched old parties that brooked no opposition and marginalized the Populists in Congress.

3.1.1 Farm Crisis, 1870-1896

The unflagging advance of industrial capitalist modernization in the late nineteenth century precipitated an agrarian economic crisis. Wheat and corn farmers in the Middle west and cotton farmers in the South were the hardest hit and faced a multi-front battle: declining farm prices, global competition, currency shortage, one-crop dependency, the end of cheap land, usurious lending, and monopolized railroads. The economic landscape of the populist

outbreak is shown in the evidence presented in tables 3.2 through 3.7.

The ongoing liberalization of the American economy brought greater trade in global markets. Such markets brought a larger field of competitors, forcing American farmers to lower their prices. Global markets also brought sudden and dramatic price fluctuations that ate into farmer's income, particularly cotton and wheat farmers. Significant domestic demand for corn used for livestock feed provided a mildly more stable outlook for corn farmers. Nevertheless, aggregate farm income was negatively impacted: between 1870 and 1900, the total number of farms in the United States increased twofold while aggregate farm income declined from one-fourth to one-fifth of national income (Hofstadter 1955; Ostler 1993; Sanders 1999, 103-110).

At the same time, economic growth outpaced currency growth, causing a currency shortage. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the production of gold lagged behind economic growth, that when combined with greater international competition, contributed to declining prices on farm goods (Sanders 1999, 103-110). Furthermore, middle westerner and southern farmers were often one-crop dependent, leaving them particularly vulnerable to dramatic price changes in the markets for corn, wheat, and cotton –the most common crops among one-crop farmers. Additionally, one-crop farmers were vulnerable to weather irregularities, pest infestations, and soil nutrient deficiencies caused by the relentless planting of a single crop in the same land.

Further exacerbating farmer's plight was the end of cheap land. The Homestead Acts had drawn farmers westward and given each settler 160 acres of land to develop.² However, the pressures of a growing society pushed farmers toward mechanized and commercial farming, requiring ever larger tracts of land. Farmer's found purchasing land difficult beyond their initial grant of 160 acres because of rampant land speculation. Farmer's became heavily mortgaged to buy more land and mechanical equipment to support large-scale, commercial

²The pertinent legislation are the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850, the Homestead Act of 1862, the Southern Homestead Act of 1866, and the Timber Culture Act of 1873 (Porterfield 2004).

farming. By 1886 there was a mortgage for every two people in Kansas and North Dakota. In Nebraska, South Dakota, and Minnesota, there was a mortgage for every three people. Many farms had been mortgaged several times, ultimately causing there to be more mortgages than families in the five states listed ([Goodwyn 1978](#); [Hicks 1931](#), 23-24; [Shannon 1977](#), 306-307).

In Nebraska, the price of land per acre doubled from roughly \$8.75 to \$17.50 between 1881 and 1887. In neighboring Kansas, farm land sold for \$6.25 per acre in 1867, sold for \$270 per acre in 1887. In 1887, a 42 square mile tract in Nebraska was divided and sold as town lots; \$35 million was generated from the sales ([Shannon 1977](#), 306-307). In Kansas, new mortgage debt per capita taken on in 1885 alone was double the total *cumulative* mortgage debt per capita in 1880. In 1887, it was triple the total cumulative mortgage debt per capita in 1880 ([Hicks 1931](#), 24).

The Northeastern banking institutions that extended mortgages to the western settlers tended to lend too much on each farm. Lender's logic was that the more they lent, the more they made in interest. Farmers took on the large amounts offered in the 1860s and 1870s, when farm prices were high and crop yields were consistently plentiful. Across the Middle west, land value increased on average between 400 and 600 per cent from 1881 to 1887 ([Hicks 1931](#), 25; [Mappin 1889](#)).

³North and South Dakota are the Dakota Territories prior to 1889. On November 2, 1889, the Dakota Territories are separated into North and South and become independent states. Source: [Hicks \(1931, 20\)](#), [Lynd \(1864\)](#), and [Harrower \(1889\)](#).

Farmers also contended with usurious interest rates. Farmer's in Alabama, Arkansas, Montana, New Mexico, Texas, and Wyoming paid the highest interest on farm mortgages, paying 9 to 11 percent while northeastern farmers paid the least interest, paying only 5 to 6 percent ([Eichengreen 1984](#); [Sanders 1999](#); [Thompson 1916](#)). Some of the high interest rates in the west were justified because of the risks of mortgaging farm property in an unsettled area with unknown weather patterns and an uncertain future. Nevertheless, unmitigated risk is not the sole explanation for the higher interest rates found along the western frontier. Roughly 55 percent of mortgage lending in the Middle west and South originated with out-of-state lenders, largely in the Northeast. Such lenders took advantage of the absence of other lending institutions to exploit settlers ([James 2015](#); [Sanders 1999](#); [Snowden 1987](#)). Moreover, the cheap land that had drawn farmers to the distant plains created another problem: moving farm goods across the land to markets and population centers.

Peripheral farmers, dispersed over the vast and remote ranges of the west, middle west, and south, relied on railroads to move farm goods to markets. Peripheral farmers had little choice other than to send their crops to distant markets and even less choice among

³Source for table 3.2: [U.S. Bureau of the Census \(1896, 1921, 1934\)](#) and [Sanders \(1999, 100-110\)](#).

³Note on table 3.4: Middle west and southern figures are averages of disaggregated regional averages. Compiled information is found in [Sanders \(1999, 102\)](#). Primary source information is found in [Snowden \(1987\)](#), [Thompson \(1916\)](#), and [Shannon \(1977\)](#).

⁴Source: [U.S. Bureau of the Census \(1936\)](#).

⁴Note on table 3.5: Middle west and southern figures are averages of disaggregated regional averages. and add additional cites. Source: [Sanders \(1999, 101-110\)](#) and [Shannon \(1977, 418\)](#).

⁴Sources for table 3.6: [U.S. Bureau of the Census \(1911\)](#) and [Shannon \(1977, 51\)](#).

⁵Note: Values in millions.

Source: [Shannon \(1977, 353\)](#).

Table 3.3: Farm Mortgage Interest Rates

	1890	1915
Northeast	5.6	5.7
Middle West	7.85	6.65
South	7.8	8.05
West	9.1	9.1

Table 3.4: Farm Mortgages, 1890–1930

<i>Mortgages</i> ⁴	1890	1900	1910	1920	1925	1930
Total	874,215	1,093,164	1,312,034	1,461,306	1,395,026	1,497,766
% of All Farms	27.8	30	33.2	37.2	36.1	42
% Free of Debt	70.9	66.5	65.6	52.8	-	51.7
Avg. Farm Debt	\$1,224	-	\$1,715	\$3,356	\$4,004	\$3,561
% Debt-FarmValue	35.5	-	27.3	29.1	41.9	39.6

Table 3.5: Farm Tenancy by Region

	1880	1890	1900
Northeast	16.0	18.4	20.8
Middle West	20.5	23.4	27.9
South	36.1	38.5	46.4
West	14.0	12.1	16.6

Table 3.6: Number of Farms in the United States, 1859–1889

	Number of Farms	Number of Acres of Farm Land
1860	2,000,000	407,213,000
1900	5,737,000	838,592,000

railroad companies to transport their crops. Railroad companies had little competition in the peripheries and also contended with the higher costs of covering such long distances from the peripheries to population centers. The railroads were monopolies in the west and were emboldened to charge farmers high freight rates.

While railroad corporations and mortgage lenders wrought vast fortunes, farmers confronted a sense of degradation brought on by the urgent matter of daily survival. Many common men were starving and losing their farms. Those that could eke out a living, barely could sustain themselves. The freight rates, set by railroads with little oversight, remained steady regardless of sudden changes in agricultural markets. With sudden downturns coming more often as a result of global market competition, farmers saw railroad freight rates consume an ever greater share of their income.

Farmers to the west of the Mississippi River and south of the Missouri River faced far steeper railroad rates than their eastern counterparts. Rates for moving goods from farms

Table 3.7: Agriculture's Share of National Income, 1859–1889

	National Income ⁵	Agricultural Income	% of National
1859	\$4,098	\$1,264	30.8%
1869	6,288	1,517	24.1
1879	6,617	1,371	15.8
1889	9,578	1,517	21.2

south of the Missouri River and west of the Mississippi River are, in some cases, four times the rates for moving goods between locales east of the Mississippi and between locations in the northeast. In the case of shipping goods to market in Kansas in 1875, farmer's paid \$2.60 per ton-mile; farmer's in Texas and the Pacific frontier, \$4.51 per ton-mile; farmer's in the South, \$3.06 ([Sanders 1999](#), 102-110; [Shannon 1977](#)). Farmer's in Pittsburgh in 1875 paid \$0.97; farmer's in Michigan, \$0.89 ([Sanders 1999](#), 102-110; [Shannon 1977](#)). Corn farmers in Nebraska and Kansas complained that, "it took the value of one bushel of corn to pay the freight on another bushel," and wheat farmers in the Dakotas said the same, underscoring the challenges facing peripheral farmers in getting their crops to market ([Shannon 1977](#), 295-298).

3.1.2 Institutional Innovation: the Basis of Agrarian Political Organizing

Distressed common men of the west, middle west, and south who worked hard but suffered under the weight of mortgages and railroad rates, the whims of global markets and the predations of unscrupulous lenders, turned to the state for relief. To do so, farmers turned first to the Democratic and Republican parties. However, they found their political participation obstructed by patronage. Farmers looking for help were unable to voice their concerns because of the character of political participation and political parties prior to the turn of the century.

Political parties, in principle, are a democratizing force. The American political party, in its original form, is the conduit for including Everyman's political preferences on the same level as the political preferences of entrenched elites, long represented and organized through the natural advantages of elites. Nevertheless, by the onset of the 1880s, the Democratic and Republican parties were consumed by patronage. Such party machines and machine politicians were single-minded seekers of reelection –that is to say, party machines were pre-occupied with holding on to power. Party machines were uninterested in pursuing pressing policy issues because such controversial matters jeopardized their often precarious electoral status and thus threatened their hold on power and their ability to satisfy patronage needs. Instead, party machines were inclined to perpetuate the political status quo and the accompanying obstacles to popular political participation that helped keep them in power.

In controlling national politics in the Congress, party machines controlled the levers of governance. As I will show, even those representatives in Congress elected to pursue a Populist agenda were unable to accomplish their goals because of the entrenchment of the party machines. While populist representatives certainly sponsored bills and advocated for the causes important to their constituents, it was to little avail.

Common American farmers turned to alternatives outside the political mainstream. The Farmer's Alliance swept onto the national political landscape in 1890.⁶ The Farmer's Alliance is the first *political* organization for agrarian interests. The Farmer's Alliance builds on the foundation of local farm coöperatives developed by The Grange beginning in the 1870s. The Grange at its peak had roughly three-quarters of a million members in 19,000 local Grange organizations. At the Grange's peak, 11.2% of all farmers were Grange members ([Sanders 1999](#), 105-108).⁷ The Grange was explicitly nonpolitical and was focused largely on matters

⁶The Farmer's Alliance is founded in a number of local Alliance organizations in Texas and the Middle west in 1878-9. However, it entered the national political landscape in a noticeable way in 1890.

⁷11.2% of the male and female population over ten years old engaged in agriculture ([Sanders 1999](#), 105-108).

of agricultural coöperation in order to stem the negative consequences of the economic crisis.

Despite the Grange's nonpolitical character, the Grange brought about a major accomplishment with political consequences: the organization and coördination of action among farmers. Moreover, the Grange caused farmers to think more deeply about their collective status and the broader problems affecting agrarian communities. In effect, the Grange brought farmers into political consciousness. As a result, politically conscious farmers, frustrated by the nonpolitical character of The Grange, formed the Farmer's Alliance in the late 1870s. For much of the next decade, the Farmer's Alliance took up matters of local politics and extended the work of the Grange. The Farmer's Alliance helped farmers deal with abusive landlords, catch petty criminals, and organize coöperative marketing techniques. However, by the late 1880s, the Farmer's Alliance was transformed into a national political organization with significant clout.

In 1890 the Farmer's Alliance had nearly 1.3 million members across twenty-seven western, middle western, and southern states ([Hicks 1931](#)). The largest concentrations—100,000 or greater—were located in Arkansas, Georgia, Kansas, Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas (see table 3.8). With the ability to mobilize a vast network of state and local alliances, the Farmer's Alliance advanced an ambitious agenda: large-scale economic reform, the development of a support system and agricultural market coördination on the level typically only seen through government intervention. Indeed, the kind of government intervention the Farmer's Alliance sought would eventually become the mainstays of federal agricultural policy within several decades. Moreover, the Farmer's Alliance pursued wholesale political change: the removal of stiff barriers to political participation and discussion of

⁸This table excludes states with less than 2,000 members or outside of the Middle west and South, broadly construed. Primary source information is found in [Appleton \(1891, 301\)](#). This information is found in compiled form in [Sanders \(1999, 123\)](#). Additional information is found in [Hicks \(1931\)](#).

Table 3.8: Farmer's Alliance Membership in the Middle West & South, 1890

State	Membership ⁸
Alabama	75,000
Arkansas	100,000
Colorado	5,000
Florida	20,000
Georgia	100,000
Illinois	2,000
Indiana	5,000
Kansas	100,000
Kentucky	80,000
Louisiana	20,000
Mississippi	60,000
Missouri	150,000
New Mexico	5,000
North Carolina	100,000
North Dakota	40,000
South Carolina	50,000
South Dakota	50,000
Tennessee	100,000
Texas	150,000
Virginia	50,000
West Virginia	2,000

policy and the opening up of the party landscape to include the voice of Everyman.⁹

In the presidential election of 1892 the People's Party gained more than 30 percent of the vote in ten states. Overall, the People's Party garnered 1,024,280 popular votes – 8.5 percent of the total popular vote – and 22 electoral college votes (Sanders 1999, 133-138). Such figures represent a decisive victory for agrarian Populists in that the People's Party, and the platform of agrarian populism, had become part of the national political landscape with serious ability to mobilize voters. The success of agrarian populism at the polls in 1891 and 1892 threatened the two party status quo. However, as I will show, once elected, Populist and Populist fusion representatives encountered stiff barriers to participation once they arrived in Congress.

⁹Such aims are determined at the Alliance meeting in December 1889 and together, are known as the St. Louis platform.

3.2 Related Research: the Absence of Consensus

The literature on 1890s populism is littered with trite explanations for populism's emergence and its consequences. Despite many formidable minds taking up 1890s populism, there is no consensus as to the character, causes, or consequences of the 1890's populist outbreak. Were the Populists in fact socialists? Was populism and progressivism one in the same? Were Populists paranoid country folk or democratic idealists? The reason for this incoherence in the literature is because there has been no close analysis of the causes for populist support in the 1890s nor has there been any careful investigation as to the national scope of populism in terms of real legislative accomplishments, if any, of the Populists in Congress. Without understanding populism in Congress it is difficult to reach a unifying framework for understanding American populism as a whole.

The 1890s is often referred to as the "age of reform" because of the transformative effects of the era in terms of shaping American politics. From the attempts to reform American politics in the 1890s emerged a combination of social, economic, and political responses. From the panoply of studies on 1890s populism, there are three overarching schools of thought. First is a school of thought that suggests 1890s populism is a precursor to progressivism. Furthermore, this school of thought would suggest that Populists were idealistic democratic reformers. Key among the proponents of this school of thought is [Sanders \(1999\)](#). [Sanders \(1999\)](#) suggests that agrarian populism and labor came together to shape the national political agenda, curbing the excesses of industrial capitalism, ushering in a new age of expanded and meritocratic government. Furthermore, [Sanders \(1999\)](#) argues that it is the result of the collaborative effort of agrarian Populists and labor that many democratic institutions – federal trade policy, income tax, direct election of senators, direct primary elections, banking and currency regulation, antitrust policy, agricultural coordination, and railroad regulation – were brought into existence as a result of populist mobilization in the 1890s.

While [Sanders \(1999\)](#) provides an apt bottom-up description of grass-roots populist orga-

nizing and populist activism, Sanders fails to provide concrete evidence that would point to a clear link between grass-roots populism and the implementation of specific national policies. Much of the reforms that Sanders claims to be the result of populist mobilization are national in scope, the domain of the Congress. Despite this reality, Sanders provides us with an examination of grass-roots populist activism, electoral mobilization, and electoral outcomes on a regional level. While Sanders' analysis certainly sheds light on the crucial build up of populist political organization throughout the nation and the causes of such, an important topic in its own right, this analysis does not establish how such regional mobilization impacts the enactment of particular policy programs. In fact, other than descriptions of elections in which states sent Populists to Congress, Sanders does not address the all-important topic of populism in Congress.

Using the same logic, [Pollack \(1962\)](#) argues that 1890s populism was a progressive force. [Pollack \(1962, 143\)](#) writes, “[n]ot only did populism look forward rather than backward, but it was also deeply committed to freedom.” Pollack claims that populism, while not wanting to dismantle industrial capitalism, provided a robust critique of industry and fundamentally altered American democracy in a progressive direction. Pollack suggests populism was not so much a protest movement but rather an episode in the long push for human rights since the industrial revolution. Pollack's work is also missing any serious consideration of populist policy matters. In one instance, Pollack highlights a piece of correspondence written by a Kansas populist that advocated for the St. Louis platform to include a provision for the eradication of slums ([Shapiro 1968, 325](#)). Pollack points out how this correspondence represents grass-roots sentiment. However, Pollack neglects to mention that no such provision was included in the St. Louis platform nor was such a provision ever seriously considered for consideration in the Omaha platform. Such a proposal was never brought up by a single populist representative in Congress. In fact, Pollack's work does not look at populism in Congress at all.

Pollack's work selectively chooses to look over inconvenient geographic details, focusing

only on populist activism in the Middle West where conventional history often situates 1890s populism as a product of Frontier ideology that seeks to bring the nation back to its agrarian roots. By focusing only on the Middle West, Pollack fails to consider the influence of populist activism in the South. Moreover, Pollack doesn't examine the bigger and more important question: what are the aggregate effects of populist activism on the national politics? Ultimately, Pollack's argument pays too much attention to grass-roots sentiment. Pollack's argument is certainly compelling and gives us insight as to how the Farmer's Alliance used a network of local alliances, niche periodicals, and charismatic itinerant speakers to bring farmers and ordinary Americans into the populist cause, all of which is crucial in forming a thorough understanding of American populism, but it does not provide us with any real or concrete evidence of how such grass-roots mobilization transformed –or didn't transform– into legislative reality on the national stage.

In a similar vein, [Hicks \(1931\)](#) looks at the populist grass-roots and advances an argument that also depicts Populists in the 1890s as eager democratic reformers. Like the previously mentioned authors, [Hicks \(1931\)](#) contextualizes 1890s populism as a vibrant movement of common men who accepted industry's paramount role in society but wished only to see its worst excesses curbed. [Hicks \(1931\)](#)'s work is useful in that it situates the foundation for the People's Party and the national populist agenda in Congress in the context of the agrarian movements and the national network of Farmer's Alliances laid in the 1880s. From a historical and social perspective, [Hicks \(1931\)](#) aptly examines the conditions and grievances of American farmers. Hicks reveals the sense of cultural marginalization felt by farmers and the sense of despair that prevailed among farmers due to industrialization and globalization.

Moreover, [Hicks \(1931\)](#) depicts the Populists as savvy political operators with an ambitious agenda of democratic reforms. However, the evidence for such a claim is scant. Hicks provides a description of the policy programs advocated by ordinary Populists: a subtreasury plan, tariff reform, increasing circulating currency, railroad rate reforms, and antitrust regulation. However, Hicks analysis ends at description. Hicks certainly points to rhetor-

ical flourishes and grass-roots sentiments that certainly reflect a desire to reform political institutions, Hicks does not provide us with evidence establishing a clear link between the principled and idealistic vision of American democracy espoused by colorful orators and captivating editorials and the realization of such policies. Missing from Hicks analysis is a careful analysis of how such policy programs were introduced for consideration in the Congress.

[Altschuler \(1982\)](#) also contributes to the populist-progressive mold by claiming the entirety of the People's Party platform was made into policy ([Clanton 1984](#)). Despite this grand claim, no evidence suggests that this is the case. To the contrary, substantial evidence points to the fact that none of the People's Party platform is made into law during the years of the People's Party existence (1891-1896). It is precisely the lack of populist policy enacted and the inability of Populists in Congress to build legislative alliances, cut deals, and show constituents real results that explains the short life of the People's Party.

Ultimately, [Sanders \(1999\)](#), [Pollack \(1962\)](#), [Hicks \(1931\)](#), and [Altschuler \(1982\)](#) are unified in that they impose a populist-progressive lens on their analysis of 1890s populism, giving too much credit to Populists for important policy accomplishments and paints populist in a heroic light, as progressive crusaders. [Bicha \(1976\)](#); [Goodwyn \(1976\)](#) argue that Populists were not such progressive crusaders, and are more aptly described as ambivalent conservatives. Furthermore, the works of these authors all neglect to consider the national scope of populism, instead focusing on regional and local episodes of populist activism and cliché descriptions of populism without evidence.

[Goodwyn \(1976\)](#) examines the origins of Populists political consciousness. Goodwyn situates the Farmer's Alliance at the center of his populist framework by suggesting the Farmer's Alliance provided the organizational apparatus that allowed for a widespread protest movement. In Goodwyn's account, populism is a social movement that is an alternative to the onslaught of industrial capitalism. Goodwyn wears his heart on his sleeve, showing his sympathy for the Populists striving for dignity in a rapidly changing nation in which farmers were finding themselves increasingly on the margins. Goodwyn's study is useful in that it provides

a thorough description of the Farmer's Alliance, particularly in Texas and throughout the South.

Goodwyn sheds light on the role of the Farmer's Alliance in advancing some of the key aspects of the People's Party policy platform: the push for greenback monetary policy, a sub-treasury system, and purchasing and marketing coöperatives. Goodwyn's study is useful in that it describes how such issues lead to the building of a connected network of local alliance organizations and gave rise to the itinerant populist lecturers that became the political leaders of the movement. However, after this Goodwyn's contribution falters. Goodwyn's geographic focus is on Texas, the populist movement surrounding George Watson in some portions of Georgia, and there is a brief treatment of populism in Alabama and Nebraska. Goodwyn's treatment of the national scope of populism is largely based on the political positions and orations of George Watson, a noted Georgia populist and member of Congress. Goodwyn fails to provide a systematic and evidence based study of populism at the national level and instead describes cliches about the suffering and ideals of populism. Goodwyn's work is not so much an empirical study but a work in political philosophy, attempting to convince the reader about the righteousness of the populist cause in the 1890s.

A third camp describes 1890s populism in terms of its conservatism. Most notably is the work of [Hofstadter \(1955\)](#). For [Hofstadter \(1955\)](#), economic hardship contributed to causing farmers to take up populism, but those hard times were not grounded solely in economic woes. Economic precarity and social anxiety cause farmers to turn to populism, [Hofstadter \(1955\)](#) concludes. Farmers had voluntarily entered into the commercial realm and when the boom and bust cycles of industrial capitalism did not favor agricultural commerce, agrarians retreated to the high ideals of an agrarian myth and an agrarian democracy. The nostalgic longing for times past feeds into the "cranky pseudo-conservatism of our time" ([Hofstadter 1954](#); [Hofstadter 1955](#), 20; [McMath 1992](#), 12). [Hofstadter's \(1955\)](#) view of populism has been widely praised for integrating nuanced processes of alienation of labor, economic modernization, the social system, and elements of political discourse and psychology. However,

Hofstadter's (1955) work is fiercely criticized for his depiction of all populist movements as having a tendency toward xenophobia and racism, his assumption that rural communities are disorganized, and his Durkheimian presumption that the proper functioning of society entails the total absence of political conflict (Collins 1989; Durkheim 1893; McMath 1992, 12-14). Nevertheless, Hofstadter's (1955) argument has stood up to scrutiny over time and serves as a template for much later analysis grounded in the presumption that economic grievance is a necessary condition for the development of populism but is not a whole explanation for populist swells (Hofstadter 1955; McMath 1992, 10-14).

In a likeminded thread, Bicha (1973, 1976) frames American populism as a form of “ambivalent conservatism.” Bicha (1973, 1976) arguments is novel in that it suggests congressional populists were the “equals” of their counterparts in the two old parties. Furthermore, he claims that the historical trope of Populists as “calamity howlers” was a false caricature and misleading depiction. Bicha (1976, 105) goes on to argue that the congressional Populists of the 1890s were “nineteenth century men in their values and assumptions, not precursors of the fiscal liberalism, the welfare philosophy and the statist orientation of twentieth-century liberal reformers.” Instead, Bicha (1976, 128-129) paints the Populists as men of traditional and politically elite values, men that “believed in an older order, a world of self-regulating, not selfishly manipulated mechanisms and processes.”

To make his case, Bicha (1976) examines the titles of bills introduced by congressional Populists in the 52nd and 53rd congresses. Several issues arise with such an approach. By examining only bill titles, one does not grasp the true character of the legislation proffered. Furthermore, the conclusion reached by Bicha (1976) entirely ignores the written and spoken record. One only need look at the Omaha platform to understand the agenda of the Populists.¹⁰ Furthermore, one only need look at the Congressional Record –examined in detail later in this paper– to see the deep frustration of the Populists with the recalcitrant nature of the two old parties in Congress and the utter inability for the Populists to advance their

¹⁰see appendix 3.2 for the Omaha Platform.

policy agenda.

If [Bicha \(1976\)](#) were correct, then what does one make of the ideological difference in committees and the chamber between the Populists and the two old parties and the significant number of bills proffered by Populists that languished in committee? This is to say nothing of additional significant methodological impairments in [Bicha \(1976\)](#): the exclusive focus on western Populists and the ahistorical description. By focusing solely on western Populists, [Bicha \(1976\)](#) neglects the all important middle west and southern Populists; it is in the middle west and the south where the highest concentration of local Farmers' Alliance organizations drove forward the national populist movement.

Moreover, while it is the case that many of the congressional Populists had held prior elected office and were noted figures in their respective communities, were often well educated, and were often men of moderate means, it is well evidenced in the Congressional Record and in Populist writing and oration outside of Congress –as is well documented in [Pollack \(1967\)](#)– the true sentiment of Populists: a movement fueled by the desire to overturn the political status quo and expand the state to meet the needs of the people. Kansas governor Lorenzo Lewelling aptly captures the overarching populist sentiment that [Bicha \(1976\)](#) neglects: “I have a dream of the future. I have the evolution of an abiding faith in human government, and in the beautiful vision of a coming time I behold the abolition of poverty.”

[Ferkiss \(1957\)](#) sees populism as a more unprincipled, radical, and nefarious crusade than simple conservatism. Populism is less a mass movement seeking reform and more resembles fascism and McCarthyism, concludes [Ferkiss \(1957\)](#). Agrarian communities see their majority lost, their social status in decline, and broader society turning more enthusiastically to urban and commercial life. As a result, agrarian peoples turn to extralegal measures, prejudice, and scapegoating rather than reform-oriented goals that respect the sanctity of the overarching arrangement of political institutions ([Ferkiss 1957](#); [McMath 1992](#), 12).

In addition to the ideological camps within the literature on populism, [Argersinger \(1995\)](#) and [Clanton \(1998\)](#) provide valuable historical insight on 1890s congressional populism. The

work of these scholars is outside the ideological camps mentioned above and are purely historical in nature. [Argersinger \(1995\)](#) provides us with a historical review of the institutional constraints on congressional Populists. Argersinger provides rich anecdotes of the cement wall that excluded Populists from participation in Congress. Argersinger describes how the House rules and committee system were designed by, and for, the two main parties. Combined with the strong powers gained by the Speakership in the 1880s, Argersinger provides the historical context for how the Populists were muted by the two old parties and the rules set up to help them maintain their grip on power.

[Clanton's \(1998\)](#) work compliments Argersinger with tangential information on the backgrounds of Populist members of the House in the 1890s and selected anecdotes from remarks given by Populists on diverse topics: silver coinage, Cuban independence, and American involvement in the Philippines. Both [Clanton \(1998\)](#) and [Argersinger \(1995\)](#) provide ample historical context and compelling anecdotes about congressional Populists. However, both works do not provide a systematic analysis of the political ramifications of the Populist's time in Congress. Specifically, how the experience of congressional Populists impacted the ability of Populists to bring real changes to their constituencies. Both studies do not include any analysis of the relationship between the two main parties and the Populists nor the antecedents to the 1890s populist revolt nor the aftermath of 1890s populism. Ultimately, both [Argersinger \(1995\)](#) and [Clanton \(1998\)](#) provide useful historical background. Such historical background provides the springboard for the analysis laid out in this chapter.

Such scattershot views such as those discussed here on 1890s populism defies a more nuanced understanding of the rise and fall of the People's Party. Here, I show that congressional Populists were ardent supporters of the populist agenda: railroad reforms, currency reforms, and the regulation and curbing of the excesses of industrial capitalism. Drawing from the Congressional Record and primary sources, I make the case that the Populists arrived in Congress eager to go to work representing their constituents and to implement the populist agenda. Nevertheless, the original analysis presented here reveals that the Pop-

ulists were obstructed on every front: Populists were relegated to trivial positions within the committee system where Populist bills were flatly ignored; as a result, Populists were unable to implement nearly any of the populist policy agenda, thus rendering the Populists ineffective representatives; and when the Populists tried to speak to the chamber to voice their complaints and persuade colleagues of the populist cause, the Populists were squashed by House Speakers who exercised unilateral power of recognition to silence and marginalize the Populists. Ironclad rule by the two old parties rendered the People's Party a failure in congress. I conclude that as a result of the People's Party's failure to gain traction in the House, the fusion of the Democratic Party was a political necessity that brought the People's Party to its demise in 1896.

3.3 Obstructed Representation

This is a study of populist legislative and political activity in Congress between 1890 and 1896. The objective is to demonstrate that Populists in Congress attempted to enact populist policy proposals but had little success because of the utter monopoly over the levers of power held by the Republican and Democratic parties. In this context, levers of power refers to the ability to introduce and advance legislation from House committees to the House floor and then passing those bills into law via the executive branch.

Populism succeeded in organizing a national movement and bringing populist issues to the fore. Populism's success even extended to the formation of a national third party, the single most notable third party in American politics. In the 1891 elections for the 52nd Congress there were 118 Populists challengers in House races, out of 332 total possible seats, representing 36% of all House seats. In 1894 there were 157 Populist candidates in House races of a total 356, representing 44% of all House seats. While only 9 Populists won in 1892 and 12 in 1894, the number of Populists who challenged the two old parties in House races represents the extent of populist ambition in the 1890s. Had the Populists won even half of the races they competed in, the Populist delegation in Congress would've commanded recognition and respect in the chamber. The significant number of races entered by Populists in 1892 and 1894 also highlights the success of populism as a movement drawing in aggrieved common men and organizing their political preferences. However, the success of populism in forming a national third party did not extend to that party's effectiveness in Congress. At every turn, the Populists encountered barriers to their ability to participate and work as effective legislators. The entrenched old parties held a monopoly over the House of Representatives and brooked no opposition to their legislative programs. How they did this was primarily through taking advantage of the committee system.

3.3.1 The Power of Committees

The power to move legislation is most often held by committee chairs and ranking members. As third party representatives elected by western and southern farmers, Populists in Congress encountered a deliberative body in which the two party system was institutionalized and had adopted norms and procedures that stifled the policy innovations the Populists had been sent to Congress to enact while also perpetuating two-party control ([Argersinger 1995](#), 213).

By 1890, policy work in Congress was conducted in committee. Discussion of policy occurred on the floor only to “[tell] it to the country,” as Woodrow Wilson aptly described. The committee system had taken over the work that had been historically taken up in the House itself. The House leadership had also expanded its role and power by the late nineteenth century, resulting in House Speakers with a high degree of central authority. Importantly, the Speaker determined member’s committee assignments, giving the Speaker near complete and unilateral control over the legislative process. The power of the Speaker was further enhanced in the 1880s by expanding the powers of the House Rules Committee. The Speaker appointed himself to the House Rules Committee as well as the chairs of the Appropriation Committee and Ways and Means committee, cementing the Speaker’s ability—and the majority party’s ability—to control the entire legislative pipeline. In having party leaders hold the Speakership, the chairmanships for Appropriations and Ways and Means, while simultaneously sitting on the Rules Committee, the Rules Committee became the institutional venue for the fusing of the party system and the committee system in the House ([Argersinger 1995](#), 214).

The effective control of the legislative process by the majority party was further cemented with the implementation of the so-called “Reed Rules” put into place by House Speaker “Czar” Reed.¹¹ The Reed rules demanded all present members vote and all present members be counted for quorum regardless of their response when called upon (called the disappearing

¹¹Republican of Maine. Speaker of the House 1889-1891 and 1885-1889.

quorum). The Reed rules also gave the Speaker the power to dismiss any motion attempted by the minority party by declaring it dilatory and out of order. The Reed rules allowed for the majority party to suppress dissent from the minority party and paved the way for the majority's legislative agenda. While the Republican party was first to implement the Reed rules during the 51st Congress (1889-1891), when the Speakership changed hands to the Democratic Party in 1891, the Democrats adopted the rules, making them a central feature of any majority's power. The consolidation and exercise of the Speaker's power constituted negative agenda power, or the ability to control the legislative agenda by *preventing* the introduction of bills incongruent with the majority's interests (Cox and McCubbins 2005).

The centralization of power for the majority, the exercise of negative agenda power, and the fusion of the majority party's leadership and the committee system, made two-party control of the chamber an impenetrable reality. The changed House was an institution less conducive to minority sway and less open to new parties and new members. This is the scene encountered by newly elected Populists members when they arrived in Washington beginning in 1891. As Representative Bell (P-CO) aptly describes: "These rules give control of the House to less than half a dozen men –the five forming a Committee on Rules– the dictates of whom a majority will obediently obey" (*Congressional Record, 54th Congress, 1st Session 1896*, 577)

In both chambers, Populists encountered institutions bent on excluding their policy proposals and hampering their ability to achieve the legislative goals their constituents had sent them to accomplish. The importance of committees was not lost on the Populists. When Populists arrived in Congress, they quickly began "contriving means to obtain places on committees where they may best advance the interests of their constituents."¹² As a consequence of the Reed rules mentioned earlier, the Populists found it difficult to get on to the relevant committees and impossible to get into the positions of power that would allow Populists to advance their policy agenda.

¹²Original quotation is from the *Baltimore Sun*. Excerpt found in Argersinger (1995, 217).

In the 52nd Congress (1891-1893), Populists held 13 committee leadership posts, of a possible 125 posts. In the 53rd Congress, the Populists held their highest number of committee leadership positions, 14 positions between chairmanships and ranking members. In the 54th Congress, Populists held a mere 10 committee leadership positions. Furthermore, of the most important committees –Appropriations, Ways and Means, and Rules– Populists were offered no seats from the 52nd through the 54th congress –the entire period in which Populists served in the House.

The Speaker had sole authority over committee assignments. Populists were excluded from committees of any influence and were instead assigned to minor committees, some of which never convened. Representative Watson (P-GA) lamented the minor committee assignments given to Populists, claiming that such assignments were “pigeon holes in which dust accumulates and an occasional paper is filed away” ([Argersinger 1995](#), 219). Representative Bell (P-CO) lamented that “so far as the committees are concerned, the Populist members of this body have not a single important position. Their committee assignments signify nothing.” ([Congressional Record, 54th Congress, 1st Session 1896](#), 577).

Representative Bell (P-CO) went on to openly challenge Speaker Reed who was responsible for relegating the Populists to obscurity in the House. Mr. Bell demanded that Populists receive recognition on all House committees, including the powerful Appropriation, Ways and Means, and Rules committee, claiming that populist representatives represented 6 million people and 1,600,000 votes in the most recent election and thus deserved greater inclusion ([Congressional Record, 54th Congress, 1st Session 1896](#), 577). Mr. Bell went on to say that Maine, with 4 representatives –the home state of the powerful Republican leader, Speaker Reed– held 4 of the best committee assignments in the House and controlled more legislation than all the states of the west and middle west ([Congressional Record, 54th Congress, 1st Session 1896](#), 577).

Representative Henderson (R-IA), chairman of the powerful appropriations committee, responded to Mr. Bell’s complaints on behalf of the Populists by suggesting, “leave it to

the Speaker and these old-time rules” (*Congressional Record, 54th Congress, 1st Session 1896*, 577). Mr. Henderson’s remarks are telling in that they reinforce the Democratic and Republican’s shared desire to keep power between the two old parties while completing suppressing any third party participation.

Speaker Crisp (D-GA) during the 53rd Congress claimed that in making committee assignments, he would only take “such assistance and advice as he considers it advisable to take,” indicating the Speaker’s intent to appoint committees based on his party’s interests (*Argersinger 1992*, 661-662). Speaker Crisp ignored all committee requests from the Populists. Representative Watson (P-GA) complained that Speaker Crisp operated the House as if “the House of Representatives is his private property” (*Argersinger 1992*, 661-662). Mr. Watson had challenged Mr. Crisp for the speakership and thus, when Crisp inevitably won the speakership, he placed Mr. Watson “just as low as the law allowed” (*Argersinger 1992*, 661-662).

Speaker Crisp was hard on the Populists, claimed representative Bell (P-CO) but when Speaker Reed took over again during the 54th Congress, he was no better to the Populists, relegating them to obscurity. In one instance, Speaker Reed and the Republicans wanted to advance their version of the Dingley Tariff in the 54th Congress –tariffs were a matter of great importance to Populists– the Republican leadership did not make any committee assignments other than for Rules, Ways and Means, and Appropriations, refusing to appoint any other committees. In so doing, Speaker Reed left the other committees unformed, without the ability to meet, thus obstructing the ability of any legislation to advance that was not explicitly introduced in the 3 most influential committees, populated with members of the House leadership. The House leadership –the Republicans at the time– were able to pass their version of the Dingley Tariff, without any populist input on a matter of great importance to their constituents. While the Populists were in favor of tariffs, the Dingley Tariff did not include any of the commodities that were important to Populists –agricultural goods, raw materials, and livestock/meat. The Dingley Tariff instead raised tariffs on silk,

china, sugar, and textiles. By not allowing any input other than that of the House leadership, Populists were unable to insert their views on the matter or attempt to shape the legislation to reflect their constituents' preferences.

Populists were vehemently opposed to the Republican tactic of not appointing any committees. Representative Simpson (P-KS) speaking on behalf of the Populists in Congress, demanded that the speaker "appoint the committees and give Congress the chance to legislate" (*Proceedings in Congress 1897*). Representative Simpson also called out Speaker Reed's actions as "autocratic and despotic" (*Argersinger 1995*, 220). Mr. Simpson's attempt to call out the Speaker's behavior ended with Speaker Reed declaring Simpson out of order and silencing him by having him removed from the House floor by the Sergeant-at-Arms. As Simpson was about to leave the lectern, he exclaimed sardonically "Where am I at, Mr. Speaker?" The Speaker replied "the present occupant of the Chair has never been able to find anyone who could definitely fix the gentleman's status" (*Simpson is Sat Upon 1897a*). This statement is telling of the populist's overall place in the chamber, as neither of the two old parties allowed the Populists to caucus with them, leaving the Populists wholly outside the legislative process; the Populists were adrift with little ability to effect change.

When the Populists attempted to raise complaint on the matter, the Democrats—in the minority—utterly rejected populist complaints, or what they called, "useless and captious resistance to Republican policies" (*Argersinger 1995*, 220). This is emblematic of the two old parties' complete monopoly over the House; the Democrats, the minority party at the time, rejected any third party resistance to what the Republicans and Speaker Reed were doing in order to pass the Dingley Tariff. Despite the obvious fact that the Democratic party was separate from the Republican Party, the Democrats nonetheless supported the Republicans in suppressing Populist participation. The Dingley Tariff of 1897 (pushed through the House in 1896) is an example of how Populists were obstructed in the committee system from obtaining the positions necessary to advance the agenda they had been sent to Congress to enact.

The obstructed reality for Populists is borne out in the evidence shown in tables 3.9 through 3.14. Between the 52nd and 54th Congress, the Populists held roughly only 9% of committee leadership positions for any committee and held no positions on any of the 3 most powerful committees. Tables 3.15 through 3.17 show how even on the committees taking up the substance most important to the Populists, they were, in large part, excluded. This is further evidence of how the committee system was used by the two old parties to obstruct the Populist’s ability to respond to their constituents needs.

James Baird Weaver, populist presidential candidate in 1892, articulated populist’s frustration at not being able to advance the people’s agenda: “public sentiment is not observed. It is uniformly defied...the wealthy and the powerful gain a ready hearing, but the plodding, suffering, unorganized, complaining multitude are spurned and derided ” (Weaver 1892, 54).

Table 3.9: Chairmen & Ranking Members for all Committees by Party, 52nd Congress

	Chairs ¹³	Ranking Members
Democrats	56	-
Republicans	-	56
Populists	9	4

3.3.2 Blocked Legislation

From the 52nd to the 54th Congress, 29 Populists were elected to the House of Representatives.¹⁴ Sometime supporting the Populists were 76 Republican and Democratic members

¹³Unexpected turnover on committees is cause for some minor discrepancies between the number of assigned chairmanships and ranking memberships.

¹⁴In 1892 and 1894, Populists ran for 118 and 157 House seats, respectively. In the 52nd and 53rd

Table 3.10: Chairmen & Ranking Members for all Committees by Party, 53rd Congress

	Chairs	Ranking Members
Democrats	55	-
Republicans	-	51
Populists	12	2

Table 3.11: Chairmen & Ranking Members for all Committees by Party, 54rd Congress

	Chairs	Ranking Members
Democrats	-	57
Republicans	57	-
Populists	10	0

Table 3.12: Composition of 3 Most Powerful Committees, 52nd Congress

	Appropriations	Ways & Means	Rules
Democrats	10	10	3
Republicans	5	6	2
Populists	0	0	0

Table 3.13: Composition of 3 Most Powerful Committees, 53rd Congress

	Appropriations	Ways & Means	Rules
Democrats	12	12	3
Republicans	6	7	3
Populists	0	0	0

Table 3.14: Composition of 3 Most Powerful Committees, 54th Congress

	Appropriations	Ways & Means	Rules
Democrats	6	8	3
Republicans	11	11	3
Populists	0	0	0

Table 3.15: Composition of 3 Committees Important to Populists, 52th Congress

	Banking & Currency	Agriculture	Coinage
Democrats	11	10	8
Republicans	5	5	4
Populists	0	0	1

Table 3.16: Composition of 3 Committees Important to Populists, 53th Congress

	Banking & Currency	Agriculture	Coinage
Democrats	11	10	10
Republicans	6	6	5
Populists	0	1	1

Table 3.17: Composition of 3 Committees Important to Populists, 54th Congress

	Banking & Currency	Agriculture	Coinage
Democrats	11	6	7
Republicans	12	11	9
Populists	0	2	0

from states that had voted for the populist candidate in the presidential election of 1892 with a margin of at least 30%.¹⁵ When the Populists arrived in Congress, they were eager to enact their policy agenda. Representative Watson (P-GA), a noted populist figure, spoke on the House floor in 1892, stating: “We insist that this Government shall be again brought back to its foundations, so that it may be a government of the people, by the people, and for the people” (*Congressional Record, 52nd Congress 1892*). While the populist delegation to Congress was small, they were passionate about the populist cause and getting to work for their constituents. The issues taken up by the Populists largely adhered to the Omaha Platform.

The Omaha Platform was the central policy manifesto of the populist movement and the People’s Party. The Omaha Platform contains three overarching planks: first, the issue of money and finance. This plank contained proposals for increasing the coinage of silver and gold, increasing the amount of circulating currency, and a call for a graduated income tax. Second, the issue of transportation. This plank contained proposals for the regulation and nationalization of railroads. Third, the issue of land. This plank contained proposals for regulating private industry and that the land of the nation belonged to all its people and should therefore benefit all the people. While the platform was broad, it was the framework for populist thinking in Congress. The populist delegation had a mandate to seek legislation to regulate private industry and the economy so that it would be more equitable for ordinary Americans. However grand and however possessed of conviction were the Populists in Congress, they would find themselves hard pressed for accomplishments in Congress. As shown in the previous section, Populists were blocked from the single most important venue of legislative power: the committee system. The Populists were utterly excluded from the most powerful committees: Appropriations, Ways and Means, and Rules.

Congress, there were a total of 332 and 356 seats, respectively.

¹⁵Those states are: Alabama, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Wyoming.

Furthermore, the Populists were mostly excluded from the substantive committees most relevant to the populist agenda: banking and currency, agriculture, and coinage. Thwarted through the committee system, the Populists encountered only legislative failure.

Tables 3.20 through 3.22 evidence the legislative failure of the populist agenda in the House. Between the 52nd and 54th Congress, populist members introduced 493 bills of which only 5 were enacted –a dismal 0.8% success rate. Those members of the two old parties but represented states that had a 30% or higher populist vote in the 1892 presidential election, fared marginally better: such members introduced 2,370 bills of which 29 were passed into law –a slightly less dismal 1.22% success rate. The overall House passed 5.71% of all the bills introduced, a five-fold increase over the average success rate of Populists in the House. In the few instances in which Populists bills were successful, they were almost exclusively one-time niche bills and not the meaningful reform measures sought in the Omaha Platform. The five bills passed by the Populists pertained to making a minor adjustment to a detail in the Congressional Record from the 51st Congress (Mr. Boen), amending the statutes of the United States (Mr. Bell), and extending the time to build a street railway on an indian reservation (Mr. Davis). Representative Kem (P-NE) sponsored the only substantive bill from the Populists that was enacted during the 53rd congress: an act to repeal timber-culture laws, an issue of importance to populist constituents. In the 54th congress, Populists passed a single bill: an act to promote the safety of employees and travelers. While populist successes were few, their attempts to pass meaningful legislation were numerous.

Representative Simpson (P-KS) introduced a bill to prohibit usury, a topic of great importance to not only Simpson’s Kansas constituents, but to the whole of the Populist party.¹⁶ The bill was introduced in the Committee on Banking and Currency, where it was not taken up and did not make it out of committee. Similarly, Representative Halvorson (P-MN) introduced a bill to “to prevent the interstate railways from being used to unjustly

¹⁶52 HR 134

centralize business and wealth,” a topic central to the populist agenda.¹⁷ The bill was introduced to the committee on interstate commerce, where it was disregarded and never taken up seriously. William Jennings Bryan (D-NE), a noted populist figure and sympathizer, introduced a bill to place lumber on the free list and reduce duties on wood products (HR 8797).¹⁸ This issue was important to Bryan’s agrarian constituents in Nebraska and was congruent with the overall agenda of the populist movement. The bill was introduced to the House Ways and Means Committee where it languished and was never formally taken up.

The populist agenda was obstructed by the ironclad control over the committee system held by the majority party. Furthermore, the Populists were obstructed by the ideological leanings of the committees most central to passing populist legislation: Appropriations, Ways and Means, Coinage, and Interstate Commerce, all skewed heavily toward the two major parties. Tables 3.18 through 3.18 show the ideological leaning of the committees from the 52nd to the 54th congress. In each congress, the committees most relevant to the populist’s substantive interests (banking, coinage, commerce) as well as the committees most important for passing legislation (appropriation and ways and means) are incongruent with Populist ideology. In each session, the committees skew more conservative than that of the Populists. Moreover, there is ideological incongruence between both the Democrats and the Populists and the Republicans and the Populists. The Populists are incongruent with the majority party in each session from the 52nd to the 54th congress. This ideological difference makes it even more difficult for the Populists to advance their legislation.

Unable to get meaningful legislation considered in committee and get bills out of committee and onto the floor for consideration, the Populists were unable to achieve their legislative agenda. Representative Watson (P-GA), captured the frustration experienced by so many Populists, sardonically and melancholically suggested “maybe I can get the pages to let me help them bring up stationary, pens, inks, etc. and thus keep the rust off.” Watson went on

¹⁷52 HR 573.

¹⁸The free list refers to a list of commodities that did not have state imposed duties.

Table 3.18: Chamber DW-Nominate Average Scores, 52nd–54th Congress

	Democrats	Populists	Republicans	Chamber
52nd Congress	-0.352	-0.210	0.435	-0.145
53rd Congress	-0.360	-0.191	0.452	-0.065
54th Congress	-0.439	-0.145	0.426	0.174

Table 3.19: Average DW-Nominate Scores for 5 Committees, 52nd–54th Congress

	52nd Congress	53rd Congress	54th Congress
Appropriations	-0.131	-0.091	0.175
Banking	-0.152	-0.123	0.115
Coinage	-0.175	-0.068	0.075
Interstate Commerce	-0.095	-0.022	0.200
Ways & Means	-0.082	-0.060	0.158

to say “the elevator man seems to be a good-natured outcast and possibly he may let me pull the cord” ([Argersinger 1995](#), 219).

At stake was not just the personal displeasure of populist members like Watson, it was the utter inability to represent the preferences and issues of their constituents. Watson described the situation as: “so fine a district as there is anywhere sends me here to work for it. [Speaker] Crisp out of personal spite places me where he thinks I’ll never be heard of” ([Argersinger 1995](#); *Baltimore Sun* December 15, 1891).

Without the ability to represent their constituencies in terms of advancing policy, the Populists are left to resort to complain about their grievances and frustrations. However, the Populists found even the ability to voice their complaints thwarted.

Table 3.20: Legislative Success of Populist Bills, 52nd–54th Congress

	Introduced ¹⁹	Out of Committee	Enacted	%Passed
52nd Congress	173	0	0	0%
53rd Congress	199	4	4	2.0%
54th Congress	121	1	1	0.83%
Totals	493	5	5	0.8%

¹⁹This refers to bills sponsored by representatives and senators of the People’s Party. Out of Committee refers to a bill that made it to any stage beyond committee in either chamber. Enacted refers to those bills signed into law by the president.

²⁰This refers to bills sponsored by representatives –Democrats or Republicans– from states in which the Populist vote was at least 30% in the 1892 election. The states are: Alabama, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Wyoming.

Table 3.21: Legislative Success of Reps. from Populist States, 52nd–54th Congress

	Introduced ²⁰	Out of Committee	Enacted	%Passed
52nd Congress	644	4	4	0.62%
53rd Congress	625	14	12	1.92%
54th Congress	1,101	15	13	1.18%
Totals	2,370	33	29	1.22%

Table 3.22: Overall Legislative Success in the House, 52nd–54th Congress

	Introduced ²¹	Measures Passed	%Passed
52nd Congress	14,893	722	4.8%
53rd Congress	12,226	711	5.8%
54th Congress	14,585	948	6.5%
Totals	41,704	2,381	5.71%

3.3.3 Recognition

The powers of the Speaker combined with the institutionalization of the Republican and Democratic party in the committee system blocked any attempt by the Populists to advance their legislation. Among the most forceful ways in which the Populists were suppressed was by the Speaker's ability to recognize members wanting to address the House.²²

In the 1890s, for an individual representative to speak on the House floor, a request in writing had to be submitted to the Speaker, detailing the rationale for addressing the chamber. The Speaker then recognized representatives based on whether the details of their request were found favorable by the Speaker and was in sync with the majority's agenda. The speaker's role by the 1890s was to advance the legislative agenda of the majority, as Speaker Reed describes, the speaker's role is "not simply to preside over the deliberations of his fellow members, but to carry out party pledges and round up a successful legislative session" (Brady 1973, 23; Reed 1899, 9).

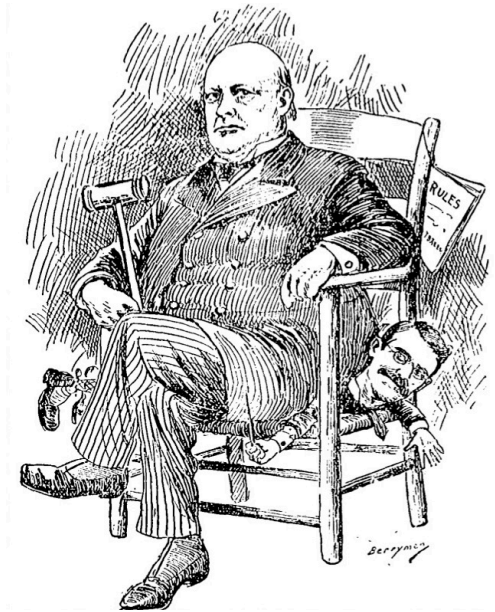
The mere presence of a third party represented a wholesale rejection of two party control over the chamber and majority rule, thus the Populists found it difficult to gain recognition. Without the ability to gain recognition to speak on the House floor, the Populists resorted to asking for speaking time on the basis of personal privilege, although this was also largely unsuccessful. In one instance, Representative Simpson (P-KS), was able to gain time on the House floor by way of asking for a point of personal privilege. He had barely begun

²¹This refers to bills introduced and passed regardless of the party of the originating sponsor(s).

²²Speakers had had the power to recognize individuals at their discretion. However, if the speaker didn't recognize a given, the member had the right to appeal. Nevertheless, in 1881, Speaker Randall (D-PA) formalized the rule that the Speaker's power to recognize individuals was absolute (Argersinger 1995; Bach 1990; Alexander 1916; House 1935).

²²Source for figure 3.1: *Simpson is Sat Upon* (1897b). The image is in the public domain and is Fair Use.

Figure 3.1: Cartoon Depicting Speaker Reed Sitting on Mr. Simpson (P-KS).



speaking when Speaker Reed ruled Simpson out of order. Speaker Reed refused to hear any complaint because critical statements were “not conducive to order” ([Argersinger 1995](#), 221). Before being lead back to his seat by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr.Simpson replied “I have great doubts lately as to whether I have any rights in this House” ([Topeka Advocate May 19, 1891](#); [Washington Post May 14, 1897](#)).

In a similar instance, Mr. Bell (P-CO) was able to address the House because a Democratic colleague yielded his time. Mr. Bell denounced the ways in which the House rules were being used to oppress Populists, a significant constituency in the nation:

Mr. Bell (P-CO): Mr. Speaker...I belong to a party that casts 1,600,000 votes, and there are seven of us in this Hall...We have stood here during the last four weeks and pleaded with the Speaker and with the members leading this House for the majority, and not one member of the Populist party has been permitted by them during this session the privilege of addressing the House in his own time.

Mr. Bell was not a member of any influential committee and thus had little ability to

gain recognition. He was only ever able to address the House when a sympathetic colleague yielded their time to him. As Mr. Bell describes it, he had to “beg the opportunity to address the house.” Furthermore, Mr. Bell lamented that Populist’s inability to speak on the House floor was evidence of the “complete dependency of individual members on the will of the speaker and the committees” and that “members of a new party are practically ostracized in the House and have no power under the rules to promulgate any of their principles” (*Congressional Record, 54th Congress, 1st Session 1896*, 316-318). Opportune moments in which Populists could use time yielded to them by sympathetic Democrats and Republicans were rare. Even in those rare instances, most instances were taken up by the more vocal Populists, such as Mr. Bell (P-CO), Mr. Simpson (P-KS), and Mr. Watson (P-GA).

Rank-and-file Populists did not have the benefit of even being able to “beg” to use someone else’s time to speak on the floor. Consequently, rank-and-file Populist members resorted to canned remarks in the Congressional Record. Such remarks, while formally on the record, were not spoken on the House floor and thus did little in the way of persuading their fellow members to take up policy issues or to change the rules to give Populists greater recognition and access.

Representative Stark (P-NE), furious that his remarks had to be canned in the Congressional Record rather than spoken on the House floor, bemoaned his canned remarks as a “deception...made necessary by the rules of the House.” Mr. Stark goes on to say that he had entered Congress with the intent of never canning any of his speeches but that “rather than be deprived of all the rights to which the suffrages of the people of the fourth district should entitle me, I avail myself of the only opportunity presented” (*Argersinger 1995*, 222-223).

Representative Omer Kem (P-NE) described the experience of resorting to publishing his remarks in the Congressional Record as “humiliating.” Mr. Kem went on to describe the House as an “arbitrary machine for smothering free speech and representing a part of the people only.” Mr. Kem reinforced the aggrieved sentiment felt among all Populists in the House that they were “denied the right of free speech by rules and practices more fitting

for a monarchy than a republic” ([Argersinger 1995](#), 222-223). Moreover, the inability to gain even basic recognition from colleagues caused some Populists to give up the struggle; in 1896, Representative William Baker (P-KS) chose not to run for reelection despite the fact that he was popular and would’ve likely won reelection.

Without the ability to speak on the House floor, to use rhetoric and oration as the instruments of persuasion, Populists were unable to make their pitch for populist policy. Furthermore, Populists were excluded from receiving even basic dignity as representatives of American constituents. With no ability to speak and make the populist case and effectively excluded from the committee system, Populists held little sway over legislative matters and were largely incapable of serving their constituents.

3.4 Discussion

As a result of the institutional monopoly held by the two party system, populism proved to be a great success as a movement but an abject failure as a party. From the vast and desolate ranges of the middle west, west, and south, rose up a network of thousands of local alliance organizations. Such a national network was unprecedented in American politics and sought to redirect American democracy toward the interests of common men. Such a movement also sought to curb the excesses of industrial capitalism so as to make it more egalitarian and fair and preventing the outright desperation of agrarian communities. Populism succeeded in organizing a national movement and bringing populist issues to the fore. Populism's success extended to the formation of a national third party, the single most notable third party in American politics. However, the success of populism in forming a national third party did not extend to that party's effectiveness in Congress.

If populism was a great success in terms of calling attention to the plight of common men and forming a coherently organized national movement, it failed dramatically as a party in Congress. As shown in the previous pages, the utter inability of the Populists in Congress to pass any meaningful legislation rendered void the populist dream of a national third party that would vie for power alongside the two old parties. However, the entrenchment of the two major parties in Congress gave them an institutional advantage that rendered any possibility of third party success null. It is in this context that the populist party reached its demise.

By 1896, the People's Party was on its last legs. Republicans controlled both chambers in Congress and the White House. Republicans had won the White House by nearly 4 percentage points. In the House, Republicans held 206 seats compared to 104 held by Democrats. In the Senate, the Republicans held 46 seats compared to the Democrats 32 seats. The Republicans hold on the chambers of Congress and the White House by comfortable margins would continue for the foreseeable future. At the state level, even in Kansas, a People's Party bastion, the Republicans took control in 1898 and repealed Populist reform measures.

In Texas and North Carolina, the Democrats took control by 1898 and also repealed the more progressive Populist reforms.

With the inability to implement a populist agenda on the national level, congressional Populists faced a unique reality: an enthusiastic constituency and a nationally organized movement, but the inability to get anything done in Congress. The inability to provide responsiveness to Populist constituencies lead the People's Party to fusion with their closest ideological ally, the Democratic Party. Looking at table 3.18 and table 3.19, one can see Populists and Democrats are closer ideologically than the Populists and the Republicans. Furthermore, much of the Populist's success was the result of Democratic-Populist fusion in regional elections. Between 1891 and 1897, 31 members of the House belonged to one of the two old parties but were from states that had voted at least 30% or more for the Populist candidate for president in the 1892 election. Such representatives were often fusion candidates and held populist sympathies. In the South, a Democratic stronghold in the 1890s, nearly all Populist candidates had been fusion tickets. However, fusion with the Democrats did not sit well with many Populist voters who had supported the People's Party in order to unseat the old political machines. Particularly in the south, where the Democratic Party represented elite control and was the primary focus of Populist revolt against the political system.

In the middle west, the Democratic party had a less visible presence and represented the entrenched political machines Populists had been railing against. Fusion with the Democrats seemed treasonous to many Populist supporters. Indeed, in *The Coming Nation*, the Populist dilemma was articulated:

“The burning question of today is, shall we fuse with the democrats? Shall all the reform elements of this country drop every other reform issue, except free coinage of gold and silver, join hands with the free silver democrats and fight the common enemy—plutocratic republicanism? If the democrats would do half of the ”fusing,” I for one would say yes. But do the democrats offer the reformers

one single concession? I fail to see it as yet...No, my brother; the democratic party can not swallow me down unless it swallows all the populist reform issues. There are too many horrors fresh in my memory—too many scenes of poverty and want, at which a democratic administration turned a deaf ear.”

To fuse with the Democrats was contrary to the very principles upon which the People’s Party and the populist movement were founded. In an 1892 editorial in the *Alliance-Independent*, it is said that common men have pursued a third party because “it is the conviction that has been forced upon them that the old parties have both passed beyond the control of the people into the hands of designing capitalists and corporations, whose end and aim in life is to control legislation in their own selfish interests.” To participate in fusion with one of those major parties was anathema. Thomas Watson claimed that the entire purpose of the Populist party, if it were to exist at all after 1896, would be to “rigidly exclude from control every leader tainted with fusion” (Woodward 1963, 333). After fusion with the Democrats in the 1896 election, Watson lamented:

“Our party, as a party, does not exist any more. Fusion has well nigh killed it...the national organization is almost dead...the sentiment is still there, the votes are still there, but confidence is gone, and the party organization is almost gone...” (Woodward 1963, 330)

The failure of populism as a party pushed the populist movement to morph and integrate with what would become known as the Progressive movement. Central to the Progressive movement is the notion of apartisanship; a shift away from party politics and toward an apartisan politics of bureaucratic policymaking. Party politics did not provide the Populists with the lasting reforms they had sought. Instead, Populists would pursue a wholesale transformation of the state and its institutions in order to garner the responsiveness they sought.

The reform legislation of the Progressive era is a response to the changes brought about

by industrial expansion in the late 19th century. I will show in the coming chapter that the reforms of the Progressive era were such that aggrieved constituencies –that is to say, common Americans– sought responsiveness at the onset of an agrarian economic crisis beginning in 1920, and as a result of Progressive reforms, government institutions provided responsiveness.

CHAPTER 4

The Populist Moment: Reinterpreting Agrarian Politics in the 1920s

“...we may all find ourselves indebted to this new movement for bringing economic and social considerations, which lie close to the life and labor of the common lot of Americans, clear through into the arena of searching public discussion.”

— *Survey*, October 1924

4.1 Introduction

This chapter takes aim at the absence of agrarian populism in the 1920s. Drawing on robust empirical evidence and original analysis, I show that the conditions of the agrarian economic crisis in the 1920s are similar, if not worse, than those conditions faced by farmers in the late nineteenth century. Despite similar economic conditions, there is an absence of agrarian populism in the 1920s.

The combined effects of the institutional action taken between 1920 and 1923 and the attempted passage of the McNary-Haugen bills from 1924 through 1928 amounts to a robust government response to ordinary American’s economic concerns. However, close analysis of the effects of such legislation show minimal effect on real outcomes. Following from that logic, I conclude that populism is about the *perception* of representation. The story told

here is about how institutions shape politics and coördinated political action. Looking to the populist moment of the 1890s helps one better understand the agrarian political situation in the 1920s.

The demise of the People's Party at the end of the nineteenth century demonstrated the inability of populism to be successful as a third party. Without the ability to accomplish its policy goals in Congress, prevented from sitting on influential committees, blocked from important posts, and silenced on the floor, the People's Party's hopes of becoming a competitive national party were dashed. While the People's Party was a failure, the populist movement, the sentiments underlying the struggle of common men, were very much alive in the early twentieth century.

The sentiment underlying the People's Party was carried on outside of electoral politics in the early twentieth century through the transformation and expansion of government. What really had the People's Party and the Alliancemen asked for? That when common men found themselves at the mercy of unrelenting forces too strong for them to fight alone, government help them. What were the demands of the People's Party and the Farmers' Alliance –help from predatory lending, help with the fallout from bad crop yields, railroad regulation, banking and currency reform, election reform– other than a demand to exercise their right to a government of the people that helps when common men are being crushed by conditions utterly out of their control? When the Populists asked for such help in the 1890s, they had simply asked too early.

The responsibility for advancing the sentiments of Jeffersonian democracy, making representative institutions and the institutions of government more responsive, fell to the heirs of 1890s populism: The American Farm Bureau Federation, the Farmers' National Council, and the Non-Partisan League. Of these, the American Farm Bureau Federation was the most significant and influential in advancing a renewed Populist agenda in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Just as industrial concerns in the Gilded Age had “purchased” representatives and ad-

vanced their interests by way of influence peddling, the Populists would take up the same approach. While the Populists had decried the ability of industrial interests to sway policy through influence, agrarians would form the basis of one of the single most powerful set of organized interests in American politics: the farm lobby. Farmers would achieve their aims through the organization of agrarian interests and aggressive advocacy in the halls of government. No longer were mobilization, elections, or parties the locus of political change. In the 1920s, the locus of political change would be found in the advocacy work of the principal agrarian lobbying organization: The American Farm Bureau Federation.

Before agrarians built an influence machine that rivaled those of industry, the Populists attempted to achieve their aims in the 1890s by ensuring that common men could participate in politics. In increasing political participation and removing barriers to participation for common men, populism achieved significant advances: ballot reform, direct primary elections, and the legal regulation of nominations, conventions, and elections, the adoption of the Australian ballot, and initiative and petition referenda.¹

The political achievements of agrarian populism in the late nineteenth century were means to an end. Furthermore, agrarian populism was responsible for calling out the rampant corruption of party machines and bringing to a swift end the reign of party bosses. The People's Party, the most successful third party movement in American political history, forced the major parties—particularly the Democratic party—to accommodate the demands of an organized and mobilized agrarian bloc. With such organization, ordinary Americans were able, for the first time since the beginning of the nation, to sway elections and command the attention of the major parties. The Populists voted into office Populist legislators at the state and national levels. With sympathetic legislators, and the ability to directly introduce legislation in a majority of states through initiative and petition referenda, ordinary Americans were finally able to introduce the policy programs they had long sought; programs to help ordinary Americans during tough times, reduce inequality, curb capitalism's worst

¹For more on reforms to political participation for common men, see appendices 4.1 and 4.2.

excesses, and make a level playing field for plutocrats and ordinary Americans alike. The first step was to democratize political participation. First among the reforms to political participation were direct primary elections.

Two major advances led to the emergence of the direct primary election in the United States: first, the introduction of the Australian ballot; second, the legal regulation of the primary process. The combined reforms targeted the corrosive effects of machine politics. The corrupting effect of patronage obscured the selection of candidates for office. Prior to reform, the nomination of candidates occurred in party conventions in which delegates are chosen by the party bosses. The party bosses and their lieutenants whipped votes and fixed nominating processes so that machine backed candidates were the only nominated candidates. Such candidates advanced the interests of industrial patrons and helped propagate the pernicious political and socioeconomic inequality emblematic of the Gilded Age.

The inability of Everyman to participate in policy discussions and the nominating process obfuscated the selection process and left no meaningful choices among leadership groups. Even in the rare event that a reform minded candidate was successfully nominated and elected to office, the lack of a broader agrarian legislative program prior to the late 1880s made it difficult to accomplish pro-agrarian legislation. Furthermore, party machines avoided the programmatic social policy espoused by agrarian populists because such policies involve spending funds and instituting professionalized bureaucracies. Patronage-oriented machines were only interested in the organization's survival and using the spoils of office to reward party workers and patrons ([Amenta 2000](#), 20-24). Often, individuals that worked for such political organizations sought only personal enrichment and that of the organization, with no eye toward a broader policy agenda or ideology. Direct primary elections imperiled party machine's control over electoral outcomes.

Addressing the use of party ballot was the first step in implementing direct primary elections. With the use of Australian ballots, the ballots are printed by the state without any involvement from the parties or candidates. Australian ballots are only available at the

polling place at a designated time. Most importantly, the Australian ballot introduces the notion of anonymity in elections. Anonymity is achieved by removing voter's identifiable information, printing ballots that are uniform in design, and by making ballots available only at the time of casting votes rather than in advance. By 1893, 33 states had adopted Australian ballots. By 1910, 43 states had adopted some form of the Australian ballot.

Party machines were opposed to the Australian ballot. Party ballots allowed party machines to exert control over politics. Party ballots were not anonymous and were printed in partisan periodicals with the names of all party-selected candidates printed on the ballot, giving the voter little choice other than meaningless distinctions among the machine's hand selected candidates. Furthermore, the use of named ballots allowed for intimidation and vote buying. Consequently, party machines were able to fix elections in favor of the machine's desired candidate(s). In so doing, the industrial patrons of the party machines saw their policy preferences implemented. "This is a government of the people, by the people and for the people no longer, it is a government by the corporations, of the corporations and for the corporations," claimed President Rutherford B. Hayes, highlighting the pervasive corruption of the era and the entrenchment of party machines.

The decentralization and informal customs that governed elections also contributed to the need and eventual implementation of Australian ballots. The factionalism prevalent in the era would sometimes produce "bolting" factions that would splinter from the main party, nominate their own candidates, and run their own campaigns, but would seek to show solidarity with the main party. Bolting was common because of the many local customs and informal understandings that were pervasive through the various factions and communities within a voting district. Bolting candidates were more common in places where one party was much stronger and there was the absence of any organized opposition. Bolting candidates would hold their own nominating caucus or meeting. The informality and lack of procedure led to confusing situations in which it was unclear who the official nominee(s) were.

Prior to the Australian ballot, bolters were, in principle, responsible for creating and

distributing their own ballots. However, many did not have the resources to do so. Voters were often permitted to cross out the names of candidates and “paste in” the names of other candidates. The bolter candidates would supply the “pasters” to voters prior to submitting their ballot at their polling site.

Additional disarray prior to Australian ballots came from the distribution of party ballots. The local machine lieutenants who were charged with distributing ballots could easily “knife” a candidate –not distribute the ballots or reduce a small number of ballots– making them an improbable winner. Machine lieutenants and district captains had to be paid for their services distributing the ballot. Such payments ensured that a candidate’s name appeared on the ballot and that the ballots were distributed.

Such a disorderly system gave the advantage to party machines –they were able to keep track of voters and had the ability to promote or hamper any particular candidate. However, there was also a disadvantage for the machines: such a system also placed the costs of printing and distributing ballots on the party machines. The implementation of the Australian ballot not only introduced order and legal regulation to the process, but also transferred the costs of printing and distributing ballots to the state.

Ballot reform was crucial in setting the stage for nomination reform. The Australian ballot addressed the problems the parties had dealt with: bolting candidates, rule by informal customs, and the high costs of printing and distributing party ballots. At the same time, the Australian ballot allowed for parties to maintain control over electoral politics, even enhance their control. The most prevalent type of ballot reform in the 1890s was the party column with straight ticket party. This ballot type allowed a voter to choose a slate of candidates from a single party with the simple marking of one box. Looking at figures [C.1-C.12](#), one can see that this option is the most prevalent and becomes more popular over time. The party column with straight ticket party allows for the party machines to promote and put into office an entire slate of candidates rather than candidates on a piecemeal basis. Such ballot reform brought greater stability and eliminated the ability of bolter candidates from

declaring themselves nominees outside legal channels or from having their name “pasted” onto the ballot. In this way, the Australian ballot brought greater stability and the machines were for it. However, in supporting the adoption of the Australian ballots, the party machines had helped in their own eventual demise.

The legal regulation introduced with the adoption of the Australian ballot led to the state becoming a full participant in the process: the printing of ballots became the duty of the state. As a result, standardized methods were adopted to determine whose names appear on the ballot and with which party affiliations. In order to do this, formal party officers must be named. Party officers then communicate with legal officers of the state to certify officially recognized parties and candidates. In order to ensure fairness, provisions are made to include formal political parties and candidates on the ballot who are polling over a certain percentage by a given date.

With the intervention of the state came legal scrutiny that sought to uproot and prevent corruption, intimidation, fraud, and bribery. By 1890, half of American states had laws that regulated primary elections. In eleven states² laws prohibit the most egregious forms of vote manipulation: stuffing ballot boxes, impersonating voters, bribery, intimidation, and fraud. Election laws passed in the decade 1880-90 also forbade candidates from spending money on activities other than printing and holding meetings, therefore making it difficult to use official funds for bribery and graft. Such laws also detailed how primaries were to be carried out and enumerated penalties for infractions of such laws.

The result of these new regulations is the formal definition of political parties. In being formally defined, parties are afforded legal standing. In affording such legal status to the structure of party organization and competition, the party bosses were disempowered. Moreover, legal regulation of the ballots led to regulation of the entirety of the nomination process. Despite there being clearly regulated nominating processes by 1890, most nominations took

²Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New Jersey, Ohio, Nebraska, Michigan, Maine, South Carolina, Indiana, Missouri, and Colorado.

place through caucuses. Caucuses, vulnerable to manipulation and persuasion, largely favor machine control. The move from caucuses to nominating conventions and direct primaries, democratized elections. To reform the conventions, populist-backed or populist-sympathetic legislators passed into law regulations of conventions. Importantly, the use of proxies for delegate voting became forbidden. Furthermore, a higher quorum became required for voting on candidate nominations. Prior to reform, candidates were nominated at conventions by roll-call vote with a quorum of only one-fourth the total delegates present. The voting procedure itself was reformed so that delegates vote by paper ballot rather than by voice during roll-call.

The timing of conventions was also reformed. By 1895 primary elections were conducted on a uniform schedule in each election cycle, announced publicly.³ Furthermore, the scheduling of party conventions was required to take place in roughly the same time period as the casting of ballots. A California law passed in 1897 required the convention take place within seven days of the primary. In Massachusetts, the convention had to take place within four days of the primary. In requiring that conventions took place close to the primary election, it ensured the precision of memory and impeded the ability of machines to manipulate votes during a lengthy interlude between primary and convention.

Like with the Australian ballot, the regulation of nominations and primary elections transfers the costs from the party to the state. During the first round of primary laws passed in Missouri (1891), Maryland (1892), Kentucky (1892), and Mississippi (1892) there were explicit provisions for the expenses of the primary to come from the public purse. In so doing, the parties are relieved of the costs while also being relieved of the power that comes from financing and controlling primaries. Public financing put all parties and candidates on a level playing field.

A centrally important reform is the creation of party registrations. Reform legislation re-

³Although legislation requires uniform schedules, there is variation among states in terms of the specific timing.

quired that qualifications must be publicly announced and that to vote in a primary election, an individual must meet such qualifications and register with their chosen party. In many of the state laws, a central component of the qualifications for primary voters was a party allegiance test. A reform law in West Virginia in 1891 states that no one should vote “who is not a known, recognized, heretofore openly declared member of the party included in the terms of the call” (Merriam 1908, 36). In Wisconsin, the voter was required to pledge an oath that “he did not vote against such regular candidates at such last preceding election” (Merriam 1908, 36-37). In Minnesota, the phrasing was slightly different: “that he voted with the political party holding the primary election at the last election; that he intends to vote for and support the nominees of the convention” (Merriam 1908, 36-37). In Michigan, a voter must declare “I am a (name of party) and a resident [sic] of this ward for the last ten days, and am in sympathy with its aims and objects, and will support its principles and objects” (Merriam 1908, 37). In California, the law prescribed an oath: “bona-fide present intention of supporting the nominees of such political party or organization at the next ensuing election” (Merriam 1908, 37).

In having individuals swear an oath, voters were also registered. Kentucky led the way in this regard. In the Kentucky reform law of 1892 voters were asked their party affiliation which was recorded in the official register used for general election purposes. Even more stringent were the provisions for disseminating such registers. The law in Kentucky required that persons authorized by the party to obtain a copy of the registration list from the state-controlled register must take an oath to use the list as part of their official duties, which they were to execute “faithfully and honestly” with penalties for not doing so (Merriam 1908, 36-37).

The express purpose of the many reforms to the primary process was to improve the political conditions in the interest of participatory democracy. The increased scrutiny and regulation of party conventions whittled away at the various methods used by party machines to fix elections and monopolize the levers of power. The direct primary began to appear

by voluntary party action with movements for making direct primaries legally mandated in middle western, western, and southern states—those areas with the strongest agrarian populist mobilization. The legally mandated primary election first appears in Wisconsin in 1903. By 1910, nineteen states have mandatory direct primary election; by 1915, thirty-one states ([Ware 2002](#), 120-124). In a span of twenty-five years, the direct primary went from utterly nonexistent, to legally mandated in the majority of American states (see figures [C.13–C.22](#)).

The combined effect of regulations on primary elections, the Australian ballot, and the legal regulation of ballots, primaries, nominations, and elections, dealt a fatal blow to machine politics and allowed Everyman to participate more actively in politics.

In addition to the more democratic nature of political participation in the early 20th century, there was a significant expansion in the size and character of government. Industrialization and the accompanying political issues –inequality, global competition, obstructed representation, the decline of agriculture, and labor exploitation– and the resulting political upheaval was cause for the creation of a strong, centralized federal government. The centralization and expansion of government was an administrative response to the political demands of populists in the 1890s. Such an administrative state was less prone, in principle, to partisan manipulation and more responsive to the demands of common people. Moreover, an expanded and reformed government –or, at least, new governmental units organized on merit principles that were grafted onto a system in which old machine principles persisted– was better equipped to carry out complex policy programs that required developed bureaucracies and specialized skills.

Despite populism’s failure as a viable third party in national politics, it was a successful movement. The populists sentiments stirred up in the 1890s did not vanish with the People’s Party fusion with the Democratic Party in 1896. The Populist agenda carried on in a new form: as Progressivism. In particular, populism carried on in an anti-party vein. Party politics had failed the Populists. Now, the Populists would take a page from the annals of

industry's political playbook: agrarian populism would advocate for their concerns outside party politics and become a venerated coalition of advocacy groups, the farm lobby.

4.2 The Farmer's Depression, 1920-1929

For American farmers, the Great Depression began nearly a decade earlier in 1920. Data displayed in table 4.2 through table 4.5 shows the severity of the problem for American farmers. There is a marked increase in the number of mortgaged farmers and the dollars amounts of those mortgages. Per capita farm debt nearly doubles from 1890 to 1920. Approximately half of all American farmers had substantial debt obligations by 1930. Over the course of the 1920s, the ratio of farm debt to farm value increases to approximately forty percent alongside the simultaneous erosion of farm values.

Farmers in the 1920s faced similarly difficult –arguably more difficult– economic circumstances than those faced by farmers in the late nineteenth century. Their economic problems were particularly salient in terms of the increasingly heavy burden of debt. Mortgage data spanning both periods, shown in table 4.1 reveals an increase in the number of mortgaged farmers and the amounts of those mortgages. If we compare farm mortgage figures from 1890 and 1920, we can see the marked –more than double– increase of the average, per capita, farm debt and the shift to nearly half of all American farmers having debt obligations. Over the course of the 1920s, the ratio of farm debt to farm value increases to approximately forty percent, indicating the steep increase in debt load with the simultaneous reduction in farm value. While dealing with these issues, farmers also faced declining prices for agricultural goods; looking at table 4.2, the value of corn decreases during the 1920s while farmers continue to produce approximately similar yields.⁴ The trend towards lower prices and overall depressed crop value and average prices is also seen in the price of wheat and the leading crops, as shown in tables 4.2 through 4.5.

The combination of depressed commodity prices, declining farm values, and heavy debt loads led to a period of sustained economic hardship for many American farmers throughout the 1920s and well before the onset of the Great Depression. In light of the conditions

⁴With the exception of the steep decline in yield in 1930.

mentioned, one could reasonably expect for there to be a populist outbreak, following the same logic as populist outbreak in the late nineteenth century. However, the period 1920–1932 is absent populist outbreak other than in a handful of marginal cases. Given similar economic conditions as those found in the period 1884–1896, why does populist outbreak fail to take hold in the 1920s? Whereas the former period has come to epitomize populism in American history, the so-called “populist revolt” and is well documented as to the prevalence of populism and its underlying causes, what has not been explored is the general absence of populism in the second period.⁵

Table 4.1: Farm Mortgages, 1890–1930

<i>Mortgages</i> ⁶	1890	1900	1910	1920	1925	1930
Total	874,215	1,093,164	1,312,034	1,461,306	1,395,026	1,497,766
% of All Farms	27.8%	30	33.2	37.2	36.1	42
% Free of Debt	70.9	66.5	65.6	52.8	-	51.7
Avg. Farm Debt	\$1,224	-	\$1,715	\$3,356	\$4,004	\$3,561
% Debt-FarmValue	35.5	-	27.3	29.1	41.9	39.6

⁵It should be noted that the populist outbreak I refer to here as being absent is conceptually distinct from organized populism that existed within standards channels of political participation – e.g., LaFollette and his Populist political platform in Wisconsin.

⁶Source: [U.S. Bureau of the Census \(1936\)](#).

⁷Source: [\(U.S. Bureau of the Census 1896, 1921, 1934\)](#).

⁸Source: [\(U.S. Bureau of the Census 1926, 1931, 1932, 1936\)](#).

Table 4.2: Corn Crops, 1869–1930

<i>Averages</i> ⁷	1869	1875	1885	1895	1905	1915	1925	1930
Yield/Acre (Bushels)	23.6	29.5	26.5	26.2	28.8	28.2	28.2	20.4
Value Yield/Acre	\$17.75	\$12.38	\$8.69	\$6.91	\$11.88	\$16.22	\$19.74	\$12
Value/Bushel (cents)	75.3	42	33	26.4	41.2	57.5	67.4	59.4

Table 4.3: Average Value Per Acre of 10 Leading Crops

<i>Year</i> ⁸	Value per Acre
1875	\$14.05
1880	\$11.89
1885	\$11.33
1890	\$9.97
1895	\$8.12
1900	\$9.09
1905	\$13.28
1910	\$15.53
1915	\$17.18
1920	\$23.26
1925	\$20.62
1930	\$13.29
1934	\$14.04

Table 4.4: Average Crop Value Per Acre, 1871–1930 (In Constant 2017 Dollars)

<i>Year</i> ⁹	Value per Acre
1875	\$14.05
1880	\$11.89
1885	\$11.33
1890	\$9.97
1895	\$8.12
1900	\$9.09
1905	\$13.28
1910	\$15.53
1915	\$17.18
1920	\$23.26
1925	\$20.62
1930	\$13.29
1934	\$14.04

Table 4.5: Average Annual Price of U.S. Wheat, 1885–1930

<i>Year</i> ¹⁰	Value per Acre
1885	\$20
1890	\$24
1895	\$19
1900	\$20
1905	\$27
1910	\$28
1915	\$33
1920	\$33
1925	\$23
1930	\$17

With high debt, low and erratic farm prices, and increased farmer marginalization in the broader culture, the stage was set for widespread agrarian populism and insurrection in the 1920s. However, the 1920s are notable, not the least of which, because of the distinct absence of any significant Populist agitation. I show that the lack of Populist agitation, despite the right conditions, is the result of unobstructed representative conduits. While in the previous case studies I have shown that obstructed representation is the cause for Populist outbreak, here I show the contrapositive: unobstructed representation prevents populism, despite similar circumstances.

⁹Dollar amounts are in Constant 2017 Dollars. Source: ([U.S. Bureau of the Census 1938](#)).

¹⁰Dollar amounts are per bushel [60lbs], in 2017 adjusted dollars. Source: ([U.S. Bureau of the Census](#)

Reforms to broaden political participation and expand the administrative machinery of government created a more responsive political situation. The central question is: how did representative and governmental institutions become more responsive? In this chapter, I show that when the agrarian economic crisis hit in 1920, government helped by assisting coöperative organizations, issuing antitrust exemptions, providing new forms of market information, and intervened in setting production targets and price levels. Such policies were in response to the grievances of American farmers. Such a governmental response prevented the outbreak of populism.

1938).

4.3 Institutional Development

Of the many and sundry studies of American agrarian politics, none is as impactful as the work of [McConnell \(1953\)](#). [McConnell \(1953\)](#) examines the transformation of American agriculture from a collection of well-intentioned but ineffective local organizations, to a level of centralized power that paralleled the great national industrial lobbies. [McConnell \(1953\)](#) posits that the centralization and organization of agrarian interests at the national level, after the failure of the People's party in the 1890s, leads to the creation of the Farm Bureau Federation. The Farm Bureau Federation spoke on behalf of all farmers and acted as the organizing force in Washington of the national farmer's movement.

The Farm Bureau Federation eventually suppressed the role of small-time farmers and instead increased its control over agricultural extension programs in favor of large-scale commercial farmers. The Bureau ultimately lead to the dismantling of the Farm Security Administration and supplanting it as the primary interface between government agricultural policy and farmers. At this point, [McConnell \(1953\)](#) claims that democracy had gone out of agricultural policy and had become an agricultural oligarchy. [McConnell's \(1953\)](#) view is fundamentally pessimistic and cynical; he sees the Farm Bureau Federation as the embodiment of all that is wrong with special interest lobbies and as an inherently corrosive force in American politics. The author neglects to consider the important developments of the 1890s and their impact on the early 20th century. Moreover, the author neglects to consider how a highly centralized farm lobby may benefit common American farmers by being able to attain real policy achievements, unlike the People's Party in Congress.

In just such a vein is the work of [Hansen \(1991\)](#). [Hansen \(1991\)](#) claims that the farm lobby came about in the first three decades of the twentieth century with great success. Hansen's argument is novel in that it moves away from the conventional view that interest groups advocate through pressure on legislators. Rather, Hansen argues that interest groups are successful when they present legislators with better and complete information about

constituent preferences. In Hansen's conception, legislators are single-minded seekers of reelection and will do what it takes with the information presented by lobbying groups to be reelected.

Hansen's argument relies on two key concepts. The farm lobby was able to gain access to the powerful committees of Congress in the 1910s and 1920s by showing members that it would be in their best interest to address agrarian concerns. Hansen labels this "competitive advantage". Moreover, agrarian issues were shown to have ongoing relevance in the future. Hansen labels this "recurrence". Hansen's theoretical contributions are important and original. However, his work suffers from neglecting to consider the broader ramifications of farm policy in the 1920s. Empirical evidence shows that the agrarian economic crisis begins in the late 1910s, well before the economic shock of 1929. Yet, Hansen doesn't delve into the specific issues facing farmers, how those specific issues were responded to, nor how government changed or responded to agrarian grievances. Ultimately, Hansen fails to show the reader how the farm lobby's efforts in Congress affected Everyman in the 1920s.

In addition to direct market intervention and regulation, farmer's also sought relief from another branch of government: the judiciary. In the 1920s, farm foreclosures soared as the result of the decline in farm prices while farmers were heavily indebted and still had to pay their mortgages. Farmer's experienced both a income contraction while expenses remained the same. [Alston \(1983, 1984\)](#) shows that such a combination was disastrous for American farmers. Consequently, many American farmers were foreclosed upon. However, in the 1920s, many state legislatures sought to help farmers by enacting foreclosure moratoriums. Prior to 1932, 25 states passed legislation imposing foreclosure moratoriums for farmers. While suspending mortgage payments temporarily certainly helped farmers in the short-term, it did not address the systemic issues at play. Farm prices remained depressed throughout the 1920s and 30s. Unless foreclosure moratoriums were to become permanent, which was not the intent, then eventually the mortgage payments would resume and the farmer's conditions would not have improved at all. Moreover, the states were not equipped nor were they

the appropriate venue for addressing systemic issues facing farmers. The more pressing problems concerning supply and demand, prices, and market coordination were not matters for the individual states given the interstate character of such matters. Only market and sector reform, carried out jointly through farmer collective action and federal government intervention, could plausibly alleviate farmer's distress. While [Alston \(1983, 1984\)](#) focuses on the temporary assistance provided by states in the form of moratoria, [Hoffman and Libecap \(1991\)](#) take up the effects of legislation enacted by Congress as a response to the agrarian economic crisis of the 1920s.

[Hoffman and Libecap \(1991\)](#) show that the federal government was sufficiently equipped to respond in kind to the agrarian economic crisis of the 1920s. The federal government had shown its ability to intervene in markets with price controls during World War I. The federal government had used the Lever Food Control Act and the US Food Administration to control prices, with great effectiveness. In the 1920s, [Hoffman and Libecap \(1991\)](#) show that the federal government intervened to help farmers by assisting in the creation and coordination of marketing cooperatives, providing antitrust exemptions, improving market information, enforcement of market rules, and setting output targets and prices.

[Hoffman and Libecap \(1991\)](#) shows that the legislative agenda during the 1920s emphasized institutional action. First, there was a significant emphasis on the passage of cooperative marketing acts: the Capper-Volstead Act of 1922, the Cooperative Marketing Act of 1926, and the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1929. As the result of this combination of voluntary collective action supervised and coordinated by the federal government, the distress of American farmers was being addressed. The government helped the marketing organizations by providing antitrust exemptions, better information, and money to buy output and control supply, thus affecting price. Most significantly, [Hoffman and Libecap \(1991\)](#) show

¹¹McNary-Haugen bills was a major bill that proposed that the federal government would subsidize American agriculture by raising the domestic prices of farm products. The bill proposed that the government would buy wheat and then store it or export it at a loss.

that the push for coöperatives as the solution to agrarian distress, while eagerly implemented by farmers and government alike, was ineffective in stanching the economic bleeding. By 1924, farmers were demanding more direct government intervention. In particular, the farm lobby advocated for the McNary-Haugen bills for the remainder of the decade.¹¹ Despite vigorous advocacy, the McNary-Haugen bills failed and more direct government intervention would not arrive until 1933 with the enactment of the Agricultural Adjustment Act.

[Hoffman and Libecap \(1991\)](#) end their story at that point, without explicating as to what effect such efforts had on the demands and grievances of American farmers. As I will show later in this paper, despite the failure of coöperatives to ameliorate the situation and the failure of the McNary-Haugen bills, there was a persistent and vigorous attempt by legislators and government to address farmer's concerns. I build on the work of [Hoffman and Libecap \(1991\)](#) to show that effects of the persistent advocacy on behalf of farmers, regardless of the effectiveness of such measures.

4.4 The Non-Party Political Organization of Agrarian Interests

The classic American archetype of an agrarian citizenry that had held true for much of the nation's history had faded into nostalgic trope by 1920. By the 1920s, the forces of industrialization the Populists had so fervently tried to curb in the 1890s had proceeded unimpeded, transforming the nation into a constellation of expanding urban centers and factories.

Many farmers, battered by the relentless precarity and despair of agrarian life, had left the country for the city, leaving behind the yoke of farming life and taking up the yoke of industrial labor. Agrarian discontent had exploded onto the political scene as populism in the 1890s. While populism was successful on the score of expanding the means of political participation—legal regulation of elections, the adoption of the Australian ballot, the proliferation of direct primary elections, the direct election of senators, and the use of initiative and petition referenda—populism had been an abject failure as a political party in achieving substantive reforms.

While the mantle of agrarian populism was being carried forward, the tenor of the movement had changed. First, the historical assumption that agrarianism represented all ordinary Americans began to lose credibility. There was an embrace of farmers as a significant subset of ordinary Americans, but with distinct boundaries and a distinct character. The heirs of agrarian populism pursued an aggressive campaign focused not on the universality of agrarianism, but on the central importance of a distinct agrarian class. Second was a renewed and intensive focus on cooperative farming and marketing associations. Third, an intense emphasis on farm prices. These changes brought a narrowing of the public interests of organized agriculture. Each change indicated a sharper conception of farmers as a distinct socioeconomic class ([McConnell 1953](#), 42-43).

Populism had failed to achieve the substantive reforms in Congress that agrarian communities had long sought: trade protection, currency reform, the rooting out of corruption,

antitrust reform, government intervention and relief in times of undue distress, and the regulation of industry. These reforms were sought not to halt or reverse industrial progress, but rather, to curb industry's worst excesses impulses and allow farmers to coexist and make a decent living. Agrarian populists in the 1890s sought what President Theodore Roosevelt would later come to call a "square deal"; that no man be given unfair advantage or forced to deal with unfair disadvantage. Such substantive reforms had not been achieved despite the forging heat of 1890s populism. Ultimately, agrarian populists had sought to make government a countervailing power and had been unable to do so. The thread of making government responsive was picked up by 1920 by a new agrarian advocacy apparatus that closely resembled the industrial advocacy apparatus that agrarian populists had so disdained and called out decades earlier.

By 1920, agrarianism and populism had become disentangled. The longstanding agrarian majority was diminished and while still significant, no longer spoke on behalf of the majority of Americans. As a result of the failure to achieve agrarian reforms through the mantle of populism and political parties, and without a majority of Americans to bolster the cause of agrarianism, agrarian communities looked to alternatives: advocacy and pressure through the national organization of interests.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, no organization was more emblematic of the non-party pursuit of agrarian interests than the American Farm Bureau Federation.¹² The Farm Bureau's mission was to fuse American farmer's together, into a politically powerful rival to the great industrial lobbies. For the Farm Bureau, the old tradition of populism was irrelevant ([McConnell 1953](#), 43).

The power of the Farm Bureau stemmed from a dispersed network of interconnected local farm organizations that reached the most remote and impoverished agrarian communities. The Farm Bureau used the expansive network as a means of channeling agrarian political

¹²Henceforth referred to as the Farm Bureau.

power in the nation's capital. The Farm Bureau was structured as a river delta: county Farm Bureaus organized farmers, provided information to farmers, and gathered information about what farmers needed and wanted. County agents were the principal representative of the Farm Bureau at the county level. County Farm Bureaus were connected through a state Farm Bureau. State Farm Bureaus were connected to the national Farm Bureau based in Washington DC.

The Farm Bureau has its origins with the Morrill Act of 1862. This law assigned unclaimed national lands for the creation of colleges. Such colleges and universities were to be dedicated to agriculture and mechanic arts. In 1900, the agricultural colleges formed a national organization, the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations. In the same year, the Hatch Act was passed establishing the agricultural experiment stations at the agricultural colleges. This is the basis of a system of agricultural education known as the agricultural extension system, weaving together scientific innovation and applied farming. To carry out educational programs at the local level, transferring the learned information in the colleges and experiment stations into practice, was a system of county agents. County agents acted as agricultural missionaries, advising and teaching farmers throughout the land to use the latest techniques and science to advance the cause of agriculture.

The Farm Bureau's foundation of political power lies with the county agents that were the central figure of agrarian politics in each county. Between 1900 and 1914, the county agent's role was nebulous; the county agent was part of a private organization yet often worked closely with government, sometimes even drawing pay from government sources, and often carrying the authority of a public officer. However, the success of the extension programs and the county agent system relied also on contributions from local business communities. Local banks and businesses joined with the extension system to grant credit only to those farmers who participated in the educational programs operated by the extension program and the county agents. The logic here being that the success of business hinged on the

success of common farmers. If common farmers are successful in growing as well marketing and selling farm goods, then local businesses would also prosper.

Prior to 1914, the county agent system and the network of extension programs and coöperative programs operated by the agricultural colleges were widespread but not formalized in terms of national legislation. The collaboration between business leaders and the agricultural education movement was intended to eventually attain such legislation. The Smith-Lever Extension Act of 1914 did just that, nationalizing the extension system.

The Smith-Lever Act established farmer's institutes dedicated to specific agricultural research, routinized publication of educational pamphlets, itinerant lecturers, and the ability to have technical farm advisors, scientists from local agricultural colleges, address pressing matters in a particular locale. Despite the nationalization of the extension system and the corresponding oversight from the Department of Agriculture, the county agents were the center of power at the local level both prior to and after the passage of the Smith-Lever Act.

The proliferation and presence of the county agents is a crucial aspect of organized agricultural interests in the United States in the 1910s and 20s. The peak of the county agent system came after 1918, when special war appropriations were authorized by Congress that included provisions to increase farm production so as to supply the war effort, the number of agents rose to 2,600. From 1909 through 1929, the number of county agents stood at 2,251 on average.

While much credit is given to the Smith-Lever Act for creating the extension and county agent systems, the truth is that both already existed prior to the Smith-Lever Act's passage in 1914. the more important contributions of the Smith-Lever Act are threefold: first, the bill regularized the county agent system. Second, the bill reduced the agricultural colleges from being central players in agricultural extension and coöperation, to just another player in the field. Third, and of paramount importance, the Smith-Lever Act refocused the attention of the agricultural movement on Congress as the source of transformative power. The agricultural education movement was not a spontaneous organization of interests, but

rather, a concerted effort to consolidate and focus agrarian advocacy in such a way as to bring about changes on a large-scale ([McConnell 1953](#), 45-48).

The county agents were formally tasked with operating educational programs. However, the real task of the county agent system as a whole was to introduce the newest and most efficient farming methods and implement such methods in the broadest number of cases. Even with thousands of county agents, individual outreach to farmers was a cumbersome and time consuming process not conducive to rapid implementation of new methods. Thus, county agents were instructed to work closely with local farm leaders and with groups of farmers, in order to disseminate information about new methods efficiently. As a result, the county agents created organizational structures for their bailiwicks. The purpose of the county agent's organizational work was to multiply effort, establish close contact with local groups, make leadership most effective, and provide a clearing house of agricultural information. With such goals in mind, county agents operated as organizers of the Farm Bureau.

The Farm Bureau existed, in principle, to coördinate and organize the work of all farm organizations throughout the nation. With a system of county agents in place, and a means of collecting and disseminating information in the 1890s, the Farm Bureau was well prepared to operate as a unified lobbying group. Giving advantage to the Farm Bureau as a lobbying group was its opaque status as not quite a private organization nor entirely a public institution. Beginning in 1915, the Department of Agriculture integrated the financial aspect of the county agent system with the Farm Bureau. Moreover, the federal government had a keen interest in continuing to subsidize the Farm Bureau because farmers found themselves in economic straits, and notions of bolshevism were swirling among distressed farmers. “[The Farm Bureau is] doing a great work in preventing the farmers from taking up bolshevistic doctrines and tendencies,” claimed Congressman King during a hearing of the Banking and Currency Committee. In another moment, Mr. Howard testifying on behalf of the Farm Bureau claimed that, “if I wanted to increased the membership of the American Farm

Bureau Federation two-fold in a very short time, I would work some means to get you to withdraw your federal appropriations...the farmers are sorely pressed...they are almost ready for bolshevistic movement” implying that without Federal help, American farmers would rally quickly to challenge the political status quo and may even turn to radical ideas as an alternative to the distress they experienced under American capitalism.

The novelty of a national organization of agrarian interests and its opaque role, semi private and semi public, are captured in the words of EJ Leonard, the secretary of the Colorado Farm Bureau:

“Farm Bureau is new in principle. This is not only a type of farmer’s organization, but it is a new institution as well. It is neither a public nor a private institution but a remarkable mixture of both. Whether it is a corporation or not is immaterial. It will function in the various units just the same.”

By 1920, much of the organizational structure of the county agent system was entangled with the local Farm Bureaus. At the same time, the role of the agricultural and land grant colleges, and the related extension system found themselves increasingly marginalized in comparison with the Farm Bureau structure in each state. By 1920, The local Farm Bureaus had begun to coalesce into state federations and those federations became formally connected to other states, forming a national federation of Farm Bureaus. Legislators began to pass bills that assigned authority over matters previously handled by the state directors of the extension programs: approval of appointments, administration of the state Farm Bureau federation, and control of funds. By 1920, Farm Bureau representatives were also the county agent, and these positions were endowed as legal representatives of county governments. With the fusion of the Farm Bureaus, the county agent system, and the county government, the Farm Bureaus were the central source of power in terms of organizing agrarian interests. At the same time, 93% of the funds for supporting the local agents came from state and federal sources.

By 1920, the Farm Bureau had become a platform for advocating on behalf of farmers and improving the standing of farmers in society. At the Farm Bureau's national meeting in Chicago 1920, the substance and direction of the Farm Bureau Federation was made clear: "To create in the urban mind a better conception of the Farmer's relationship to other units in the social and economic structure." (McConnell 1953, 52)

The Farm Bureau had the best of both worlds. The Farm Bureau was a private, voluntary organization, that had embedded itself in the Department of Agriculture, coöpting the county agent system, and using government officials to organize manage a national federation of Farm Bureaus with public funds. By 1920, the groundwork was laid for the national organization of agrarian interests. At the time the national Farm Bureau emerged in 1920, farmer's faced the economic crisis, described in the previous section. Despite the many and dramatic narratives of agrarian interests, the agrarian movement of the 1920s did not appear spontaneously or miraculously, but was the deliberate consequence of two decades of systematic organizing through the federation of Farm Bureaus.

The driving cause of the Farm Bureau was legislative from 1920 onward. The Farm Bureau immediately opened a Washington operation and took interest in bills under consideration. Congressmen representing districts with local Farm Bureau organizations were asked to report their vote to the Farm Bureau office in Washington. During Congressional committee hearings to investigate the nature and character of the Farm Bureau, the director of the Farm Bureau, JR Howard, was summoned before the Congress. When asked about the status of county agents, Howard replied that county agents were semigovernmental employees. The Farm Bureau's chief lobbyist in Washington, also summoned before the Congress, informed the Congress that the Farm Bureau was a voluntary organization and not a governmental agency. At the same time, the Congress had the transcript of a speech given by the Department of Agriculture's C.B. Smith, in which he claimed: "the farm bureau is practically a public institution" (McConnell 1953, 51-54). The ambiguous status of the Farm Bureau was by design.

As economic depression set into the agrarian economy, the Farm Bureau became solely focused on acting through Congress. In May 1921, twenty-two senators met in the offices of the Farm Bureau in Washington. These senators would be known as the “farm bloc.” The organization of a farm bloc in the senate is the unique achievement of the Farm Bureau.

The farm bloc’s twenty-two senators controlled a majority on the Senate Agriculture Committee, posing a direct threat to the political machines and their industrial patrons. Now agrarian interests were on the same playing field that industrial interests had for so long taken for granted as their exclusive domain.

The most important means of influence exercised by the Farm Bureau was through its ability to marshal information and create a unifying narrative. The Farm Bureau’s office in Washington would disseminate surveys on particular legislative policies throughout the state and local bureaus. The state and local bureaus administered the surveys and collected the responses, sending them to Washington where the survey data was collated. The aggregated results were used to persuade members of the Congress to vote congruently with the farm bloc.

The ability to provide information and corral members to vote was successful and a burst of agrarian legislation followed. Farm legislation took up regulation of grain exchanges, extending the War Power Corporation’s ability to lend money for the export of farm products, immigration reform, tariff reform, antitrust exemptions for farm cartels, government assistance in expanding farm coöperatives. The success and plentiful farm legislation of the era is unparalleled in American history.¹³

Central to the vast agenda of the farm bloc, spurred on by the Farm Bureau’s apt lobbying efforts, was the creation and expansion of farm coöperatives.

¹³The only period of American history that produced more farm legislation was in the early phases of Roosevelt’s New Deal.

4.4.1 The Coöperative Marketing Approach

The federal government first responded to agricultural economic distress by helping farmers help themselves. The War Powers Corporation and the US Food Administration, with the powers granted by the Lever Food Control Act of 1917, demonstrated the government's ability to intervene to control prices and help farmers during World War I. Such actions set the precedent for the aftermath of The Great War. After the end of the war and by 1920, agricultural commodity prices were in perpetual decline. To address this, farmers turned to the Farm Bureau and the Farm Bureau turned to legislative action for relief. The first approach to addressing the farmer's plight relied on the private and voluntary organization of coöperative marketing associations. Coöperatives are an analog of the Farm Bureau itself – organized privately and voluntarily, bolstered by the regulatory might and funding of governmental institutions. The push for coöperatives led to the passage of the Capper-Volstead Act in 1922 and the Coöperative Marketing Act of 1926.

The Capper-Volstead Act of 1922 enacted antitrust exemptions that prevented coöperatives from being deemed monopolies or trusts by the Sherman Antitrust Act. The law was enacted after intensive lobbying by the Farm Bureau. The private-public model was entirely in keeping with the political ideology of the Wilson, Harding, and Coolidge administrations which saw to reduce the role of direct government intervention and instead foster greater public-private collaboration. Thus, the Capper-Volstead Act sought not to directly create coöperatives but rather to assist in their creation. At the time, the model for agricultural coöperation was the California Fruit Grower's Exchange which controlled 73% of the fruit exports from California. The Capper-Volstead Act directed the War Finance Corporation to extend loans on the basis of aggregated stored collateral by an individual coöperative.

The central aim of the coöperative movement was to bring together a significant proportion of growers in a particular commodity and then restrict the amount of product entering the market at any one point in time in order to control the price and ultimately raise the

price. Additionally, the coöperatives had the aim of developing new market efficiencies to reduce costs as well as new forms of marketing to boost demand.

Coöperatives were popular and spread across most agricultural products. The bushels of wheat marketed by wheat coöperatives went from 11.4 million bushels in 1922 to 28 million bushels in 1925. However, wheat coöperatives only ever controlled 5% of the national wheat crop, as seen in table 4.6. As for citrus, coöperatives controlled 50% of the national crop, as seen in table 4.7. Control of less than 50%, such as is the case for the wheat coöperatives, is insufficient to affect commodity prices (Hoffman and Libecap 1991, 405-407).

While the coöperative approach had been the centerpiece of the federal government's response to agricultural depression as a result of the vigorous lobbying of the Farm Bureau, by 1924 it was clear that coöperatives alone could not halt the fall of farm prices and the ongoing agricultural economic crisis. Despite the coöperatives, wheat prices never fully recovered to prewar levels, as seen in table 4.5. On the other hand, the price of milk and citrus rebounded to prewar levels and remained high throughout the 20s, as evidenced in tables 4.6 through 4.10.

¹⁴Source: Table 519, *Yearbook of Agriculture* (1932, 950).

¹⁵Source: Table 520, *Yearbook of Agriculture* (1932, 950).

¹⁶Source: Chart is adapted from Hoffman and Libecap (1991, 398).

¹⁷Source: Manthy (1978, 47).

¹⁸Source: Hoffman and Libecap (1991, 398).

Table 4.6: Wheat Output Controlled by Coöperatives, 1921–30

<i>Years</i> ¹⁴	Bushels (in millions)	% of Market
1921-22	11.4	2.3%
1922-23	20.3	3.5
1923-24	24.4	4.8
1924-25	280	4.4
1925-26	16.8	3.5
1926-27	17.5	3.0
1927-28	12.3	1.9
1928-29	14.9	2.2
1929-30	17.6	3.1

Table 4.7: Citrus Output Controlled by Coöperatives, 1921–30

<i>Years</i> ¹⁵	Boxes (in millions)	% of Market
1920-21	25.7	63%
1921-22	16.8	53
1922-23	25.3	60
1923-24	27.2	51
1924-25	24.0	54
1925-26	27.2	56
1926-27	30.4	54
1927-28	25.8	56
1928-29	39.7	53
1929-30	29.0	57

Table 4.8: Price of Milk, 5-year Averages, 1910–29

<i>Years</i> ¹⁶	Price (per gallon)
1910-14	\$2.3
1915-19	2.2
1920-24	2.3
1925-29	2.5

Table 4.9: Price of Oranges, 5-year Averages, 1910–29

<i>Years</i> ¹⁷	Price (per box)
1910-14	\$1.7
1915-19	1.8
1920-24	2.3
1925-29	2.9

Table 4.10: Price of Wheat, 5-year Averages, 1910–29

<i>Years</i> ¹⁸	Price (per bushel)
1910-14	\$2.25
1915-19	2.2
1920-24	2.25
1925-29	2.5
1930-34	2.2

4.4.2 The Direct Intervention Approach

The failure of coöperatives to raise prices in middle western crops lead to the widespread idea that coöperatives were ineffective and a greater force of intervention was required. Both at the same time and after attempts were made to resolve the problem of declining farm prices through farm coöperatives, the farm bloc in the Congress, at the urging of the Farm Bureau, enacted legislation that had the government intervene to control prices directly. The more direct legislation had two aims: first, was to introduce tariff legislation that would help raise prices by separating domestic and foreign commodity markets; second, was to introduce legislation that would force a reduction in domestic supply in order to meet price targets.

Three tariffs were enacted in order to more directly raise farm prices. The Emergency Tariff of 1921, as the name implies, was a hastily enacted bill that was meant as a stop-gap measure until more comprehensive legislation could be passed. The Emergency Tariff increased import taxes on wheat, most importantly, as well as sugar, meat, and wool. Following from the Emergency Tariff of 1921 was the Fordney-McCumber Tariff of 1922. The Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act is most notable because it gave the president the authority to raise or lower tariffs up to 50% in order to boost domestic prices and lessen foreign imports. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, passed in 1929 and enacted in 1930, included the highest tariff rates ever passed in American history, 61.7%.

While such tariffs were meaningful attempts to provide relief for distressed farmers, the McNary-Haugen bills represent the single most ambitious attempt to address the farmer's plight. The McNary-Haugen bills were intensely lobbied for by the Farm Bureau and attempts were made to pass the bill on four occasions from 1924 through 1928. While the Farm Bureau was lobbying hard for the bill, private business was lobbying against the bill. Business interests claimed the bill was contrary to capitalist principle, represented a moral hazard, and inappropriately involved government in the economy. The major proponent of the McNary-Haugen bills was George Peek. Peek was a veteran government bureaucrat and

had worked on the War Industries Board during World War I. During the War, the War Industries Board and the Food Administration had successfully set prices. The precedent was set that the federal government was capable of conducting an intervention into the economy and fix farm prices.

The McNary-Haugen bills proposed a multifold solution. First, a flexible tariff would be imposed to separate foreign and domestic markets, with the aim of diminishing the presence of foreign exports, thus bolstering domestic prices. Second, domestic supply would be coördinated with real demand, thus raising and stabilizing the price. In order to control domestic supply, the McNary-Haugen bills proposed the government purchase excess supply, store it, effectively taking it off the domestic market, thus raising the price. The government would acquire the excess supply through a newly created Agricultural Export Corporation. The Agricultural Export Corporation would purchase the excess supply at the target price and then attempt to sell it abroad at a loss. The Corporation would continue to buy up excess supply until prices returned to prewar levels, similar to those between 1910 and 1914. The Bureau of Labor would conduct monthly assessments of the real price and make a determination as to whether prices had returned to prewar levels. The program would be financed by a tax imposed on all farm producers. In so doing, the government would be subsidizing distressed agricultural markets, artificially raising the price, and helping create a more stable economic environment for farmers.

The Farm Bureau lost this legislative battle. However, the Farm Bureau was successful in another sense: it effectively gathered public opinion information from farmers channeled such information to legislators who then acted on that information. Legislators, knowing that constituents were mobilized and able to vote and wanted help, were incentivized to deliberate and attempt to pass relief legislation, with the ultimate goal of winning their next election. Farmer's wanted McNary-Haugen for two primary reasons: first, it represented the federal government intervening directly to set prices and help farmers. Second, the McNary-Haugen bills did not require farmers to reduce production. Farmers were free to build up

their farms and produce as much as possible, knowing that the federal government would intervene to maintain high and stable prices. Support for the McNary-Haugen bills was most high among those commodity markets that were least helped by coöperatives and continued to suffer from low prices throughout the 1920s. Table 4.11 shows support for the McNary-Haugen bills by commodity sectors for each of the four versions of the bill that were taken up and voted on by the Congress.

Table 4.11: Congressional Support for McNary-Haugen Bills by Commodity Sectors

<i>Sector/Region</i> ¹⁹	6-3-1924	5-21-1926	2-17-1927	5-3-1928
Dairy States	23%	27	32	45
Fruit States	21	17	31	33
Grain States	72	75	77	83
Tobacco States	29	41	75	81
Cotton States	15	35	67	73
Total	41	44	55	63

The introduction and lengthy consideration of the McNary-Haugen bills indicate the ongoing decline and volatility of prices for farmers, especially grain farmers in the middle west. In each iteration of the bill, the number of commodities was expanded; in the final version in 1928, all commodities were included. Each iteration of the bill reveals the diverse interests within the farm bloc in Congress. In the 1927 version, a provision creating a national farm board was proposed to handle the supply surpluses. Such a provision was

¹⁹Source: Fetrow and Elsworth (1948), *Congressional Record, 68th Congress, 1st Session* (N.d., 10341), *Congressional Record, 69th Congress, 1st Session* (N.d., 9862-63), *Congressional Record, 69th Congress, 2nd Session* (N.d., 4099), *Congressional Record, 70th Congress, 1st Session* (N.d., 7771-72), Hoffman and Libecap

intended to attract proponents of agricultural coöperatives. In the 1928 version, a provision was added proposing a \$400 million fund to help agricultural coöperatives better control the supply entering the market as well as to improve agricultural marketing techniques. At each iteration of the bill, different agricultural groups were brought in to endorse the bill. At different points, the Grange –or what was left of it–, the Farmer’s Union, and the American Wheat Grower’s Association endorsed iterations of the bill. At each iteration, The Farm Bureau was a relentless supporter of the bill.

Table 4.11 shows support for each iteration of McNary-Haugen in Congress. The evidence points to the increasing popularity of McNary-Haugen over the years in which it was under consideration. In the first iteration, 41% of Congress supported McNary-Haugen. By the fourth iteration in 1928, 63%. This is a marked shift in the favorability of the bill. This points to the fact that the Farm Bureau was providing representatives with the information that farmers were in distress and felt that the federal government should intervene to relieve their distress. While there is an overall increase in support for McNary-Haugen, the granular evidence shows there are stark geographic divisions in support. Wheat producing states generated the greatest support for McNary-Haugen because of the persistence of low and volatile prices and the failure of voluntary and coöperative efforts to stabilize the prices.²⁰ Representatives of the cotton and tobacco states were initially less supportive but by 1928 were strongly in favor.²¹ The dairy and fruit states were the least supportive across all iterations of McNary-Haugen because coöperatives had been successful in those areas as evidenced by the stability in prices.²²

(1991, 409).

²⁰Wheat producing states refers to: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and Nevada.

²¹Tobacco and cotton states include: North Carolina, Kentucky, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

²²Fruit states also includes vegetable producers. Dairy, fruit, and vegetable states include: Maine, Ver-

Throughout the years of McNary-Haugen, the Farm Bureau was a constant presence. In one notable example, the Iowa's Farm Bureau was the first state Farm Bureau to embrace McNary-Haugen. on January 17, 1924, one day after Oregon Senator McNary and Iowa Representative Haugen introduced the McNary-Haugen bills in Congress, the Iowa Farm Bureau held its annual convention and its membership overwhelmingly passed a resolution endorsing McNary-Haugen. The Iowa Farm Bureau resolved to "endorse the plan for a government export corporation" and referred to an "impending disaster" if federal intervention did not arrive promptly ([Campbell et al. 1962](#); [Porter 2000](#), 382-384).

The Iowa Farm Bureau further supported McNary-Haugen through congressional testimony. On March 12, 1924, CW Hunt, secretary-treasurer of the Iowa Farm Bureau, testified that farmer's were filled with a psychology of hopelessness and despair if government did not intervene. CW Hunt went on to say that McNary-Haugen would "put the farmer in the same position or very nearly the same position that other classes of industry have been in for some time" (*Congressional Record, 68th Congress, 1st Session N.d.*, 498).

The Iowa Farm Bureau also used print publications to lobby for McNary-Haugen. In an article in the *Iowa Farm Bureau Messenger*, the Farm Bureau was described as being "enmeshed in a battle of interests." CW Hunt, writing in the same publication, described his role as "straight from the firing line in Washington," pointing to the Farm Bureau's open embrace of Washington lobbying. CW Hunt goes on to compare McNary-Haugen with the "laws that have been passed from time to time to clear the way for others line of industry and enable them to keep free step with the march of progress." He said that this is "all that agriculture is asking in this McNary-Haugen bill, the privilege of working out its own economic salvation."²³ The *Farm Bureau Messenger* also mentions how opposition

mont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Maryland, Idaho, Washington, California, Virginia, New Jersey, Delaware, Florida, Oregon, and West Virginia.

²³Quotations are from *Iowa Farm Bureau Messenger* (1924) found in [Porter \(2000, 384-385\)](#).

to McNary-Haugen –grain dealers, speculators, millers, packers, exporters– is “perfectly organized” and that agriculture must do the same in order to be competitive and win the battle for McNary-Haugen.

Despite the multi-front advocacy of the Farm Bureau in advocating for McNary-Haugen, the bill failed to pass in the House in 1924. Consequently, the Farm Bureau called a conference of McNary-Haugen supporters and created the American Council of Agriculture, with its purpose being “the enactment by Congress of necessary remedial legislation to create equality for agriculture with industry and labor under the principles of the McNary-Haugen bill.”²⁴ In remarks to the attendees, Frank Murphy, a Minnesota-based Farm Bureau member, said:

We are here today to give notice that no man or group of men –no interest or group of interests –no political party or combination of parties–no power on God’s earth can keep in economic bondage –can submerge and reduce to a peasantry more than one-third of the population of the United States...this is the hour of mobilization. All of our siege guns are to be moved to position.

Such remarks point to the increased sense of organization and partisanship for the agrarian cause, and more specifically, for McNary-Haugen. Such remarks point to a more significant shift: a shift away from party politics and grass roots organizing and an embrace of organized and militant lobbying in Washington.²⁵

At the 1925 Farm Bureau convention, attendees were told to “harness up together” so that “the power thus obtained might secure equality of opportunity.” The president of the Iowa Farm Bureau, Charles Hearst, testifying before the Joint Committee on Agriculture claimed that Iowa farmers faced “almost unbearable” conditions and asked that farmers

²⁴Quoted in [Porter \(2000, 383-386\)](#).

²⁵Block quote found in [Porter \(2000, 385\)](#).

be given “the same opportunity that other citizens of this country have.”²⁶ In the 1925 session of Congress, McNary-Haugen managed to pass the House as an amended bill but was abandoned in the Senate.

In a further attempt to pass the McNary-Haugen, the Farm Bureau created the Corn Belt Committee in 1925. In May of 1925, the committee convened with three hundred attendees from across the middle west. At the meeting in Des Moines the attendees called out the “interests which attempt to keep agricultural producers from receiving a fair return on their efforts.” The Corn Belt Committee was intended to be an additional lobbying group to advocate for remedial legislation for distressed farmers. The Farm Bureau met again at its annual convention in 1926 where it was resolved to once more support McNary-Haugen. By this point, there was a strong sense of agricultural identity and that American farmers were at a disadvantage compared to other interest groups. At the convention, it was resolved that farmers needed an export corporation and a tariff system to help agricultural markets, similar to those set up for industry, labor, and transportation.

The Farm Bureau provided financial backing to the Corn Belt Committee and the American Council of Agriculture as lobbying arms for agriculture. The Iowa Farm Bureau financed Hearst’s trips to Washington to testify and lobby on behalf of agriculture. This is in addition to verbal support at conventions and in writing in agrarian periodicals such as the *Iowa Farm Bureau Messenger*.

In 1927, The Farm Bureau, primarily the Iowa Farm Bureau pushed hard for McNary-Haugen. At the Iowa Farm Bureau convention of 1927, speaker Henry Wallace claimed that “if the nation was to long endure it must give agriculture a square deal as it gives to labor and industry.”²⁷ Another speaker at the convention told the assembled attendees that agriculture deserved “full participation in the principles of protection this nation has

²⁶Quotes are from [Congressional Record, 68th Congress, 2st Session](#) (N.d., 34) and found quoted in [Porter \(2000, 385-387\)](#).

²⁷Original quote found in [Bureau Farmer](#) (1927, 13-14). Quoted from [Porter \(2000, 389\)](#).

devised and bestowed on other industries.”²⁸ In 1927, the Farm Bureau’s efforts paid off.

The fourth version of McNary-Haugen passed both chambers of the Congress in February 1927. However, President Coolidge was not supportive of such extensive and direct government intervention in the markets. Coolidge felt that the solution to the farmer’s dilemma was in coöperative farming, marketing techniques, and agricultural loan programs. Coolidge vetoed the bill. Coolidge vetoed the bill once again in 1928, after McNary-Haugen had passed both chambers again ([MacCoy 1967](#), 234-235).

McNary-Haugen represents a watershed in American governance. Despite not being enacted, the various permutations of McNary-Haugen reveal the responsiveness of representatives during a period of economic distress for American farmers, particularly in the middle west. After the failure of the 1928 iteration of McNary-Haugen, the *Bureau Farmer*, a prominent agricultural periodical, claimed that the dream of equality for farmers had not died because:

“the farmer is accustomed to fighting for what he gets. In years gone by he has fought grasshoppers, rust, smut, rats, and other pestilences –and he can fight the organized eastern minority with equal tenacity. He will not stop in this fight until he is given that fair equality in the economic scheme of the nation which is his, both by Divine and Constitutional right.”

The fact that the Farm Bureau, with great fanfare and publicity through the media, convention speeches, and congressional testimony which was later reprinted in agricultural periodicals, showed American farmers that *their* representatives, spurred on by *their* organization, the Farm Bureau, were doing something to try and help American farmers. Moreover, farmers felt as if they had won because the bills had successfully passed one chamber or both on multiple occasions.

²⁸Quoted from [Porter \(2000, 389\)](#).

The Farm Bureau knew that getting McNary-Haugen signed into law was a long shot, at best. When Coolidge vetoed McNary-Haugen a second time in 1928, the Iowa Farm Bureau's Executive Committee issued a resolution calling for a presidential administration that has a "real understanding of the great issues of the day, and a disposition to be fair" ([Murray 1953](#); [Neal 1985](#); [Porter 2000](#), 391).

Despite not being passed, McNary-Haugen represents a sea change in agrarian organizing. In the 1930s, as a result of the concerted and organized effort of the farm lobby, started by the Farm Bureau, the New Deal would substantively address the needs of agriculture with the creation of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the Commodity Credit Corporation, and the Farm Credit Administration. In the postwar era, the iterations of successive Farm Bills would become mainstays of the modern congressional agenda. Farm Bills –the legislative package enacted to provide assistance to agricultural enterprises – have been passed roughly ever 5 years since the 1930s. In each iteration, billions of dollars are appropriated to help ease the perpetual economic distress faced by farmers trying to exist in a firmly industrial economy. In the most recent farm bill –the 2018 Farm Act– appropriates \$428.3 billion over the 5 year span from 2018 to 2023.

The comprehensive and persistent responsiveness of the Congress to the economic needs of American farmers from the New Deal to the contemporary is the consequence of the vigorous lobbying and organizing apparatus first put into place by the American Farm Bureau and its national federation of state bureaus.

4.5 Discussion

The presence of responsiveness explains the absence of populism in the 1920s. The responsiveness garnered by the national organization of agrarian interests was long in coming.

The national movement of agrarian populism in the 1880s and 90s sought the governmental responsiveness that was seen in the 1920s. Alas, representative channels were obstructed and governmental institutions were ill-prepared for carrying out large-scale and costly policy programs in the 1880s and 90s. Before obtaining the government intervention distressed farmers sought, the channels of representation and political participation needed to be forced open.

Agrarian populists cleared obstructed channels of representation by coalescing as a national movement. As a national movement, agrarian populists were able to threaten the two-party status quo and reform political participation. Populists gained majorities in state houses throughout the Middle West and South. As a consequence of the populist fervor that explosively consumed the nation in the 1890s, the process began of democratizing political participation. Populist organizing ushered in state control and regulation of elections, the implementation of the Australian ballot, the reformation of political conventions and nominating processes, direct primary elections, direct election of senators, and the implementation of initiative and petition referenda in a majority of states.

Such reforms allowed for Everyman to participate in politics.²⁹ Such reforms allowed for an impotent, but vocal, faction to be elected to the House of Representatives. Despite the representation of populist concerns in Congress, the Populists were excluded from the committees, processes, and power circles in Congress that are the venue for real change. The pursuit of redress through electoral politics proved to be a failure.

As a result of the transformation of political participation wrought in the closing years of the 19th century and the foundation of national political organizing left by the populist

²⁹For more on reforms to political participation for common men, see appendix A and B.

insurgency of the 1890s, farmers could organize for their interests in the first three decades of the 20th century. The Progressive movement, the 20th century vehicle for populist ideals of governance, was able to root out corrupt political machines, weakened by the populist reforms of the 1890s, and expand and use the institutions of government to implement national policy programs.

Despite the advances in political participation, the responsiveness of the Congress and federal government seen in the 1920s, is not the result of electoral mobilization. In fact, political participation is diminished in the 1920s compared to previous decades, and in particular, compared to the 1880s and 90s (table 4.12).

Further evidencing the decline in electoral mobilization is the reduced importance given to primary elections. Primaries, which had been a core element of the Populist agenda in the late nineteenth century, as a means to democratize electoral politics, was paid little attention in the 1920s. In 1916, 57% of northern Populist states scheduled a presidential primary. However, in 1920 it had declined to 36%. In 1924, it was also diminished compared to previous elections, with only 43% of those states scheduling presidential primary elections. Nationally, the primary votes cast as a percentage of general election votes never rose above 40%.

Such a decline in voter turnout in the general election as well as diminished participation in primary elections highlights the shift away from electoral politics as a means of obtaining the policies ordinary Americans sought. Instead of the raucous political activism of 1890s populism, in the 1920s ordinary American farmers pursued their policy goals through the national organizing of agrarian interests and lobbying. Such advocacy was an alternative to the electoral mobilization of the past, which had brought great attention to the plight of common men but had not achieved the policies they sought.

³⁰Turnout is calculated as the percentage of the voting age population who cast a vote.

³¹Includes only Northern Populist states in denominator (14).

Table 4.12: Turnout in Presidential Elections, 1828–1932

<i>Election Year</i> ³⁰	% Turnout
1828	57.6%
1832	55.4
1836	57.8
1840	80.2
1844	78.9
1848	72.7
1852	69.6
1856	78.9
1860	81.2
1864	73.8
1868	78.1
1872	71.3
1876	81.8
1880	79.4
1884	77.5
1888	79.3
1892	74.7
1896	79.3
1900	73.2
1904	65.2
1908	65.4
1912	58.8
1916	61.6
1920	49.2
1924	48.9
1928	56.9
1932	52.6

Table 4.13: Number of Populist States Scheduling Presidential Primaries, 1912–1928

<i>Election Year</i>	No. of States	% ³¹
1912	5	36%
1916	8	57
1920	5	36
1924	6	43
1928	5	36

Table 4.14: Primary Votes Cast as a Percentage of General Election Votes Cast (1920-1928)

<i>Election Year</i>	%
1920	33.5%
1924	31.2
1928	39.5

Table 4.15: Rural vs. Urban Population by %, 1880–1920

	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920
Rural	71.4%	65	60	54.2	49
Urban	29	35	40	46	51.4

By 1919, farmers had lost their electoral advantage established in the 1890s by way of threatening the old party status quo through mobilization of the farming class. Additionally, farmers had lost their numerical advantage (see table 4.15). In the past, Congress had rejected demands from the farming class for intervention into the agricultural market. However, in the 1920s, the Congress passed two tariffs to protect domestic farm prices, two price fixing measures, and the Capper-Volstead Acts which included aid for agricultural coöperative and marketing associations and antitrust exemptions to allow farm coöperatives to operate in a homogenous manner. The Congress also passed sundry other bills aiding agriculture: the Packers and Stockyard Act, Grain Futures Act, Filled Milk Act, Cotton Standard Act, The Produce Agency Act, the Perishable Agriculture Commodity Act, As a result, the farmer's plight in the 1920s was addressed. One observed commented, "that Congress passed more legislation on behalf of agriculture during the period 1920 to 1932 than during its entire previous existence." Another commentator wrote, "Congress in recent years has become more and more solicitous of farmer opinion" (Hobson 1942, 498; Hansen 1991, 26).

The ability of the Farm Bureau to gain access to Congress and garner policy responsiveness for farmers is congruent with the trends at the time. The Democratic and Republican parties were weakened by the apartisan reforms pushed by the Progressive movement. The Progressive movement had also reformed the power structure within Congress, hindering the Speaker's powers and the absolute control over the House by the majority party. Such reforms had the consequence of also weakened the power of the standing committees. The Populist reforms to elections and electoral financing in the 1890s, then continued by the Progressives, had taken out patronage at the knees. The Farm Bureau had introduced new elements into the political landscape that made the lobbying efforts of the Farm Bureau particularly effective.

First, by maintaining an office in Washington, the Farm Bureau was freed from reliance on the efforts of friends of agriculture to inform the Farm Bureau of activities on the Hill.

Furthermore, The Farm Bureau's membership was national in scope and was growing rapidly in 1920, giving it clout and stability as a long-term presence in Washington. Moreover, the Farm Bureau engaged in new lobbying tactics. When a 1921 bill to transform the Muscle Shoals dam for fertilizer production did not pass, the Farm Bureau chief lobbyist at the time, Gray Silver, asked representatives to report how they had voted. Representatives were outraged at such a request and ordered Silver and other Farm Bureau leaders to appear before the House Banking and Currency Committee. Such a tactic became a regular tool in the Farm Bureau's repertoire. Silver and the Farm Bureau had access to a trove of public opinion data from their members at the county level. If a congressman seemed to falter on a vote important to agricultural interests, Silver would show the congressmen the poll results. In more pressing situations, Silver would reach out to state and county Farm Bureau offices and have them send telegrams to the congressmen's office expressing the opinions of the grassroots, making it clear that the rank-and-file members of the Farm Bureau were well informed and monitoring activity in the Congress ([Hansen 1991](#), 29-31).

The Farm Bureau went further. In 1921, the Farm Bureau organized a series of town hall hearings in counties mostly in the middle west. At such hearings, farmers expressed their grave concerns about the distressing economic conditions they faced and what they thought should be done. The Farm Bureau presented the transcripts of the hearings to the Joint Commission of Agricultural Inquiry, a congressional commission delegated with investigating the farmer's economic crisis.

Members of Congress were inclined to heed the information provided by the Farm Bureau because of their proven ability to sway public opinion among its membership. A group of agriculturally friendly members in both chambers formed the Farm Bloc. The Farm Bureau had a direct hand in the Farm Bloc's organization: the idea was conceived of by Gray Silver, the Bureau's chief lobbyist, and was brought into existence during a meeting of nine senators in Silver's office. The Farm Bureau's sway over the Farm Bloc is illustrated in a series of events in 1921: the Senate attempted to adjourn until the House passed a

tariff bill. The Senate had not yet voted on twelve measures that the Farm Bloc, and the Farm Bureau, considered important. If the Senate adjourned, when it reconvened, the tariff bill would almost certainly have taken priority. Consequently, Silver instructed local farm bureaus to wire telegrams to the Senate protesting the adjournment. The sudden backlash, coordinated by the Farm Bureau, caused the motion to adjourn to fail. The Republicans attempted to adjourn once more and failed again. Finally, with President Harding leading the negotiations, a compromise was reached in which the Farm Bloc agreed to adjourn once six of the twelve bills had been taken up. Among the six bills taken up, one was for new regulation of the packers and grain exchanges and another extended the authority of the War Finance Corporation to make agricultural loans, both matters of serious importance to the Farm Bureau's members. Such a maneuver was evidence that the Farm Bloc was the "most effective organized force in Congress" ([Barnes November, 1922](#), 52). In one periodical, it was noted that, "party leaders and the president himself do not venture a move without consulting it" ([Knappen November, 1921](#), 151).

In gathering political intelligence and communicating such intelligence between representatives and ordinary farmers, the Farm Bureau was shaping outcomes. The Farm Bureau had shown its ability to organize legislators and circumvent party leadership entirely. Nevertheless, representatives were eager to avoid drawing retaliation from party leadership and thus downplayed the influence of the Farm Bureau. Senator Capper of the Capper-Volstead bill, denied that the Farm Bloc or the Farm Bureau threatened the party leadership: "we simply try like a big steering committee, to get cooperation in support of measures of common interest, nobody breaking from his political associations." Further evidencing legislators attempt to downplay the influence of the Farm Bloc and the Farm Bureau were the comments of Minnesota Congressman Sydney Anderson: "the thing was too loosely organized and informal for such purposes [as disrupting party leadership]" ([Hansen 1991](#), 32).

For representatives of agrarian constituencies, the success of the Farm Bloc and the Farm Bureau in 1921 pointed to how agrarian representatives and their policy agendas could

benefit from the Farm Bureau's ability to organize outside of the party structure. While the Farm Bureau had certainly shown itself to provide a competitive advantage, thus giving it access, legislators were reluctant to fully embrace the Farm Bureau and openly identify as part of the Farm Bloc because the recurrence of farm issues was not at all clear.³²

Legislators did not expect farm issues to become perennial. The general assumption among legislators was that after addressing major issues –creating agricultural coöperatives, issuing antitrust exemptions, passing bills regulating packers, grain exchanges, and milk distributors– that farm issues would fade into the background. The legislators were correct to some degree: after major victories for the Farm Bloc and the Farm Bureau in 1920 and 1921, “the fighting strength of the group decreased” ([McConnell 1953](#), 58). It was reported in the New York Times in February 1922, shortly after the major victories of the Farm Bloc that:

“[b]oth Democratic and Republican Senators who are bloc members said today that there was at present little legislative business which seemed to require the attention of the bloc” ([Farm Bloc Stays 1922](#))

Also contributing to the notion that farm issues and thus the Farm Bloc's influence would be short-lived was the widespread view that the agricultural economic crisis would soon be over. Representative Anderson (R-MN) wrote:

“the farm bloc came into existence as an emergency means for handling some of the legislative features of this great and most unusual agricultural emergency...when the cementing force of the group disappeared, the group itself dissolved” ([Anderson 31 December, 1921](#))

³²[Hansen \(1991\)](#) specifies that for an organized interest group to gain and maintain group access to legislators, an organized interest must provide a *competitive advantage* and show that there is *recurrence* of the pertinent policy issues.

Anderson's remark highlights the prevailing view that while the Farm Bloc, and thus the Farm Bureau, had been apt at organizing support for farm related bills, such organized influence was fleeting. Moreover, agricultural economic crises had occurred before and while they were sometimes severe and stirred up agrarian agitation, legislators felt accustomed to the ebb and flow of agrarian distress. In the late nineteenth century there had been price collapses and economic shocks in the agricultural sector similar to that experienced at the end of the First World War. Legislators expected that farm issues would recede and the agenda would move on to other topics. Such sanguine views of the farm crisis were misguided.

The agricultural economic crisis did not recede. The crisis continued and the Farm Bureau had a hand in bringing in fresh blood into the Congress. In 1922, much of what the Republicans had gained in the Congress was lost; seventy-six seats in the House and eight in the Senate. Replacing the GOP legislators were four new Senators with agrarian backgrounds representing North Dakota, Minnesota (x2), Iowa, and Nebraska.³³ Such victories were not seen as some sort of populist victory over the old guard, like in the 1890s. Rather, on this occasion, the progressivism and its push for bolder and deeper government intervention had had a victory over the old guard who wished to put farm issues out of mind after 1921. However, the Farm Bureau would not recede into the background.

By 1924 the Farm Bloc in Congress was pushing legislation that would have the federal government intervene in the agriculture market. The farm crisis had not receded and the Farm Bureau was advocating for a wholesale intervention to alleviate the distress of American farmers. At this point, farm issues were proving to be a recurring issue. Furthermore, the Farm Bureau was proving to have staying power by demonstrating to agrarian legislators that loyalty to the farm lobby offered more electoral advantages than party loyalty. Such a transformation is illustrated in the debate over a novel price support program.

³³The newly elected Senators were Lynn J. Frazier, Henrik Shipstead, Magnus Johnson, Smith W. Brookhart, and R.B. Howell, respectively.

In 1921, George Peek, a farm equipment manufacturer and active Farm Bureau member, proposed a plan that would come to be known as the first part of the original McNary-Haugen bills.³⁴ While the McNary-Haugen bill failed in both 1924 and 1925, the Farm Bureau was increasingly proving to legislators that loyalty to the farm cause would be better than party loyalty.

In 1926, the House agriculture committee hearings had a very different tone. The committee was divided and there were four plans before the committee: The Peek plan (McNary-Haugen), a proposal from the Coolidge administration, a cooperative marketing plan, and a fourth plan known as the export debenture. Only one plan had the backing of the Farm Bureau: the Peek plan. In 1926, the Farm Bureau had helped middle western members of the committee win reelection and the way in which such committee members interacted with the Farm Bureau was notably different than in 1924. During the 1926 hearings, the committee hearings became a bully pulpit for agrarian legislators to pontificate about their own agrarian credentials and those of the witnesses called from the Farm Bureau. During a hearing in which Charles Hearst, head of the Iowa Farm Bureau, was being questioned, Representative Aswell (D-LA), an opponent of the Peek plan, claimed, "...has to take what you say on faith, and he has lost considerably that quality of faith in the agitation of politicians...I have letters from Iowa...saying all this trouble in Iowa is largely caused by politicians and salaried agents that have been going around stirring up these matters questioned." Representative Ketcham (R-MI), a proponent of the Peek plan and an ally of the Farm Bureau, responded by denouncing Representative Aswell's cynical narrative and bolstering Hearst's credentials as a "bona fide" Iowa farmer and certainly not a "salaried agent." ³⁵

³⁴As the reader may recall from the previous section, the plan proposed to set the price of a given crop to a ratio price that was equal to the ratio between farm prices and manufactured goods prior to the Great War. Any surplus that was the result of such an arrangement would be sold abroad by a government agency set up for such a purpose. Any losses would be covered by a tax applied to farmers.

³⁵Quotations are from the Congressional Record for the 69th Congress, 1st session, 1926, as quoted in

In another instance, Peek plan opponent Representative Fort (R-NJ), questioned the right of the Farm Bureau president, Sam H. Thompson, to speak on behalf of cattle producers, despite the fact that he was an Illinois corn farmer. To counter, Representative Adkins (R-IL) spent significant time going through his own biography and that of Thompson in order to show that the Farm Bureau president was an “honest dirt farmer” and “unselfishly interested in agriculture.” Moreover, Representative Adkins helped Thompson respond to a tough line of questioning by Representative Thomas (R-IL) who wanted to know why certain crops in his constituency were excluded from the bill; Adkins prompted Thompson’s reply by suggesting that land appropriate for such crops was limited and therefore “not at the mercy of processors“ like corn, wheat, and cotton farmers ([Hansen 1991](#), 47).

The committee’s concern for agrarian issues was shared widely among its members in 1926 unlike in 1924. During another hearing, Chester Gray, a Farm Bureau lobbyist was being questioned by Representative Kincheloe (D-KY), an opponent of the Peek plan, about who would pay for export losses in the event that the revenue from the proposed tax did not cover the total sum of the losses. Gray admitted that the Treasury would indeed be responsible for the costs in such an eventuality, eliciting an aggressive response from Kincheloe: “you admit if there is a loss it will come out of the Treasury.” Representative Rubey (D-MO) intervened in support of Gray, making the point that any profits would go to “reimburse the Treasury.”

The legislators that supported the Farm Bureau defended it against other bills. In one exchange, Representative Andresen (R-MI), asked a proponent of another farm plan with no support: “what chance do you think your bill has, when it has received no such endorsement from these farm organizations? Do you think we should give the farmer something...he is not here sponsoring through his personal representatives?”

The Farm lobby’s control of the farm relief issue in the Congress is also exemplified by

[Hansen \(1991](#), 46-47).

an episode in December 1926, when Representative Haugen complained about the proposals being put forth by the farm lobby. In response, the farm lobby informed him that, “unless he sponsored their bill it would be offered by Representative Purnell (R-IN), thus minimizing Mr. Haugen’s leadership in the contest for government assistance to agriculture.”³⁶

By 1926, legislators in Congress had gone from reluctant associates to enthusiastic collaborators in regards to the farm lobby. “[Farm lobbyists] were told to get together around a table and decide just what it was they wanted,” reported the New York Times.³⁷ Legislators were eager to embrace the Farm Lobby and in particular the Farm Bureau, because the Farm Bureau had been instrumental in mobilizing grassroots support for the Peek plan. Representative Kincheloe (D-KY) of the Agriculture Committee and a long-time opponent of the Peek plan and the Farm Bureau more broadly, exclaimed: “how can these [local] organizations throughout the United States have any intelligent conception of the content of these bills?” Kincheloe was referring to the ability of local Farm Bureaus and farmer organizations to express support for the Peek plan in writing and at rallies.

What Kincheloe’s points to is the dual nature of the farm lobby’s advocacy: it was able to gather political intelligence and share such information with local constituencies. The farm lobby, the most emblematic of which is the Farm Bureau, then shared the aggregate preferences of farm communities with legislators. The Farm Bureau was controlling the conversation in a mutually reinforcing cycle: the Farm Bureau pushes an agenda through its periodicals to garner support from its rank-and-file members, then it gathers public opinion data to that affect, then shows such polling results to legislators so as to push legislators in a given direction, thus achieving the Farm Bureau’s desired outcome.

The Agriculture committee was utterly dependent on the farm lobby. An effective lobbying strategy required both a professionalized and experience staff in Washington with direct

³⁶As reported in: *Haugen to Sponsor Farm Bill in House* (1926).

³⁷As reported in: *Relief for Farmers demanded in House* (1926).

access to a dispersed network of local organizations. “The committee lacked this machinery...it depended on the machinery of member Farm Bureaus,” remarked Sam Thompson, the president of the Farm Bureau, capturing the committee’s reliance on the Farm Bureau for information on what constituents wanted.

The Farm Bureau’s achievement in getting the McNary-Haugen bills situated at center stage in the Agriculture committee’s agenda and in the agenda of both parties in both chambers, highlights the Farm Bureau’s efficacy in advancing the agrarian cause. There was no longer a need for a grassroots populist movement to agitate for change. The work of 1890s agrarian populism had set the stage for what came in the 1920s.

In the 1920s, the farmers’ movement no longer assumed the mantle of populism. Agrarianism and populism had begun a long divorce beginning in the 1910s. In the 1920s, populism, the insurgency against governing elites and institutions, was irrelevant because both representative and governmental institutions *were* responsive. Farmer’s concerns were heard. The Farm Bureau gathered agrarian public opinion and communicated that information to the Congress. The Congress then took action with tariff and currency reforms, and subsidized the creation and development of coöperative and marketing associations. When that proved minimally effective, the Farm Bloc –organized by way of the Farm Bureau– in Congress pushed legislation for greater direct intervention: the McNary-Haugen bills. The four permutations of McNary-Haugen, deliberated and voted on from 1924 through 1928, highlights the serious consideration given to agrarian concerns in the Congress. Congress was *trying* to do something to help farmers in the 1920s.

The responsiveness evidenced in Congress’ attempt to do something was enough to keep farmers hopeful that help was on the way and that their concerns were heard and being given serious attention. Whereas during the 1880s and 90s as well as the 1780s, aggrieved farmers felt that their concerns went unheeded. Moreover, farmers’ were unable to even communicate their grievances because of obstructed representation. Despite the lack of policy effective at halting the agrarian economic crisis in the 1920s, responsiveness was enough to

prevent populist backlash.

CHAPTER 5

The Arc of American Populism

5.1 Where We Have Been: American Populism, 1780–1929

This project began with the laying out of theoretical premises. In the first chapter I invoked historical institutionalism and organizational sociology as the central analytical lenses of this project. The former gives us the ability to examine populism from the top-down. That is to say, it permits us to study populism as a product of the arrangement of political institutions at a given juncture in time. Moreover, such an analytical tool allows us to compare the arrangement of institutions across different junctures.

Organizational sociology gives us a better understanding political participation and the process of inducing populism. Modes of conventional political participation are regularly retooled and recrafted to attain the results of aggrieved groups. In the case of populism, the repertoire of conventional political participation ceases to be useful. Despite attempts to reconstitute standard forms of political participation, a given group's original grievances continue unabated and even further accumulating. Organizational sociology gives us the insight to understand that populism occurs when conventional political participation no longer suffices. At that point, what is needed is wholesale reformation of the political system, or at least, it is perceived by aggrieved groups that an overhaul of politics is needed. This is a key element of populist moments. Populist moments are characterized not by the routine search for moderate adjustments to the political sphere, but a desire for the wholesale reconfiguration of the state and a replacement of the political class.

Both analytical lenses are used as the basis of analysis in each juncture examined. In the case of Shays's Rebellion, the residents of agrarian communities –that is, the least commercial-cosmopolitan communities– were feeling the pinch of the early phases of the turn to a market economy. The old ways of doing things –bartering, trading, holding debts with merchants– was suddenly no longer a viable path to a stable life. Instead, commercialization pushed its way into the hinterlands, forcing Massachusetts' farmers into debt and pulling them away from a simple and happy life of subsistence farming. Instead, they were forced to contend with commercialization and were woefully ill-prepared. Massachusetts' agrarians sought relief from their distressing conditions through routine political participation in the era: town hall meetings to discuss collective grievances, gathering signatures for petitions, and sending letters of instruction to officeholders and representatives.

Massachusetts' farmers tried such tactics during the six years between 1780 and the summer of 1786. Having exhausted all modes of conventional political participation, and the economic conditions they faced just as grave, if not worse, farmers took steps that would unquestionably call attention to their plight: halting the courts from sitting and causing the breakdown of law and order in Massachusetts.

Such steps were certainly extralegal and outside the bounds of what was considered standard political participation. Yet, from the view of the farmers, there was no alternative: they were suffering, political institutions were monopolized by the elite, and there was no way for Massachusetts' farmers to insert their voice into the policymaking process. By 1786, the farmers no longer wanted only relief from the distresses and burdens imposed upon them by commercialization, they wanted an overhaul of the entire system of government in the commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The farmers succeeded in drawing attention to their plight and in the process, attained a handful of token concessions. The concessions included temporary stays on judicial orders related to debt, temporary stays on tax payments, and relief from jail time for participating in the insurrection. More broadly, the farmers had failed in bringing wholesale reform to

Massachusetts government. Nevertheless, even in failed movements there may be success. While Shays's Rebellion was a failure on the surface, it was successful in inducing widespread public debate on issues of the franchise and rules on officeholding. It also brought to the attention of officeholders the tenuous nature of the early Republic. Shays's Rebellion and the implications for voting, officeholding, and the nature of the union would all be central topics of discussion at the constitutional convention and in society at large.

There is a trite expression that all readers will be familiar with: history repeats itself. I suggest some added phrasing to the trite expression: history *generally* repeats itself *with some minor variations*. In the case of the 1890s populist episode, one sees the same themes as in 1780s Massachusetts. Beginning in the 1870s, farmers' economic luck seems to have run out. Early on in the long farmers' crisis spanning the final 30 years of the nineteenth century, farmers turned to voluntary association: the Grange. While the Grange was apolitical and would, by and large, be a footnote in the history of American populist upheaval, it nonetheless represents a pivotal moment for American farmers: it is the first *formal* organization of agrarian interests. Such organizing is the basis of what was to come: The Farmers' Alliance and then, The People's Party.

The key distinction between the two cases is that in the 1780s, the scope is granularly focused on the minutiae of political events in Massachusetts. In the 1890s case, the scope is the whole of the nation. This is a crucial fact of which to take note. Politics in the late nineteenth century were characterized by political parties that are both *formal* and *national*. Moreover, the franchise had been widely expanded since the days of Shays's Rebellion. Yet, barriers to participation persisted.

While the advent of political parties was an achievement for democratic will, parties had been quickly consumed with seeking that ethereal high provided by the opium that was patronage politics. No differently than the opium addict bowing to his dealer's will, party bosses, operating in smoke filled rooms, did whatever their industrial patrons wanted in exchange for more. and more. More of the seemingly limitless supply of money and favors

that flowed from vast fortunes being wrought by the unrelenting advance of industrialization. The party bosses and their operatives kept political institutions weak and incompetent so as to quell any challenge to the bosses' control over the flow of gift and favors. The party bosses used their influence and their vast machines to remove any barriers to industrial growth. The party bosses helped the industrial barons of the Gilded Age grow richer and in turn, the party bosses enriched themselves with both affluence *and* influence. Illustrations of the symbiosis between party bosses and industry, a staple of American history, are well documented and found easily in the many and sundry accounts of Tammany Hall or Chicago's City Hall. The influence of patronage did not stop in the cities.

In the Halls of Congress, leaders of both parties moved deliberately and effectively to implement policy agendas that benefited their industrial patrons. Some scholars may argue that such decisive consolidation of power and efficient implementation of policy programs points to the fact that political parties in the era were well organized policymaking vehicles, representative of their constituents' preferences. Indeed, patronage parties, In Congress and at the local level, were apt vehicles of representation, if only in solely representing the preferences of their constituents who happen to also be leaders of industry. In patronage politics, the preferences of ordinary constituents are irrelevant.

The presence of patronage politics and parties in the latter half of the nineteenth century corroded the ability of common people to participate in politics. Nomination processes were opaque, candidates were hand-selected by the party machines thus eliminating any meaningful choice between candidates, and senate seats were doled out to the highest bidder in state legislatures. Moreover, there was little way for common people to express their preferences and convey them accurately to representatives who were attentive to ordinary constituent's concerns.

The Farmers' Alliance and the populist movement in the 1880s and 1890s did not begin by seeking the wholesale reconfiguration of the political system so that participatory modes would be, in fact, meaningful. Agrarian grievances began with their pursuit of relief from

the consequences of industrialization on American farmers. However, when farmers found that their ability to participate was obstructed, they first had to clear such obstructions.

The populist movement of the 1880s and 1890s was successful, like in the 1780s, in calling attention to the plight of ordinary American farmers. Yet, unlike in the 1780s, the farmers were organized and mobilized in the late nineteenth century. The movement was successful in that it initiated the process of implementing direct primary elections, the Australian ballot, direct election of senators, government oversight of elections, transparent nominating procedures, and the adoption of the initiative and petition referenda across a wide swath of the nation. The movement was also successful in creating a formal third party, the People's Party, and in getting Populist candidates elected to Congress.

Despite such achievements, the People's Party faced insurmountable barriers in Congress. The levers of power were so utterly monopolized by the entrenched old parties, that despite all the best intentions of the Populists, their presence and effect in Congress were negligible. In the end, the People's Party evaporated –or fused– into the Democratic party. Such a move was seen as a death knell to American agrarian populism and a triumph for the old party system.

Yet again, there can be success even in failure. If it hadn't been for the 1890s populist moment the pernicious barriers to political participation may have persisted uncurbed.

Again, the lenses of historical institutionalism and organizational sociology provide the ability to compare the 1780s and 1890s revealing the systemic factor at play: the obstruction of representation. Moreover, the persistent obstruction of representation that is resistant to remedy through conventional political participation. While in the 1780s there were no parties, the parties that existed in the 1890s were consumed with patronage making the political conditions similar to those found in the 1780s. In both cases, persistent obstructed representation lead to an accumulation of political grievances that transformed from the pursuit of relief for farmers, to the overhaul of the entire political system through a national third party and the concerted mobilization of farmer voters.

The 1920s episode is utterly distinct from the previous cases. In the 1920s, precipitating factors were present for a populist outbreak. There was high farm debt relative to farm value, there was price volatility, increased global competition, increased cultural marginalization in broader society, and the always present precarity of farm life brought on by the contingencies of weather and earth. Furthermore, by the 1920s, for the first time the farm population dipped below 50% of the total population, making agrarians no longer the majority in the nation. Farmers were harassed little country businessmen, who made their way alone, ignored by the growing numbers of urban dwellers who looked down upon rural farm culture as backward and simple. The conditions for populism were ripe. Nevertheless, populism did not appear in the 1920s.

The absence of populism is explained by government intervention. Or, the *perception* of *attempted* government intervention. In the 1920s, agrarianism and populism had divorced. Populism had slipped into the margins, to be resurrected in the 1930s and after the War as a distinctly different phenomenon, having little recognizable relation to the agrarian populism that took place between the beginning of the nation and the Second World War. Agrarianism took on a new organizational form: the farm lobby.

Agrarians adopted the same methods and organizational form that had for so long benefitted the great industrial lobbies of the Gilded Age. Rather than attempted to effect change through electoral politics and the creation of a third party—which had proven futile in the 1890s with the People’s Party and the Bull Moose party episode in the 1910s serving as a good reminder of the futility of third parties—agrarians would form a national organization: the National Farm Bureau Federation. Composed of a network of thousands of local county organizations, tied together through state federations and the national federation. The Farm Bureau was based in Washington and its lobbyists devoted themselves to effecting change in the interest of agrarian communities by way of advocacy behind the scenes. The Farm Bureau provided political intelligence to representatives in Congress as to what agrarian constituents wanted. When representatives were going to vote in ways counter to the Farm

Bureau's agenda, the Farm Bureau mobilized the grassroots to send telegrams, letters, and petitions to their representative in Congress, flooding the congressmen's office. Congressmen were left with no choice but to comply with their constituents' demands.

The Farm Bureau was feeding information to both sides, telling congressmen what their constituents wanted, and when that didn't work, telling constituents that their representative was about to vote counter to their interests and that they urgently needed to make their preferences known to their representative. The Farm Bureau was playing both sides against the middle.

As a result of the Farm Bureau's effective advocacy and political intelligence operation, the US Congress in the 1920s spent significant time considering agrarian related business. A Farm Bloc was created in the Congress, with members from both parties, coming together to push legislation favored by the Farm Bureau. In the early 1920s, the Congress passed bills creating farm subsidies, bills to help stabilize price of domestic farm goods, and bills placing tariffs on foreign farm goods. Bills were passed implementing federal help in creating agricultural coöperative and marketing associations as well as issuing antitrust exemptions so as to be able to cartelize and better coördinate supply and demand. While such bills were passed into law, the most ambitious, McNary-Haugen, did not pass into law. Nevertheless, five iterations of the bill came up between 1924 and 1928. Rare in the US congress is the same bill, or subtle variations of it, considered for as long as five years.

The passing of bills having to do with tariffs, coöperatives, and antitrust exemptions demonstrated responsiveness. The representatives of ordinary American farmers were listening and were paying heed to the distress and conditions faced by farmers. Despite the failure of McNary-Haugen to pass into law, the Congress's extended consideration and debate over McNary-Haugen also demonstrated responsiveness to agrarian constituents.

Agrarian constituents in the 1920s had what their counterparts in the 1890s and 1780s did not have: responsiveness. Such responsiveness in the 1920 was the result of the Farm Bureau's lobbying efforts, taking up the same strategies that the industrial lobbies had used

to run roughshod over any matter before the Congress not directly in line with industrial interest. Yet, the responsiveness garnered through the efforts of the Farm Bureau in the 1920s on behalf of agrarian constituents was possible because of the foundation laid by the populists of the 1890s. 1890s Populists made clear the futility of third parties and brought attention to the corruption and grift of the old parties. The 1890s Populists set into motion the changes that would expand participation and give greater ability to exercise democratic will to common men. The nineteenth century Populists gave way to the Progressive movement. The Progressive movement in the early twentieth century pushed against partisanship and advanced an agenda of greater governmental centralization and the expansion of a professionalized administrative bureaucracy. Such an expanded role of government was to serve the needs of the people, helping the downtrodden and ensuring that all Americans regardless of affluence, had their voice heard in government.

This section has demonstrated that historical institutionalism and organizational sociology are analytical lenses that, when combined, show us how populism reflects and effects political institutions. Such a framework allows us to evaluate populism in time while also assessing its effects over time.

5.2 Populism in Our Time: Postwar Populism and the Rightward Turn

Populism in the American context prior to the Second World War was almost exclusively characterized by a progressive bent. While it is true –and has been argued in the pages herein– that American populism is paradoxical and contradictory in that it is both *regressive* and *progressive*, the ramifications and legacy of populist episodes have been progressive as a whole.

The agrarian populism witnessed between the beginning of the nation and the early twentieth century is fundamentally different than what may be witnessed in the postwar era. As illustrated in the previous section, agrarianism and populism part ways in the 1920s. Agrarianism continues onward in the form of the farm lobby. Populism, relegated to the margins and largely in abeyance, emerges once again in the postwar era with a rightward bent.

In the postwar era, no longer did populism assume the mantle of agrarianism. Nor did populism assume solely the mantle of economic deprivation that characterized agrarian populism in the 1780s and 1890s. Populism took on a new, cultural character. Postwar populism is characterized by its cultural and racial resentment, its nostalgia, and its proclivity for scapegoating others.

In the 1960s, populism took a turn toward an ideology of cultural grievance. The focus of grievance: a leftist culture that sought to upturn traditional American life, values, and religion, a fear of minorities attempting to unseat white cultural dominance, and a profound mistrust of government, grounded in the perception that ordinary Americans had been deceived by the media over what was happening in the country in regards to civil unrest as well as in respect to the Vietnam quagmire, deceived by the amorality of urban and progressive segments of the population who were perceived to be set on destroying the trope of classic American life, and in the south, a sense of deep betrayal over one of the south's native sons,

Lyndon Baines Johnson, and his civil rights agenda.

From the success of LBJ's civil rights agenda came the last gasp of progressive populism. From then on, populism would assume the mantle of corrosive cynicism. No two individuals are more emblematic of such corrosive cynicism than Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew.

Richard Nixon rose to the presidency through his ability to connect to working class people. His own working class roots and his exclusion from the rites and rituals of the elite helped him connect to ordinary Americans, in a way that saw themselves as up against an elite establishment who were out to pass power among themselves. Nixon had long harbored resentments against the intellectual and moneyed individuals who he viewed as the enemy: Arthur Sulzberger, owner and publisher of the New York Times; Jack Kennedy and the Kennedy clan, who epitomized the old moneyed world of New England and the Boston brahmin class; and Robert McNamara, the affluent secretary of defense, former chairman of the Ford Motor Company, and an esteemed academic.¹ The world inhabited by these individuals was a world that Nixon had long perceived as actively excluding him because of his lack of Ivy League credentials and his absence from the social scene in the northeast. Nixon harnessed his own resentments, many of which were shared by common Americans, in order to win the 1968 election. Nixon spoke in the name of the “silent majority” of “forgotten Americans.”

Nixon won the 1968 election, in part, because of the alienation of common people from their government in Washington. A high degree of centralization in the federal government, along with the widespread despair and sense of deception over the situation in Vietnam, pushed Americans to reject the progressive populism of LBJ and what was left of New Deal Democratic policy. The south embraced Nixon wholeheartedly after the perceived betrayal of LBJ over civil rights and the federal government's usurpation of “state's rights,” a polite euphemism concealing something far more nefarious: the ability to systematically

¹This list is not exhaustive. It is illustrative. Nixon's list of enemies, or perceived enemies, and those individuals, families, and organizations he resented, is lengthy.

disenfranchise and oppress the black population.

Nixon jumped on the opportunity and made the Republican party a counter-elite party. In the new conservative coalition were private corporations who wished to see their taxes reduced in the name of “individual freedom”²; churches who felt that an entire generation was being lost to the progressive radicalism of “secular humanism” and the communist revolutionary rhetoric emanating from places like UC Berkeley; family organizations that protested school busing, sex education, and other forms of government intervention in “family issues.”

Such a coalition was receptive to the Nixon campaign’s scapegoating of the press and the elite for the problems that faced the nation. Spiro Agnew –Nixon’s vice president– lambasted the press in speeches. Agnew referred to the press as: “a tiny and closed fraternity of privileged men, elected by no one, and enjoying a monopoly sanctioned and licensed by government” (Kazin 1998, 248-253). Agnew also described how the media was monopolizing the means of communication of the people, claiming: “the airwaves do not belong to the networks; they belong to the people” (Kazin 1998, 248-253).

Agnew’s vilification of the press was, in his view, to uncover the blatant partisanship of the media and to reveal that the media, as a whole, had a “radical-liberal” agenda. “There is no element in American life more out of touch with the concerns and beliefs of the common man than the liberal press,” wrote Patrick Buchanan, a White House speechwriter for both Nixon and Agnew, capturing the conservative movement’s genuine feeling of hostility toward the media (Kazin 1998, 248-253).

Nixon’s eventual downfall precipitated a brief stint for President Ford and a lurch to the left with the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976. After a single term, the “silent majority” of common Americans turned out for the conservatism of Reagan. Reagan, like Nixon, played on

²a narrative that promoted unabashed self interest and limitless wealth accumulation at the expense of a just and equitable society.

the perceived sense of being shackled by government bureaucracy and taxes, a push to allow corporations to operate with less oversight and taxes in the name of “individual freedom.” Reagan won over the American heartland: he won with a coalition of conservative christians, the wealthy and business owners, working class communities, and the white community. Much of his voter base were poor, uneducated, white persons. Such individuals saw in Reagan a populist oracle who would bring American back to its former glory. Such nostalgic trope is often the device of right-leaning conservative populist politicians in the postwar period.

Such a populist winning coalition is paradoxical, not the least of which, because Reagan and his administration worked to dismantle the administrative state upon which so many working class individuals depended. Reagan’s empowerment of corporations and willful blindness to corporate malfeasance also did damage to regular working people who saw prices rise and corporate abuses proliferate. No group was more damaged from Reagan’s years in office than the very people who were a core part of his winning coalition: the working class.

By the onset of the 2008 economic crisis, the long-term effects of neoliberal economic policy were on full display. And this time, there was little state infrastructure to oversee a response. In the first year of the Obama administration, one can observe the return of a progressive populism in that Obama represented a fresh break from the political establishment in either party. The Obama administration quickly took action to help common Americans: banking reform, oversight, and regulation, the bailing out of enterprises deemed too big to fail, and the implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

However, all of this was too centralized and without sufficient immediate effect for common people. The policies implemented by the Obama administration included highly centralized actions: the bailing out, most notable, of insurance giant AIG, auto manufacturer General Motors, and the bailing out of the financial firm, Goldman Sachs.³ Such actions

³This list is not exhaustive, it is illustrative.

were perceived by ordinary Americans to be rewarding the wealthy for having made mistakes—a classic case of moral hazard. The reality is much more complex. By having bailed out such entities, widespread economic devastation was avoided and the overall economy was all the better, preserving some economic benefit for all Americans. Furthermore, the passage of Dodd-Frank, a sweeping banking reform bill, did not appear to ordinary Americans as being helpful to them. Of course, by creating mechanisms for greater oversight and barring high risk investment vehicles, ordinary Americans did benefit, certainly in the long-run.

The passage of the Affordable Care Act, like the other measures taken by the Obama administration, was seen as a heavy handed government intervention in the healthcare market, which in the American context, has been treated like any commodity market and not as a universal right, like in nearly all other industrialized democracies. Again, the ACA provided a safety net for all Americans and ensured that ordinary Americans would have health coverage regardless of employment or independent wealth.

While such measures were aimed at helping common Americans, it was not perceived that way. Instead, such measures were perceived as elite bailouts and heavy handed government spending programs. Rather than seeing the long-term economic benefits of such programs, many ordinary Americans viewed them with suspicion; such programs did not help keep ordinary Americans from having their homes foreclosed upon or help put food on the table.

The failure to understand the long-term benefits to common Americans of the Obama administrations policy programs, lead to a further exacerbation of populist angst. While many Americans, especially educated Americans occupying white collar and professional careers, were quick to recover from the 2008 economic crisis, for many uneducated Americans in the middle west and in the rural hinterlands, the recovery did not come. Instead, such Americans saw their good union jobs disappear, if they were lucky enough to be re-employed, it was without the many and sundry perquisites of union employment. Many uneducated, under-employed, white Americans felt alienated from Washington, from an administration that did not look like them or speak like them. The Obama administration's careful and

almost scholarly approach to policy matters, while lauded in some circles, was a sign of alienation for common Americans.

When common Americans are backed into a corner, with no education, no belief that their situation will improve, the perception that their ethnicity and race has a diminished role in broader society, and that their cries for help go unanswered, they pursued alternatives just like aggrieved common Americans in the 1780s and the 1890s. As a consequence, Trumpian populism erupted.

The “silent majority” of “forgotten Americans” saw in Trump someone who paid no attention to political correctness and did not comply with the effete and diplomatic mannerisms and ways of speaking that for so long have been *de rigueur* for those holding or seeking national office. In Trump, they saw an outsider who understood their plight –this is despite the irony that Trump is an affluent individual from New York City who, prior to the White House, lived primarily in a gilded triplex penthouse and spent his time jetting between his far flung properties in a private Boeing aircraft with his name emblazoned on it in gold lettering; in his post-presidency, Trump has chosen to live in a palatial seafront home in the wealthy enclave of Palm Beach, Florida.

Trump scapegoated all the perceived sources of discontent for common Americans: immigrants were taking American jobs and had to be sent back; Mexicans and other Central and South American migrants were swarming across the border, taking jobs and bringing crime and drugs as well as rape, and must be stopped with a wall; China was fleecing the American government through trade deficits and tariffs and through the stealing of American intellectual property – the “single largest transfer of wealth in human history”⁴; NATO and the global American military presence was unnecessary and other countries should be made to pay for American protection.

⁴The point on China is well taken and is objectively accurate. The quote is from the remarks of FBI director Christopher Wray.

Such claims appeal to simple reasoning and understanding. It is easy to suggest building a wall to stop immigration across the southern border; such a proposal is catchy and easy to communicate, it doesn't require complex policy explanations. However, such a proposal uses a juvenile logic that fails to consider the reality of modern life: 41% of immigrants in the United States without legal authorization arrived in the United States on a commercial aircraft and entered the country on a standard tourist visa. One could build an impregnable wall across the entirety of the southern border and would leave unaffected the path that nearly half of the total number of unauthorized immigrants in the United States had used to enter the country. A more realistic solution would address customs and immigration enforcement in the nation's airports. The more complicated picture was conveniently left out of contemporary populist rhetoric.

The idea of rejecting immigrants or "sending them back" to their countries, while appealing to those who are seeking someone to blame for their hardship, fails to stand up to scrutiny. Among foreign-born adults, 65.7% are active in the labor force, compared to 62.3% of the native born population. "Sending back" immigrants would, in fact, be detrimental to the nation's economy and would cause far more damage and would cause further unemployment, rather than an increase in employment for native born Americans. Such logic assumes that 1 person fills 1 job, and if 1 immigrant leaves, then 1 American can take that job. Such logic is misguided. An employed individual, a small business owner or a physician, may do work that gives cause for the employment of numerous other individuals –store clerks, nurses, etc. The "sending back" of one immigrant might cause a ripple effect, eliminating other jobs that individual helped create and sustain.

In another telling illustration, "sending back" immigrants would cause widespread shortages in terms of medical services. Non-US-born medical graduates represent approximately one-fifth of practicing US physicians. Furthermore, among non-US-born medical graduates who are selected into US residency medical training programs, approximately 60% are not US citizens. Nearly 25% of all dentists are foreign born and 38% of home health aides are

foreign born. In only looking at the example of healthcare, one can see that the contribution of immigrants with highly valuable skills such as physicians and dentists, is substantial. Without the presence of foreign-born physicians, the US healthcare system would be crushed under the demand for healthcare services from only US born physicians ([Batalova 2021](#); [Patel et al. 2018](#); [National Academies of Sciences, Medicine et al. 2017](#)). Healthcare is not alone, similar metrics exist for other critical industries. The notion of “sending them back” is a catchy slogan for those looking to scapegoat others for their hardship. However, such election slogans and proposals do not stand up to scrutiny and would be ruinous if implemented.

While a great deal of Trump’s populist rhetoric is grounded in fallacious notions, antithetical to national interests, his presence in national politics and his success is telling of the need for such a transformative figure. The Trump administration’s unabashedly populist tone is productive in that it calls attention to the plight of common Americans suffering under the weight of an economic system that is increasingly competitive and unwelcoming of those without advanced skills. Furthermore, the emergence of Trumpian populism is a signal that the old parties must accommodate the cultural and economic grievances of common Americans. Scapegoating of racial groups and immigrants typically dissipates when economic performance improves. With greater investment in education, training, and social safety net programs, those who currently are in great economic distress may find themselves in a better situation, perceiving themselves as better represented, and less likely to look for scapegoats.

Just like in the 1780s and 1890s, the ability to have grievances represented in policy-making, and receive responsiveness from government, is obstructed in the 2010s. Just as much as the residents of the least commercial-cosmopolitan towns in 1780s Massachusetts first attempted to resolve their distresses through conventional political participation, so did aggrieved Americans in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Most notably, Americans expressed their disapproval in opinion polls of the Bush administration in its final days and during the early days of the economic crisis in 2008. Then, Americans chose Obama as their president

and reelected him in 2012, a clear repudiation of the old guard. Americans went to town hall meetings to express their discontent during the raucous summer of 2010 and throughout 2011. Americans made clear their disapproval and feeling of betrayal at watching the big banks and firms being bailed out while common Americans lost their jobs and homes. When such participation did not produce any immediate, visible effects, populism began to emerge. With it, the beginning of the Trump era.

We also see that in the 1880s and 90s, common Americans pleaded for help for roughly 20 years (1870-1890) and parties and government institutions were unresponsive. Common Americans organized and attempted to elect sympathetic representatives. Then, when the old parties were recalcitrant to common people's demands, the People's Party emerged. Despite the significant differences between prewar and postwar populism, such a pattern is applicable to our recent populist outbreak and future outbreaks.

5.3 Where We Are Going: American Populism, 2021–

What I have laid out in this dissertation is a comprehensive framework for thinking about American populism. American populism is an ever evolving and contradictory phenomenon, going between periods of abeyance and emergence, preying on the vulnerabilities and insecurities of common people.

American populism is responsible for some of the greatest leaps forward in our nation's history, bringing about democratic reforms in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. American populism is also responsible for some of the nation's darkest moments, breeding division and vitriol in the 1960s and 2010s.

Like some dreaded chronic illness, it is not about ridding ourselves of the problem entirely through a miraculous tonic. As I have shown here, even in moments of abeyance, populism is always lurking just below the surface. We must learn to live with it, recognizing imminent outbreaks and how to better handle such outbreaks.

The populist outbreak lead by Trump is not yet over. Despite the many misgivings about Trump's presidency and the movement in his name, such a movement is a telling barometer of American politics. The emergence of the Trump movement tells us that common people and their grievances were unaddressed by the old parties, that such constituencies are genuinely suffering and need a systemic intervention to better their economic and social conditions. Populism must not be sneered at as a liberal epithet. Rather, it must be carefully considered and its root causes addressed.

While Trump may have left office, his movement continues. In the coming midterm elections, we will know whether the Democratic party's moderate majority in the House and its razor thin majority in the Senate will hold. If it does, it is a sign that at least one of the two old parties has become responsive to the needs of common Americans. If the midterm elections are a success for Trump-backed candidates –not necessarily rank-and-file Republican candidates– unseating the Democratic majority in both chambers, then we will

know that grievances among common Americans still run deep, and that there is a push to not only to attain relief for grievances, but that there exists a grievance with the whole of the functioning of our representative democracy that requires representatives from outside the status quo to shake things up.

The benefit of the framework presented here is that it allows us to understand ongoing populism and recurrences of populism in the context and in the pattern of all outbreaks of American populism. In so doing, we are able to see how similar conditions recur in American political history and the distinct pattern to populist outbreaks: grievances form, the attempted redress through conventional political participation, and when that fails, the emergence of populism. Such a framework is adaptable, fit for evaluating the recurrence of populism well into the future. Such a framework can help us prepare for the next outbreak of populism.

While populism is not avoidable, by understanding how it recurs, there is a possibility, at least in principle, that representative and governmental institutions can be better prepared for the future. By recognizing systemic disadvantage and economic precarity, like that experienced by working class Americans during the 1980s, 90s, and early 2000s, and the devastating effects of a financial crisis such as that in 2008, government can adapt. By reinvesting in social infrastructure, by imposing greater tax accountability for the nation's most successful corporations, by reasserting America's role as hegemon in the postwar global liberal order, the federal government may create conditions of greater economic prosperity for common Americans.

Additionally, the rebuilding of the nation's social infrastructure can aid Americans experiencing economic dislocation and prevent the devastating consequences experienced in the absence of such social infrastructure. Some may complain that such social infrastructure incentivizes complacency and punishes those who work hard and earn handsomely. However,

⁵Canada, France, Germany, Denmark, Japan, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Australia, New Zealand, among others.

such arguments fall flat when subjected to scrutiny. Like other industrialized democratic nations,⁵ the United States must also provide an ample buffer from the worst consequences of economic dislocation by replacing the social infrastructure that has been dismantled as part of the long process of neoliberalization begun during the Reagan administration.

A social infrastructure that is better equipped to provide a buffer from the worst consequences of economic dislocation will prevent the arising and accumulation of grievances that always accompany populist outbreaks. Moreover, a party system, that, if it is to remain a two party system, must be more responsive to the demands of aggrieved constituencies. With the absence of greater representation through a greater number of established political parties, like is seen in parliamentary democracies, then the two old American parties face a difficult situation trying to accommodate an ever more diverse society with eclectic preferences and contradictory grievances. No simple feat for only two parties. Nevertheless, greater responsiveness in moments when populism is likely to emerge may quell future populist outbreaks.

Appendix A

Appendix to Chapter 2

A.1 Roll Call Votes

Data and information regarding roll call votes described in table 2.14 and table 2.15 are drawn from Hall (1972, 100-104). The original roll call votes and the description of the bills may be found in the unpublished Journals of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (*Journal of the House of Representatives 1780*). All roll call votes for both table 2.14 and table 2.15 are reported as percentage of yes vote, except for where it is indicated as percentage of no vote. The following are the bills listed as they are displayed in table 2.14 and table 2.15:

1. “On the question whether the House will this session take into consideration the propriety of giving leave to bring in a bill for the repeal of any act or acts or any clause of any act or acts of this Commonwealth...which will oblige any creditor public or private to receive any Debtors demand, at a less sum than the just value thereof.”
2. “And on the question of the report of Committee of Ways and Means . . . and that the several acts of government which now related to the currency of the state be altered and conform with the foregoing [a system reported by the Committee, ‘founded in Justice and Equity’, that would repeal any legal tender provisions of Massachusetts currency] principle upon such a plan that all Debts public and private that are already contracted or that may hereafter be contracted at the real current value of the passing money of the state such value must be determined from time to time by some Impartial Judges, except in case of special contract.”
3. “That all such Government Securities shall be liquidated by the scale of depreciation established by the state and that the sums so liquidated shall be paid in gold and silver or in current money of this Commonwealth at the real value of said liquidated sums.”
4. “Be it therefore enacted by the authority aforesaid that the above mentioned Bills of Credit or such others may hereafter be emitted on the credit of this or the United

States . . . shall be received in all payments within the same . . . but subject however to the . . . last cited clause at the true real value of current money compared with gold and silver . . . and shall avail as the tender had been in Gold and Silver.”

5. “House resumed consideration of [the above] bill. Vote to ‘assign tomorrow for a third reading.’”
6. “Above bill passed to be engrossed, to “send up for concurrence.” ”
7. “Above bill having had three readings, passed to be enacted.”
8. “That a certain clause of an Act passed the 25th of Jan. last [the above] which authorizes the Judges to determine the value of paper money and another clause in said act which repeals the tender act so called be repealed.” (NB: percentage of no vote)
9. “That the issuing of another Tax Act be referred to the next session of the General Court.” (NB: percentage of no vote)
10. “Motion made to reconsider the vote of the house passed 26 June 1782 not to issue a tax upon the polls and estates of this commonwealth the present session.”
11. “A Bill intituled [*sic*] an Act directing the appraising of certain articles of personal estate when taken to satisfy execution at the suit of any private person or persons . . . read a third time. . . . That it pass to be engrossed.”(NB: percentage of no vote)
12. “On the Report of Committee of Ways and Means . . . agreed to take the articles separately . . . ‘Whether a duty of 1s per barrel shall be laid upon all cyder [*sic*] made or imported into this state’ [with the revenue from the state impost and excise to be used to meet some general state expenses].” (NB: percentage of no vote)
13. “House considered resolve of the senate for treasurer to issue executions against all

collectors who have not returned tax money and to “make complaint against towns and plantations that have neglected to make return to him”.

14. “House took up again a bill entitled “An Act Imposing duties on licensed vellum, parchment, and paper,” should “bill pass to be en-grossed.”
15. “House proceeded to consider the subject of a tax and the following was again made a question before the house: “Whether the appropriations of the monies arising from the Impost and Excise laws be altered and that said monies . . . be appropriated to comply with the requisitions of Congress”.” (NB: percentage of no vote)
16. “When the question was called for to have the excise bill not to be engrossed.”
17. “Question that a committee be appointed to bring in a bill to repeal the excise act.”
18. “House took up the bill intituled [*sic*] ...An Act imposing duties on licensed vellum, parchment, and papers...read a third time;...motion made to refer bill to the next session of the General Court...carried in the affirmative;...motion made to reconsider this vote so bill would lie open to debate.”
19. “Committee on new draught of the bill in addition to the Act for laying a duty on licensed vellum and other articles...reported that the house agree to a new draught with a clause levying a duty of one shilling on every bond and writing under seal...not by law recorded in any office to give it full validity. Question then put as to whether the said new draught should be agreed to be inserting the above amendment reported by the committee.” (NB: percentage of no vote)

A.2 Commercial Index

Appendix A.2 contains each town in Massachusetts as of 1784. The commercial index is calculated by ranking towns by the variables listed. Then, the rankings for each town are summed and divided by the number of variables (3 or 4 depending on the town). The towns are listed by their commercial index number, from lowest to highest. The 343 towns are divided in ten groups (deciles). Tables begin on the following page.

Table A.1: First Decile

Town	County	Stock in Trade	Silver	Money Lent	Tonnage	Index Number
Boston	Suffolk	1	1	1	1	1.00
Salem	Essex	3	3	2	2	2.50
Newburyport	Essex	2	2	4	3	2.75
Beverly	Essex	4	13	7	4	7.00
Sherburne	Nantucket	8	8	19	6	10.25
Cambridge	Middlesex	25	5	3		11.00
Plymouth	Plymouth	9	11	21	8	12.25
Dartmouth	Bristol	18	7	15	10	12.50
Ipswich	Essex	15	9	16	11	12.75
Worcester	Worcester	12	19	8		13.00
Hingham	Suffolk	17	10	14	17	14.50
Scituate	Plymouth	45	16	6	15	20.50
Andover	Essex	21	23	24		22.67
Dorchester	Suffolk	26	41	9	26	25.50
Danvers	Essex	14	22	18	58	28.00
Lancaster	Worcester	36	29	20		28.33
Roxbury	Suffolk	7	4	13	90	28.50
Braintree	Suffolk	31	12	11	60	28.50
Watertown	Middlesex	16	38	33		29.00
Marblehead	Essex	16	6	102	7	30.25
Springfield	Hampshire	30	57	10		32.33
Weymouth	Suffolk	46	31	17	36	32.50
Lynn	Essex	22	24	22	63	32.75
Gloucester	Essex	5	26	87	5	33.25
Rutland	Worcester	24	53	31		36.00
Concord	Middlesex	27	17	65		36.33
Sandwich	Barnstable	72	20	38	23	38.25
Newbury	Essex	55	41	12	45	38.25
Marshfield	Plymouth	55	25	40	35	38.75
Medford	Middlesex	60	18	39	44	40.25
Swanzy	Bristol	58	51	28	27	41.00
Charlestown	Middlesex	10	14	87	62	43.25
Milton	Suffolk	34	20	35	87	44.00
Kingston	Plymouth	74	40	23	52	47.25

Table A.2: Second Decile

Town	County	Stock in Trade	Silver	Money Lent	Tonnage	Index Number
Falmouth	Cumberland	11	83	94	9	49.25
Northampton	Hampshire	29	33	86		49.33
Haverhill	Essex	13	35	102		50.00
Taunton	Bristol	19	89	52	41	50.25
Barnstable	Barnstable	74	15	99	19	51.75
Manchester	Essex	43	64	68	32	51.75
Deerfield	Hampshire	66	50	46		54.00
Brookfield	Worcester	41	63	58		54.00
Westfield	Hampshire	69	46	48		54.33
Waltham	Middlesex	86	72	5		54.33
York	York	84	43	67	25	54.75
Pembroke	Plymouth	76	30	41	79	56.50
Cohasset	Suffolk	93	58	57	24	58.00
Lexington	Middlesex	73	27	76		58.67
Bolton	Worcester	98	56	26		60.00
Freetown	Bristol	52	48	131	22	63.25
Dunstable	Middlesex	117	32	44		64.33
Bridgewater	Plymouth	35	109	27	87	64.50
Dedham	Suffolk	88	74	32		64.67
Woburn	Middlesex	87	36	71		64.67
Stockbridge	Berkshire	33	62	100		65.00
Marlborough	Middlesex	70	47	79		65.33
Edgartown	Dukes	100	99	50	18	66.75
Falmouth	Barnstable	119	45	66	38	67.00
Chenlsford	Middlesex	81	87	36		68.00
Middleborough	Plymouth	71	99	25	84	69.75
Newtown	Middlesex	132	34	47		71.00
Hallowell	Lincoln	50	96	97	48	72.25
Hadley	Hampshire	49	28	142		73.00
Hatfield	Hampshire	107	54	61		74.00
Salisbury	Essex	62	150	53	34	74.75
Scarborough	Cumberland	38	163	80	21	75.50
Berwick	York	113	44	118	28	75.75
Abington	Plymouth	80	79	70		76.33

Table A.3: Third Decile

Town	County	Stock in Trade	Silver	Money Lent	Tonnage	Index Number
Bradford	Essex	63	138	30		77.00
Richmond	Berkshire	39	65	128		77.33
Sutton	Worcester	97	107	29		77.67
Pownalboro	Lincoln	32	73	173	37	78.75
Wells	York	47	92	169	12	80.00
Brookline	Suffolk	89	37	120		82.00
Leominster	Worcester	121	71	55		82.33
Lunenburg	Worcester	20	97	135		84.00
Granville	Hampshire	53	94	105		84.00
Westford	Middlesex	116	81	56		84.33
Dighton	Bristol	127	84	59	73	85.75
Pepperelboro	York	28	126	100	92	86.50
Berkley	Bristol	107	153	49	40	87.25
Lanesboro	Berkshire	51	102	111		87.67
Rowley	Essex	143	85	37		88.33
Northfield	Hampshire	64	133	69		88.67
Framingham	Middlesex	95	65	109		89.67
Kittery	York	139	39	116	65	89.75
Petersham	Worcester	44	119	107		90.00
W. Springfield	Hampshire	67	115	90		90.67
Stoughton	Suffolk	135	108	34		92.33
Yarmouth	Barnstable	143	104	110	14	92.75
Westborough	Worcester	42	164	75		93.67
Sheffield	Berkshire	115	87	82		94.67
Almsbury	Essex	37	154	104	86	95.25
Methuen	Essex	47	146	93		95.33
Pittsfield	Berkshire	40	85	163		96.00
Barre	Worcester	122	97	71		96.67
Boothbay	Lincoln	174	122	60	39	98.75
Wrentham	Suffolk	137	113	51		100.33
Harwich	Barnstable	94	136	122	53	101.25
Hopkinton	Middlesex	90	134	81		101.67
Tisbury	Dukes	213	78	42	79	103.00
Rehoboth	Bristol	126	52	144	100	105.50

Table A.4: Fourth Decile

Town	County	Stock in Trade	Silver	Money Lent	Tonnage	Index Number
Georgetown	Lincoln	163	61	132	68	106.00
Rochester	Plymouth	162	77	143	47	107.25
Norton	Bristol	120	119	89		109.33
Sudbury	Middlesex	182	82	64		109.33
Brunswick	Cumberland	123	161	124	31	109.75
Groton	Middlesex	101	75	154		110.00
N. Yarmouth	Cumberland	90	70	248	33	110.25
Medfield	Suffolk	167	105	62		111.33
Chilmark	Dukes	99	80	179	89	111.75
Bristol	Lincoln	90	124	227	20	115.25
Hanover	Plymouth	213	69	96	96	118.50
Sturbridge	Berkshire	57	155	146		119.33
Duxborough	Plymouth	213	139	113	13	119.50
Weston	Middlesex	64	55	240		119.67
Plan. No. 3	Lincoln	127	129	182	41	119.75
Arundel	York	165	118	147	51	120.25
New Castle	Lincoln	131	155	136	59	120.25
Pittston	Lincoln	68	189	182	46	121.25
Shrewsbury	Worcester	177	105	83		121.67
Gt. Barrington	Berkshire	79	134	152		121.67
Needham	Suffolk	213	110	43		122.00
Amherst	Hampshire	124	150	95		123.00
Machias	Lincoln	127	129	182	54	123.00
Malden	Middlesex	111	58	202		123.67
Harpswell	Cumberland	142	166	133	61	125.50
Topsfield	Essex	212	89	77		126.00
Sherburne	Middlesex	151	169	63		127.67
Biddeford	York	96	99	248	30	127.67
Rainham	Bristol	109	189	130	94	130.50
Bath	Lincoln	23	226	248	30	131.75
Leicester	Worcester	160	95	141		132.00
Medway	Suffolk	184	139	74		132.33
Northborough	Worcester	185	124	92		133.67
Grafton	Worcester	54	209	145		136.00
Sterling	Worcester	61	182	165		136.00

Table A.5: Fifth Decile

Town	County	Stock in Trade	Silver	Money Lent	Tonnage	Index Number
Cape Elizabeth	Cumberland	105	169	221	50	136.25
Ukbridge	Worcester	77	169	164		136.67
E. Sudbury	Middlesex	195	68	147		136.67
Belchertown	Hampshire	147	114	152		137.67
Deer Island	Lincoln	213	117	182	41	138.25
Mansfield	Bristol	150	161	108		139.67
Williamstown	Berkshire	59	169	191		139.67
Harvard	Worcester	167	116	138		140.33
Waldoboro	Lincoln	136	168	174	84	140.50
Attleboro	Bristol	143	226	53		140.67
Lynnfield	Essex	213	169	45		142.33
Halifax	Plymouth	132	127	212	99	142.50
Foxboro	Suffolk	190	93	147		143.33
Lincoln	Middlesex	151	48	232		143.67
Mendon	Worcester	213	155	73		147.00
Wareham	Plymouth	213	139	187	49	147.00
Billerica	Middlesex	127	67	248		147.33
Easton	Bristol	104	224	115		147.67
Sandisfield	Berkshire	85	169	189		147.67
Bedford	Middlesex	213	148	84		148.33
Stow	Middlesex	151	75	221		149.00
Royalsboro	Cumberland	213	189	120	78	150.00
Sandford	York	213	148	91		150.67
Oxford	Worcester	138	169	147		151.33
Westminister	Worcester	177	169	114		153.33
Walpole	Suffolk	149	187	127		154.33
Wellfleet	Barnstable	198	226	168	29	155.25
Spencer	Worcester	163	166	137		155.33
Littleton	Middlesex	125	150	192		155.67
Hardwick	Worcester	105	128	235		156.00
Dalton	Berkshire	77	146	248		157.00
Princeton	Worcester	213	58	202		157.67
Plan. No, 1	Lincoln	151	226	202	54	158.25

Table A.6: Sixth Decile

Town	County	Stock in Trade	Silver	Money Lent	Tonnage	Index Number
Conway	Hampshire	167	155	154		158.67
Wilbraham	Hampshire	177	169	134		160.00
Southboro	Worcester	139	169	172		160.00
S. Hadley	Hampshire	118	204	159		160.33
Edgecomb	Lincoln	82	226	248	90	161.50
Plan. No. 2	Lincoln	151	226	202	70	162.25
Hull	Suffolk	213	91	248	96	162.00
Blandford	Hampshire	213	189	85		162.33
Greenfield	Hampshire	112	219	161		164.00
Middleton	Essex	213	226	123	95	164.25
Carlisle	Middlesex	185	204	106		165.00
Boxford	Essex	213	129	156		166.00
Berlin	Worcester	213	169	117		166.33
Paxton	Worcester	113	226	162		167.00
Oakham	Worcester	213	137	157		169.00
Shirley	Middlesex	213	209	88		170.00
Plympton	Plymouth	189	185	248	63	171.25
Long Meadow	Hampshire	170	119	225		171.33
Milford	Worcester	213	226	78		172.33
Sharon	Suffolk	151	209	158		172.33
Dover	Suffolk	213	139	167		173.00
Dracut	Middlesex	151	155	215		173.67
Fox Island	Lincoln	213	226	202	54	173.75
Eastham	Barnstable	198	169	248	81	174.00
S. Hampton	Hampshire	159	199	165		174.33
Holliston	Middlesex	148	129	248		175.00
Walpole	Lincoln	177	102	248		175.67
Provinceton	Barnstable	213	226	248	16	175.75
Franklin	Suffolk	213	139	177		176.33
Bowdoinham	Lincoln	166	226	248	66	176.50
Reading	Middlesex	213	188	129		176.67
Chatham	Barnstable	177	226	248	57	177.00
Acton	Middlesex	213	202	126		180.33
Northbridge	Worcester	213	209	119		180.33

Table A.7: Seventh Decile

Town	County	Stock in Trade	Silver	Money Lent	Tonnage	Index Number
Pelham	Hampshire	170	226	147		181.00
Douglas	Worcester	185	112	248		181.67
Brimfield	Hampshire	213	155	180		182.67
Ashburham	Worcester	103	199	248		183.23
Wilmington	Middlesex	213	226	111		183.33
Topsham	Lincoln	213	209	248	66	184.00
Plan. No. 5	Lincoln	213	226	227	75	185.25
Coxhall	York	213	204	139		185.33
Templeton	Worcester	83	226	248		185.67
Stoneham	Middlesex	213	226	125		188.00
Pen. L. I.	Lincoln	213	226	240	74	188.25
Buxton	York	102	226	239		189.00
Chelsea	Suffolk	196	123	248		189.00
Plan. W. Side	Lincoln	213	226	248	70	189.25
Plan. No. 2	Lincoln	213	226	248	70	189.25
Wenham	Essex	213	189	169		190.33
Gorham	Cumberland	213	110	248		190.33
Western	Worcester	213	218	140		190.33
Plan. No. 6	Lincoln	213	226	248	75	190.50
Meduncock	Lincoln	213	226	248	75	190.50
Plan. No. 6	Lincoln	213	226	248	81	192.00
Plan. No. 5	Lincoln	213	226	248	81	192.00
Sunderland	Hampshire	110	226	247		194.33
Woolwich	Lincoln	213	226	248	93	195.00
St. George's	Lincoln	213	226	248	96	195.75
Fitchburgh	Worcester	132	209	248		196.33
Ludlow	Hampshire	192	226	171		196.33
Colerain	Hampshire	213	202	176		197.00
Warwick	Hampshire	206	139	248		197.67
N. Braintree	Worcester	192	189	213		198.00
Ashby	Middlesex	202	169	226		199.00
Townsend	Middlesex	143	226	230		199.67
Tewksbury	Middlesex	213	226	160		199.67
Pepperill	Middlesex	196	209	193		199.33

Table A.8: Eighth Decile

Town	County	Stock in Trade	Silver	Money Lent	Tonnage	Index Number
Natick	Middlesex	213	139	248		200.00
Windsor	Berkshire	213	209	181		201.00
Ward	Worcester	213	209	182		201.33
Worththington	Hampshire	158	204	248		203.33
Sylvester	Cumberland	208	226	178		204.00
Lenox	Berkshire	139	226	248		204.33
Winchendon	Worcester	213	226	175		204.67
Thomastown	Lincoln	161	226	230		205.67
Holden	Worcester	213	185	220		206.00
Shelburne	Hampshire	185	226	211		207.33
Ware	Hampshire	202	226	194		207.33
Charlton	Worcester	213	164	248		208.33
Winslow	Lincoln	213	226	188		209.00
Alfred	Berkshire	176	221	232		209.67
Partridgefield	Berkshire	213	226	190		209.67
Truro	Barnstable	208	226	197		210.33
Palmer	Hampshire	204	182	248		211.33
Athol	Worcester	213	226	195		211.33
Hubbardstown	Worcester	213	226	195		211.33
Canaan	Lincoln	208	226	202		212.00
Royalston	Worcester	192	226	218		212.00
N. Marlboro	Berkshire	213	189	235		212.33
Middlefield	Hampshire	213	226	198		212.33
New Salem	Hampshire	213	226	199		212.67
Lee	Berkshire	213	224	202		213.00
Upton	Worcester	213	226	200		213.00
Granby	Hampshire	213	226	201		213.33
Warren	Lincoln	213	199	229		213.67
Vassalborough	Lincoln	213	226	202		213.67
Southwick	Hampshire	213	226	202		213.67
Charlemont	Hampshire	170	226	248		214.67
Winthrop	Lincoln	170	226	248		214.67
WIndham	Cumberland	213	184	248		215.00
Whatley	Hampshire	175	226	248		216.33

Table A.9: Ninth Decile

Town	County	Stock in Trade	Silver	Money Lent	Tonnage	Index Number
W. Stockbridge	Berkshire	213	189	248		216.67
Adams	Berkshire	213	189	248		216.67
Bellingham	Suffolk	213	189	248		216.67
Dudley	Worcester	213	219	219		217.00
Orange	Hampshire	204	226	221		217.00
S. Brimfield	Hampshire	170	226	235		217.00
N. Gloucester	Cumberland	213	226	213		217.33
Wendell	Hampshire	213	226	216		218.33
Bridgeton	Cumberland	213	226	217		218.67
Egremont	Berkshire	183	226	248		219.00
Cummington	Hampshire	213	226	221		220.00
Brownfield	York	213	204	248		221.67
Becket	Berkshire	213	221	235		223.00
Monson	Hampshire	200	226	245		223.67
Pearsonstown	Cumberland	213	226	234		224.33
Ashfield	Hampshire	201	226	246		224.33
Chester	Hampshire	213	223	243		226.33
Montague	Hampshire	206	226	248		226.67
Balltown	Lincoln	213	226	242		227.00
Hancock	Lincoln	208	226	248		227.33
N. Ashford	Berkshire	213	226	244		227.67

Table A.10: Ninth Decile, Continued

Town	County	Money on Hand
Tyringham	Berkshire	16
Greenwich	Hampshire	15
Hancock	Berkshire	15
Holland	Hampshire	12
Bernardstown	Hampshire	10
Chesterfield	Hampshire	10
Williamsburgh	Hampshire	10
Loudoun	Berkshire	10
Goshen	Hampshire	8
Boxboro	Middlesex	8
Lebanon	York	8
Shutesbury	Hampshire	8
W. Hampton	Hampshire	7
Leverett	Hampshire	7

*These towns are ranked only by money on hand.

Table A.11: Tenth Decile

Town	County	Money on Hand
Washington	Berkshire	6
Fryeburgh	York	6
Norwich	Hampshire	5
Leyden	Hampshire	5
Montgomery	Hampshire	5
Buckland	Hampshire	4
Little Falls	York	4
Rowe	Hampshire	4
Heath	Hampshire	4
Bakerston	Cumberland	3
Waterboro	York	3
Raymondstown	Cumberland	3
Parsonfield	York	3
Shapleigh	York	3
Belfast	Lincoln	2
Lemington	York	2
Lewiston	Lincoln	2
Limerick	York	2
Mt. Washington	Berkshire	2

*These towns are ranked only by money on hand.

Table A.12: Eleventh Decile

Town	County	Money on Hand
Francisboro	Lincoln	
Washington P.	York	
Union	Lincoln	
Norridgewalk	Lincoln	
Sheppardstown	Cumberland	
Plan. No.2(22)	Lincoln	
Gray	Cumberland	
Camden	Lincoln	
Otisfield	Cumberland	
Wales	Lincoln	
Mt. Desert	Lincoln	
Plan. No. 22(21)	Lincoln	
Plan. No. 3(22)	Lincoln	
Plan. No. 1(23)	Lincoln	
Plan. No. 4(24)	Lincoln	
Plan. No. 4(25)	Lincoln	
Plan. No. 7(26)	Hampshire	

*These towns have no values for any of the variables.

A.3 Social Scale

Appendix A.3 provides the following information for Massachusetts' 343 towns as of 1784: number of newspapers, years of publication, sessions of the Supreme Judicial Court, the Court of Common Pleas and General Sessions of the Peace, barristers present, number of lawyers, number of Congregational ministers, and the number of years that a town sent representatives to the lower chamber of the General Court.

The towns are assigned a point for each of the following: presence of a newspaper, sessions of any of the 3 courts listed, residence of a barrister in 1786 or 1791, presence of 2 or more lawyers in 1786 or 1791, presence of a Congregational minister, whether or not a town sends a delegate to the lower chamber for 9 or more years between 1780 and 1791, and sending a delegate to the lower chamber for 6 or more years between 1780 and 1790. The points are then summed. Each town is placed into one of nine groups based on the total number of points; those towns with eight points are placed in group 1 and towns with zero points are placed in group 9.

Table A.13: Suffolk County

Town	Newspapers Number	Years Active	Court Sessions		Barristers			Lawyers			Ministers			Reps in GC (years)	Group & Points
			Yes		1786	1791	1791	1786	1791	1791	1780	1786	1791		
Boston	16	75	Yes		7	5	13	17	14	14	14	14	17	11	I-8
Roxbury					1	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	11	III-6
Dorchester								1	1	1	1	1	1	11	VI-3
Milton								1	1	1	1	1	1	10	V-4
Braintree							1	1	3	4	5	11			V-4
Dedham							1	2	4	3	3	11			IV-5
Weymouth									2	1	2	10			VI-3
Hingham									2	2	2	11			VI-3
Brookline									1	1	1	10			VI-3
Medfield							1		2	2	1	9			V-4
Stoughton									2	1	2	11			VI-3
Wrentham									2	2	2	11			VI-3
Cohasset									1	1	1	7			VII-2
Medway									2	2	2	10			VI-3
Walpole									0	1	1	9			VI-3
Sharon									1	1	1	9			VI-3
Franklin									1	1	1	10			VI-3
Hull												0			IX-0
Chelsea									1	1	1	4			VIII-1
Dover										1	1	0			VIII-1
Bellingham										1	1	6			VII-2
Needham									1	2	0	8			VII-2
Foxboro										1	1	5			VIII-1

Table A.14: Essex County

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions		Barristers			Lawyers			Ministers			Reps in GC (years)		Group & Points
	Number	Years Active	Yes		1786	1791	1786	1786	1791	1791	1780	1786	1791			
Salem	4	14	Yes		1	0	1	1	4	6	7	7	7	11		I-8
Newburyport	1	8	Yes		2	2	1	1	1	4	4	4	4	11		I-8
Ipswich			Yes					1	1	4	4	4	4	11		IV-5
Beverly							1	1	1	1	1	2	2	11		V-4
Marblehead							1	1	1	2	3	3	3	9		V-4
Gloucester								1	1	4	3	3	3	11		V-4
Andover								1	1	2	2	2	2	11		V-4
Haverhill							2	1	1	4	4	4	4	11		IV-5
Danvers										2	2	2	2	11		VI-3
Newbury										4	3	4	4	11		VI-3
Lynn										3	2	3	3	11		VI-3
Bradford										1	2	2	2	11		VI-3
Rowley										2	3	2	2	10		VI-3
Salisbury										2	2	2	2	11		VI-3
Methuen										1	1	1	1	8		VII-2
Manchester										1	1	1		1		VIII-1
Almsbury										2	2	2	4	10		VI-3
Topsfield										1	1	1	1	7		VII-2
Boxford										2	1	2	2	10		VI-3
Middleton										1	1	1	1	0		VIII-1
Wenham										1	1	1	1	1		VIII-1
Lynnfield											1	1	1	0		VIII-1

Table A.15: Plymouth County

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions		Barristers		Lawyers		Ministers		Reps in GC (years)		Group & Points
	Number	Years Active	Yes		1786	1791	1786	1791	1780	1786	1791		
Plymouth	1	2	Yes		2	2	2	2	2	2	11		IV-5
Bridgewater						1		4	6	5	11		V-4
Scituate								1	2	3	11		VI-3
Pembroke						1		2	2	2	10		V-4
Kingston					1			1	1	1	10		V-4
Middleborough						1		5	5	4	10		V-4
Marshfield								2	2	2	11		VI-3
Abington								1	1	1	11		VI-3
Duxborough								1	1	1	10		VI-3
Hanover					1	1		0	1	1	7		VI-3
Rochester								3	3	1	11		VI-3
Plympton								2	2	1	11		VI-3
Halifax								1	1	1	4		VIII-1
Wareham									1	1	4		VIII-1

Table A.16: Barnstable County

Town	Newspapers Number	Years Active	Court Sessions	Barristers			Lawyers			Ministers			Reps in GC (years)	Group & Points
				1786	1791	1786	1786	1791	1786	1780	1786	1791		
Barnstable			Yes	1	1				2	2	3	11		IV-5
Sandwich									3	2	2	9		VI-3
Harwich									2	2	1	9		VI-3
Falmouth									2	1	1	5		VIII-1
Yarmouth									2	2	2	6		VII-2
Wellfleet									1	1	1	7		VII-2
Chatham									1	1	1	7		VII-2
Eastham									2	2	2	7		VII-2
Truro									1	0	1	3		VIII-1
Provincetown									1	1	1	0		VIII-1

Table A.17: Bristol County

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions		Barristers		Lawyers		Ministers		Reps in GC (years)		Group & Points	
	Number	Years Active			1786	1791	1786	1791	1780	1786	1791			
Taunton			Yes				4	3	2	2	1	11	III-6	
Dartmouth									5	3	2	11	VI-3	
New Bedford							1				1	4	V-4	
Westport														
Swansey Somerset									3	3	2	7	VII-2	
Freetown									2	2		9	VI-3	
Norton							1		1	1	0	11	V-4	
Dighton									2	2	2	8	VII-2	
Rehoboth									5	8	8	11	VI-3	
Berkely									1	0	1	7	VII-2	
Attleboro									3	2	3	11	VI-3	
Mansfield									1	1	1	9	VI-3	
Easton									2	1	1	9	VI-3	
Rainham									1	1	1	10	VI-3	

Table A.18: Nantucket County

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions		Barristers		Lawyers		Ministers		Reps in GC (years)		Group & Points	
	Number	Years Active			1786	1791	1786	1791	1780	1786	1791			
Shelburne (Nantucket)			Yes						2	2	2	4	VI-3	
Edgartown			Yes						1	1	1	4	VI-3	
[Unintelligible]									1	1	2	5	VI-3	

Table A.19: Dukes County

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions		Barristers		Lawyers		Ministers		Reps in GC (years)		Group & Points	
	Number	Years Active			1786	1791	1786	1791	1780	1786	1791			
Tisbury			Yes				3	3	2	5			VI-3	

Table A.20: Middlesex County

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions	Barristers		Lawyers		Ministers		Reps in GC (years)	Group & Points
	Number	Years Active		1786	1791	1786	1791	1780	1786	1791	
Concord			Yes			1	2	1	1	11	III-6
Cambridge			Yes			1	1	2	4	3	IV-5
Charlestown	1	3				2	1	1	0	1	III-6
Watertown						1	1	1	1	1	V-4
Waltham						1	1	1	1	1	V-4
Woburn						1	1		3	3	V-4
Newton						1	1		3	3	V-4
Medford								1	1	1	VI-3
Lexington								1	1	1	VI-3
Chelmsford								1	2	1	VI-3
Groton			Yes				3	1	1	1	III-6
Marlborough									1	1	VI-3
Sudbury								1	1	1	VI-3
Framingham								1	1	1	V-3
Weston							1	1	1	2	V-4
Malden								2	1	1	VI-3
Westford								1	1		VII-2
Sherburne								1	1	1	VII-2
Hopkinton								1	1	1	VII-2

Table A.21: Middlesex County, Continued

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions		Barristers		Lawyers		Ministers		Reps in GC (years)		Group & Points
	Number	Years Active	1786	1791	1786	1791	1786	1791	1780	1786	1791		
Carlisle							1	1			9		VI-3
Dunstable											0		IX-0
Stow								1	1	1	5		VIII-1
Bedford						1		1	1	1	1		VIII-2
Reading								3	2	3	11		VI-3
Dracut								1	1	1	9		VI-3
Billerica						1		1	1	1	10		V-4
East Sudbury								1	1	1	10		VI-3
Lincoln								1	1	1	4		VIII-1
Littleton								1	1	1	7		VII-2
Pepperill								1	1	1	9		VI-3
Tewksbury								1	1	1	9		VI-3
Shirley								1	1	1	0		VIII-1
Wilmington								1	1	1	4		VIII-1
Acton								1	1	1	0		VIII-1
Townshend								1	1	1	7		VII-2
Stoneham									1	1	0		VIII-1
Holliston								1	1	1	3		VIII-1
Natick								1	1	1	0		VIII-1
Ashby								1			0		IX-0
Boxboro									1	1	0		VIII-1

Table A.22: Worcester County

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions		Barristers		Lawyers		Ministers		Reps in GC (years)		Group & Points
	Number	Years Active	Yes		1786	1791	1786	1791	1780	1786	1791		
Worcester	3	15	Yes		1	1	2	4	1	1	2	11	I-8
Lancaster					1	1		2	2	1	1	11	III-6
Rutland							1	1	1	1	2	9	V-4
Brookfield							2	2	3	3	3	11	V-4
Sutton									4	3	3	11	VI-3
Bolton									1	1	1	7	VII-2
Lunenburg									1	1	1	10	VI-3
Uxbridge							1	1	2	1		10	V-4
Barre									1	1	1	10	VI-3
Westboro									1		1	8	VII-2
Petersham							1	2	1	1	2	10	IV-5
Grafton									2	2		9	VI-3
Shrewsbury									2	1	2	11	VII-3
Northboro									1	1	1	6	VII-2
Leominster									2	2	1	8	VII-2
Sterling										1	1	8	VII-2
Sturbridge									1	2	1	10	VI-3
Mendon							1	1	3	1	1	10	V-4
Hardwick							1	1	1	0	1	10	V-4
Leicester									3	4	2	8	VII-2
Harvard									1	2	1	8	VII-2
Southboro							1	1	1		1	10	V-4
Spencer									1	1	1	10	VI-3

Table A.23: Worcester County, Continued

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions		Barristers		Lawyers		Ministers		Reps in GC (years)		Group & Points
	Number	Years Active	1786	1791	1786	1791	1786	1791	1780	1786	1791		
Westminister									1	1	1	9	VI-3
Paxton									1		0	6	VII-2
Fitchburgh							1		1	1	1	8	VI-3
Winchendon							1	0	1	1	1	7	VI-3
Princeton										1		8	VIII-1
Templeton									1	1	1	6	VII-2
Milford									0	1	1	4	VIII-1
Oxford									1		1	9	VI-3
Oakham										1	1	6	VII-2
Western									1		1	6	VII-2
Royalston									2	1	2	9	VI-3
Ashburham									1	1	1	4	VIII-1
Northbridge										1	1	4	VIII-1
Berlin										1	1	0	VIII-1
Dudley									1	1	1	7	VII-2
Holden									1	1	1	7	VII-2
Ward										1	1	5	VIII-1
Upton									1	1	1	2	VIII-1
Hubbardstown									1	1	1	3	VIII-1
Athol									1		1	5	VIII-1
Charlton									1	2	2	11	VI-3
Douglas									1	1	1	6	VII-2
New Braintree									2	1	1	9	VI-3

Table A.24: Hampshire County

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions		Barristers		Lawyers		Ministers		Reps in GC (years)	Group & Points	
	Number	Years Active			1786	1791	1786	1791	1780	1786			1791
Springfield	2	8	Yes		2	2		2	3	2	2	10	I-8
Northhampton	1	6	Yes		2			2	1	1	1	11	I-8
Westfield							2	2		1	2	10	IV-5
Hadley							1	1	1	1	1	9	V-4
Deerfield									1		1	10	VI-3
Northfield								1	1	1	1	9	V-4
West Springfield							1	1	3	3	3	10	V-4
Hatfield									1	1	1	9	VI-3
Granville										1	1	11	VI-3
Amherst					1	1			1	2	2	8	VI-3
Belchertown									1	2	2	8	VII-2
South Hadley									1	1	1	9	VI-3
Greenfield									1	1	1	8	VII-2
South Hampton									1	1	1	10	VI-3
Colerain									1	1	2	10	VI-3
Conway							1		1	1	1	5	VII-2
Worthington									1		1	9	VI-3
Blanford											1	6	VI-3
Pelham									1			6	VII-2

Table A.25: Hampshire County, Continued

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions			Barristers			Lawyers			Ministers			Reps in GC (years)	Group & Points
	Number	Years Active	1786	1791	1786	1786	1791	1786	1791	1786	1791	1786	1786	1791		
Sunderland								1	1						6	VII-2
Warwick								1	2		1				6	VII-2
Granby				1				1	1		2				9	VI-3
Southwick								1	1		1				10	VI-3
Shelburne								1	1						8	VII-2
New Salem								2	2		2				7	VII-2
Ludlow															4	IX-0
Wilbraham				1				1	1		3				8	VI-3
Whately								1	1		2				2	VIII-1
South Brimfield								2	1		1				5	VIII-1
Charlmont								1							6	VIII-1
Montague								1	1		2				6	VII-2
Monson								1	1		1				7	VII-2
Palmer								1	1		1				8	VII-2
Chester								1	1		1				7	VII-2
Ashfield								2	2		3				6	VII-2
Cummington								1	1		1				6	VII-2
Ware															2	IX-0
Middlefield															0	IX-0
Rowe														1	0	IX-0

Table A.26: Berkshire County

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions		Barristers		Lawyers		Ministers		Reps in GC (years)		Group & Points
	Number	Years Active	Yes	No	1786	1791	1786	1791	1780	1786	1791	1791	
Pittsfield	2	4	Yes				1	1	3	2	2	10	III-6
Stockbridge	1	3			1		1	1	2	2	1	11	II-7
Richmond										1	1	1	VI-3
Sheffield									1	1	1	11	VI-3
Great Barrington			Yes				1	1		1	1	10	IV-5
Lanesboro									1	2	2	10	VI-3
Williamstown							1	1	1	1	1	11	V-4
Sandisfield									1	2	2	11	VI-3
Lenox			Yes					1	1	1	1	9	IV-5
Windsor										1	1	10	VI-3
Lee												9	VII-2
Egremont									1	1	1	11	VI-3
Alford										2	1	7	VII-2
Dalton												0	IX-0
Becket									1	1		8	VII-2
Hancock										1	2	8	VII-2
Washington										2	2	8	VII-2
New Marlboro											1	10	VII-2
Tyringham									1		1	10	VI-3
New Ashford												0	IX-0
Mount Washington												0	IX-0
Loudoun												1	IX-0
West Stockbridge										1	1	4	VIII-1
Partridgefield										1	1	7	VII-3
Adams										1	1	11	VI-3

Table A.27: York County

Town	Newspapers Number	Years Active	Court Sessions	Barristers			Lawyers			Ministers			Reps in GC (years)	Group & Points
				1786	1791	1786	1786	1791	1780	1786	1791	1791		
York			Yes						2	2	2	10		V-4
Pepperelboro									1	1	1	9		VI-3
Wells									2	3	3	11		VI-3
Kittery									3	4	2	11		VI-3
Berwick									1	3	3	9		VI-3
Biddeford						1				1	1	6		V-4
Arundel			Yes						1	1	1	4		VIII-1
Sandford									1		2	4		VIII-1
Buxton										1	1	7		VII-2
Coxhall										1	1	0		VIII-1
Lebanon									1	1	1	6		VII-2
Freyburgh									1	1	1	8		VII-2
Brownfield												0		IX-0
Massabeck (Waterborough)									1		1	2		VII-2
Limerick												0		IX-0
Little Falls												0		IX-0
Shapleigh											1	1		IX-0
Little Ossepee (Limington)												0		IX-0

Table A.28: Cumberland County

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions	Barristers		Lawyers		Ministers		Reps in GC (years)	Group & Points
	Number	Years Active		1786	1791	1786	1791	1780	1786	1791	
Falmouth-Portland	3	10	Yes			2	4	5	5	11	II-7
Scarborough								2	2	10	VI-3
North Yarmouth								1	1	9	VI-3
Brunswick								1	1	3	VIII-1
Harpwell								1	2	4	VIII-1
Cape Elizabeth								1	1	5	VIII-1
New Gloucester			Yes		1			1	1	8	V-4
Royalsboro										0	IX-0
Gorham								1	1	8	VII-2
Sylvester (Turner)									1	0	IX-0
Windham								1	1	0	VIII-1
Raymondstown										0	IX-0
Bridgetown									1	0	IX-0
Pearsontown (Standish)								1		0	IX-0
Bakerstown										0	IX-0
Tray									1	1	IX-0
Shepardstown (Hebromi)										0	IX-0

Table A.29: Lincoln County

Town	Newspapers		Court Sessions	Barristers		Lawyers		Ministers		Reps in GC (years)	Group & Points
	Number	Years Active		1786	1791	1786	1791	1780	1786	1791	
Bowdoinham								1	1	2	VIII-
Winthrop										8	VIII-
Woolwich						1	1	1	1	4	VIII-

A.4 Commercial-Cosmopolitan Gradient

Appendix A.4 shows the commercial decile, social category, and total points for each of Massachusetts' 343 towns. Each town is assigned one to ten points based on its commercial decile. Each town is assigned zero to eight points based on its social category. Based on each town's score, the towns are assigned to one of three groups: towns with 13 points or more, group A; towns with 9 through 12 points, group B; towns with 8 or fewer points, group C.

Table A.30: Suffolk County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Boston	I	I	18	A
Roxbury	I	III	16	A
Milton	I	V	14	A
Braintree	I	V	14	A
Dedham	II	IV	14	A
Dorchester	I	VI	13	A
Weymouth	I	VI	13	A
Hingham	I	VI	13	A
Brookline	III	VI	11	B
Medfield	IV	V	11	B
Stoughton	III	VI	11	B
Wrentham	III	VI	11	B
Cohasset	II	VII	11	B
Medway	IV	VI	10	B
Walpole	V	VI	9	B
Needham	IV	VII	9	B
Sharon	VI	VI	8	C
Franklin	VI	VI	8	C
Foxboro	V	VIII	7	C
Dover	VI	VIII	6	C
Chelsea	VII	VIII	5	C
Hull	VI	IX	5	C
Bellingham	IX	VII	4	C

Table A.31: Essex County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Salem	I	I	18	A
Newburyport	I	I	18	A
Ipswich	I	IV	15	A
Beverly	I	V	14	A
Marblehead	I	V	14	A
Gloucester	I	V	14	A
Andover	I	V	14	A
Haverhill	II	IV	14	A
Danvers	I	VI	13	A
Newbury	I	VI	13	A
Lynn	I	VI	13	A
Salisbury	II	VI	12	B
Bradford	III	VI	11	B
Rowley	III	VI	11	B
Almsbury	III	VI	11	B
Methuen	III	VII	10	B
Manchester	II	VIII	10	B
Topsfield	IV	VII	9	B
Boxford	VI	VI	8	C
Lynnfield	V	VIII	7	C
Middleton	VI	VIII	6	C
Wenham	VII	VIII	5	C

Table A.32: Plymouth County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Plymouth	I	II	17	A
Kingston	I	V	14	A
Bridgewater	II	V	13	A
Scituate	I	VI	13	A
Pembroke	II	V	13	A
Middleborough	II	V	13	A
Marshfield	I	VI	13	A
Abington	II	VI	12	B
Duxborough	IV	VI	10	B
Hanover	IV	VI	10	B
Rochester	IV	VI	10	B
Plympton	VI	VI	8	C
Halifax	V	VIII	7	C
Wareham	V	VIII	7	C

Table A.33: Bristol County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Taunton	II	III	15	A
Dartmouth	I	V	14	A
Swansey	I	VII	12	B
Freetown	II	VI	12	B
Norton	IV	V	11	B
Rehoboth	III	VI	11	B
Dighton	III	VII	10	B
Rainham	IV	VI	10	B
Berkley	III	VII	10	B
Attleboro	V	VI	9	B
Mansfield	V	VI	9	B
Easton	V	VI	9	B

Table A.34: Barnstable County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Barnstable	II	V	13	A
Sandwich	I	VI	13	A
Harwich	III	VI	11	B
Falmouth	II	VIII	10	B
Yarmouth	III	VII	10	B
Wellfleet	V	VII	8	C
Chatham	VI	VII	7	C
Eastham	VI	VII	7	C
Provincetown	VI	IX	5	C
Truro	VIII	VIII	4	C

Table A.35: Nantucket County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Sherburne	I	VI	13	A
Edgartown	II	VI	12	B
Tisbury	III	VI	11	B
Chilmark	IV	VII	9	B

Table A.36: Middlesex County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Concord	I	III	16	A
Charlestown	I	III	16	A
Cambridge	I	IV	15	A
Waltertown	I	V	14	A
Waltham	II	V	13	A
Woburn	II	V	13	A
Newton	II	V	13	A
Medford	I	VI	13	A
Groton	IV	III	13	A
Lexington	II	VI	12	B
Chelmsford	II	VI	12	B
Marlborough	II	VI	12	B
Framingham	III	VI	11	B
Weston	IV	V	11	B
Westford	III	VI	11	B
Sudbury	IV	VI	10	B
Malden	IV	VI	10	B
Hopkinton	III	VI	10	B
Billerica	V	V	10	B
Sherburne	IV	VII	9	B
Dunstable	II	IX	9	B
Stow	V	VII	8	C
Bedford	V	VII	8	C
Reading	VI	VI	8	C
Dracut	VI	VI	8	C
East Sudbury	V	VII	8	C

Table A.37: Middlesex County, Continued

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Littleton	V	VII	8	C
Lincoln	V	VIII	7	C
Pepperill	VII	VI	7	C
Tewksbury	VII	VI	7	C
Carlisle	VI	VI	8	C
Shirley	VI	VIII	6	C
Acton	VI	VIII	6	C
Townsend	VII	VII	6	C
Holliston	VI	VIII	6	C
Willmington	VII	VIII	5	C
Stoneham	VII	VIII	5	C
Natick	VIII	VIII	5	C
Ashby	VII	IX	4	C
Boxboro	IX	VIII	3	C

Table A.38: Worcester County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Worcester	I	I	18	A
Lancaster	I	III	16	A
Rutland	I	V	14	A
Brookfield	II	IV	14	A
Petersham	III	IV	13	A
Sutton	III	VI	11	B
Bolton	II	VII	11	B
Lunenburg	III	VI	11	B
Barre	III	VI	11	B
Uxbridge	V	V	10	B
Westboro	III	VII	10	B
Grafton	IV	VI	10	B
Shrewsbury	IV	VI	10	B
Sturbridge	IV	VI	10	B
Mendon	V	V	10	B
Northboro	IV	VII	9	B
Leominster	III	VII	10	B
Hardwick	V	V	10	B
Sterling	IV	VII	9	B
Spencer	V	VI	9	B
Westminister	V	VI	9	B
Leicester	IV	VII	9	B
Southboro	VI	V	9	B
Harvard	V	VII	8	C
Oxford	V	VII	8	C
Paxton	VI	VII	7	C

Table A.39: Worcester County, Continued

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Fitchburgh	VII	VI	7	C
Princeton	V	VIII	7	C
Oakham	VI	VII	7	C
New Braintree	VII	VI	7	C
Winchendon	VIII	VI	6	C
Templeton	VII	VII	6	C
Milford	VI	VIII	6	C
Western	VII	VII	6	C
Royalston	VIII	VI	6	C
Northbridge	VI	VIII	6	C
Berlin	VI	VIII	6	C
Douglas	VII	VII	6	C
Ashburham	VII	VIII	5	C
Holden	VIII	VII	5	C
Ward	VIII	VIII	4	C
Upton	VIII	VIII	4	C
Hubbardstown	VIII	VIII	4	C
Athol	VIII	VIII	4	C
Charlton	VII	VI	6	C
Dudley	IX	VII	4	C

Table A.40: Hampshire County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Springfield	I	I	18	A
Northampton	II	I	17	A
Westfield	II	IV	14	A
Hadley	II	V	13	A
Deerfield	II	VI	12	B
Northfield	III	V	12	B
West Springfield	III	V	12	B
Hatfield	II	VI	12	B
Granville	III	VI	11	B
Amherst	IV	V	11	B
Belchertown	V	VII	8	C
South Hadley	VI	VI	8	C
Wilbraham	VI	VI	8	C
South Hampton	VI	VI	8	C
Brimfield	VII	V	8	C
Conway	VI	VII	7	C
Greenfield	VI	VII	7	C
Colerain	VII	VI	7	C
Blandford	VI	VIII	6	C
Sunderland	VII	VII	6	C
Warwick	VII	VII	6	C
Granby	VIII	VI	6	C
Southwick	VIII	VI	6	C
Long Meadow	VI	VIII	6	C
Worthington	VIII	VI	5	C
Pelham	VII	VIII	5	C
Shelburne	VIII	VII	5	C
New Salem	VIII	VII	5	C

Table A.41: Hampshire County, Continued

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Palmer	VIII	VII	5	C
Ludlow	VII	IX	4	C
Whatley	VIII	VIII	4	C
Charlemont	VIII	VIII	4	C
Montague	IX	VII	4	C
Monson	IX	VII	4	C
Chester	IX	VII	4	C
Ashfield	IX	VII	4	C
Cummington	IX	VII	4	C
South Brimfield	IX	VIII	4	C
Ware	VIII	IX	3	C
Williamsburgh	IX	VII	4	C
Chesterfield	IX	VII	4	C
Middlefield	VIII	IX	3	C
Wendell	IX	VIII	3	C
Greenwich	IX	VIII	3	C
Bernardstown	IX	VIII	3	C
Shutesbury	IX	VIII	3	C
West Hampton	IX	VIII	3	C
Holland	IX	VIII	3	C
Norwich	X	VIII	2	C
Rowe	X	VIII	2	C
Leverett	IX	IX	2	C
Goshen	IX	IX	2	C
Orange	IX	IX	2	C
Leyden	X	IX	1	C
Buckland	X	IX	1	C
Heath	X	IX	1	C
Montgomery	X	IX	1	C
Plan. No. 7	X	IX	1	C

Table A.42: Berkshire County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Stockbridge	II	II	16	A
Pittsfield	III	III	14	A
Great Barrington	IV	IV	12	B
Richmond	III	VI	11	B
Sheffield	III	VI	11	B
Lanesboro	III	VI	11	B
Williamstown	V	V	10	B
Sandisfield	V	VI	9	B
Lenox	VIII	IV	8	C
Windsor	VII	VI	6	C
Dalton	V	IX	6	C
Lee	VIII	VII	5	C
Egremont	IX	VI	5	C
Alford	VIII	VII	5	C
New Marlboro	VIII	VII	5	C
Partridgefield	VIII	VII	5	C
Adams	IX	VI	5	C
Becket	IX	VII	4	C
Hancock	IX	VII	4	C
Tyringham	IX	VI	5	C
West Stockbridge	IX	VIII	3	C
Washington	X	VII	3	C
New Ashford	IX	IX	2	C
Loudoun	IX	IX	2	C
Mount Washington	X	IX	1	C

Table A.43: York County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
York	II	V	13	A
Berwick	II	VI	12	B
Pepperelboro	III	VI	11	B
Wells	III	VI	11	B
Kittery	III	VI	11	B
Biddeford	IV	V	11	B
Arundel	IV	VIII	8	C
Sandford	V	VIII	7	C
Buxton	VII	VII	6	C
Coxhall	VII	VIII	5	C
Lebanon	IX	VII	4	C
Fryeburgh	X	VII	3	C
Massebec	X	VII	3	C
Brownfield	IX	IX	2	C
Parsonfield	X	IX	1	C
Limerick	X	IX	1	C
Washington Plan.	X	IX	1	C
Little Falls	X	IX	1	C
Shapleigh	X	IX	1	C
Francisboro Plan.	X	IX	1	C
Little Ossippee	X	IX	1	C

Table A.44: Cumberland County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Falmouth	II	II	16	A
Scarborough	II	VI	12	B
North Yarmouth	IV	VI	10	B
Brunswick	IV	VIII	8	C
Harpswell	IV	VIII	8	C
Cape Elizabeth	V	VIII	7	C
Royalsboro	V	IX	6	C
Gorham	VII	VII	6	C
New Gloucester	IX	V	6	C
Windham	VIII	VIII	4	C
Bridgetown	IX	IX	2	C
Sylvester	VIII	IX	3	C
Pearsontown	IX	IX	2	C
Bakerstown	X	IX	1	C
Gray	X	IX	1	C
Sheppardstown	X	IX	1	C
Otisfield Plan.	X	IX	1	C
Raymondstown	X	IX	1	C

Table A.45: Lincoln County

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
Pownalborough	III	IV	13	A
Hallowell	II	VI	12	B
Georgetown	IV	VI	10	B
Michias	IV	VI	10	B
Boothbay	III	VIII	9	B
Bristol	IV	VIII	8	C
Pittston	IV	VIII	8	C
Bath	IV	IX	7	C
New Castle	IV	VIII	8	C
Waldoborough	V	VIII	7	C
Plan. No. 3(^2)	IV	IX	7	C
Plan. No. 1(^3)	V	IX	6	C
Bowdoinham	VI	VIII	6	C
Deer Island	V	IX	6	C
Edgecomb	VI	IX	5	C
Walpole	VI	IX	5	C
Topsham	VII	VIII	5	C
Woolwich	VII	VIII	5	C
Plan. No. 2(^5)	VI	IX	5	C
Fox Island	VI	IX	5	C
Penobscot Lon I.	VII	IX	4	C
Plan. No. 5(^7)	VII	IX	4	C
Thomastown	VIII	VIII	4	C
Winslow	VIII	VIII	4	C
Winthrop	VIII	VIII	4	C

Table A.46: Lincoln County, Continued

Town	Commercial Decile	Social Category	Total Points	Comm-Cosmo Category
St. George's	VII	IX	4	C
Plan. No. 2(^9)	VII	IX	4	C
Plan. No. 6(^10)	VII	IX	4	C
Plan. No. 6(^11)	VII	IX	4	C
Plan. No. 5(^12)	VII	IX	4	C
Plan. W. Side(^13)	VII	IX	4	C
Meduncock	VII	IX	4	C
Vassalborough	VIII	IX	3	C
Canan	VIII	IX	3	C
Warren	VIII	IX	3	C
Balltown	IX	IX	2	C
Hancock	IX	IX	2	C
Plan. No. 1(^14)	X	IX	1	C
Mount Desert	X	IX	1	C
Plan. No. 22	X	IX	1	C
Belfast	X	IX	1	C
Wales	X	IX	1	C
Norridgewalk	X	IX	1	C
Plan. No. 2(^17)	X	IX	1	C
Camden	X	IX	1	C
Lewiston	X	IX	1	C
Plan. No. 3(^18)	X	IX	1	C
Sterlington	X	IX	1	C
Plan. No. 4(^20)	X	IX	1	C
Plan. No. 4(^21)	X	IX	1	C

Appendix B

Appendix to Chapter 3

B.1 Ocala Demands of 1890

The Ocala Demands were a set of grievances and policy positions held by the Farmer's Alliance. The Ocala Demands served as the basis of the People's Party platform, known commonly as the Omaha Platform.¹

1. We demand the abolition of national banks.
2. We demand that the government shall establish sub-treasuries or depositories in the several states, which shall loan money direct to the people at a low rate of interest, not to exceed two per cent per annum, on non-perishable farm products, and also upon real estate, with proper limitations upon the quantity of land and amount of money.
3. We demand that the amount of the circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than \$50 per capita.
4. We demand that Congress shall pass such laws as will effectually prevent the dealing in futures of all agricultural and mechanical productions; providing a stringent system of procedure in trials that will secure the prompt conviction, and imposing such penalties as shall secure the most perfect compliance with the law.
5. We condemn the silver bill recently passed by Congress, and demand in lieu thereof the free and unlimited coinage of silver.
6. We demand the passage of laws prohibiting alien ownership of land, and that Congress take prompt action to devise some plan to obtain all lands now owned by aliens and foreign syndicates; and that all lands now held by railroads and other corporations in excess of such as is actually used and needed by them be reclaimed by the government and held for actual settlers only.

¹Source information may be found in [Proctor \(1950\)](#).

7. Believing in the doctrine of equal rights to all and special privileges to none, we demand:

- That our national legislation shall be so framed in the future as not to build up one industry at the expense of another.
- We further demand a removal of the existing heavy tariff tax from the necessities of life, that the poor of our land must have.
- We further demand a just and equitable system of graduated tax on incomes.
- We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand that all national and state revenues shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government economically and honestly administered.
- We demand the most rigid, honest and just state and national government control and supervision of the means of public communication and transportation, and if this control and supervision does not remove the abuse now existing, we demand the government ownership of such means of communication and transportation.
- We demand that the Congress of the United States submit an amendment to the Constitution providing for the election of United States Senators by direct vote of the people of each state.

B.2 The Omaha Platform

The Omaha Platform was adopted at the People's Party convention on July 4, 1892. It is the central policy platform of the People's Party and the American Populist movement of the 1890s.²

²Primary source information may be found in *People's Party Platform* (July 5, 1892a), *People's Party Platform* (1893) and *People's Party Platform* (July 9, 1892b). Secondary sources are Pollack (1967, 59-66) and Tindall (1966, 90-96).

NATIONAL PEOPLE'S PARTY PLATFORM

Assembled upon the 116th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the People's Party of America, in their first national convention, invoking upon their action the blessing of Almighty God, put forth in the name and on behalf of the people of this country, the following preamble and declaration of principles:

Preamble

The conditions which surround us best justify our co-operation; we meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot-box, the Legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench. The people are demoralized; most of the States have been compelled to isolate the voters at the polling places to prevent universal intimidation and bribery. The newspapers are largely subsidized or muzzled, public opinion silenced, business prostrated, homes covered with mortgages, labor impoverished, and the land concentrating in the hands of capitalists. The urban workmen are denied the right to organize for self-protection, imported pauperized labor beats down their wages, a hireling standing army, unrecognized by our laws, is established to shoot them down, and they are rapidly degenerating into European conditions. The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of those, in turn, despise the republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes—tramps and millionaires.

The national power to create money is appropriated to enrich bondholders; a vast public debt payable in legal tender currency has been funded into gold-bearing bonds, thereby adding millions to the burdens of the people.

Silver, which has been accepted as coin since the dawn of history, has been demonetized to add to the purchasing power of gold by decreasing the value of all forms of property as well as human labor, and the supply of currency is purposely abridged to fatten usurers,

bankrupt enterprise, and enslave industry. A vast conspiracy against mankind has been organized on two continents, and it is rapidly taking possession of the world. If not met and overthrown at once it forebodes terrible social convulsions, the destruction of civilization, or the establishment of an absolute despotism.

We have witnessed for more than a quarter of a century the struggles of the two great political parties for power and plunder, while grievous wrongs have been inflicted upon the suffering people. We charge that the controlling influences dominating both these parties have permitted the existing dreadful conditions to develop without serious effort to prevent or restrain them. Neither do they now promise us any substantial reform. They have agreed together to ignore, in the coming campaign, every issue but one. They propose to drown the outcries of a plundered people with the uproar of a sham battle over the tariff, so that capitalists, corporations, national banks, rings, trusts, watered stock, the demonetization of silver and the oppressions of the usurers may all be lost sight of. They propose to sacrifice our homes, lives, and children on the altar of mammon; to destroy the multitude in order to secure corruption funds from the millionaires.

Assembled on the anniversary of the birthday of the nation, and filled with the spirit of the grand general and chief who established our independence, we seek to restore the government of the Republic to the hands of "the plain people," with which class it originated. We assert our purposes to be identical with the purposes of the National Constitution; to form a more perfect union and establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity.

We declare that this Republic can only endure as a free government while built upon the love of the whole people for each other and for the nation; that it cannot be pinned together by bayonets; that the civil war is over, and that every passion and resentment which grew out of it must die with it, and that we must be in fact, as we are in name, one united brotherhood of free men.

Our country finds itself confronted by conditions for which there is no precedent in the history of the world; our annual agricultural productions amount to billions of dollars in value, which must, within a few weeks or months, be exchanged for billions of dollars' worth of commodities consumed in their production; the existing currency supply is wholly inadequate to make this exchange; the results are falling prices, the formation of combines and rings, the impoverishment of the producing class. We pledge ourselves that if given power we will labor to correct these evils by wise and reasonable legislation, in accordance with the terms of our platform.

We believe that the power of government—in other words, of the people—should be expanded (as in the case of the postal service) as rapidly and as far as the good sense of an intelligent people and the teachings of experience shall justify, to the end that oppression, injustice, and poverty shall eventually cease in the land.

While our sympathies as a party of reform are naturally upon the side of every proposition which will tend to make men intelligent, virtuous, and temperate, we nevertheless regard these questions, important as they are, as secondary to the great issues now pressing for solution, and upon which not only our individual prosperity but the very existence of free institutions depend; and we ask all men to first help us to determine whether we are to have a republic to administer before we differ as to the conditions upon which it is to be administered, believing that the forces of reform this day organized will never cease to move forward until every wrong is remedied and equal rights and equal privileges securely established for all the men and women of this country.

PLATFORM

We declare, therefore—

First. – That the union of the labor forces of the United States this day consummated shall be permanent and perpetual; may its spirit enter into all hearts for the salvation of the Republic and the uplifting of mankind.

Second. – Wealth belongs to him who creates it, and every dollar taken from industry without an equivalent is robbery. “If any will not work, neither shall he eat.” The interests of rural and civic labor are the same; their enemies are identical.

Third. – We believe that the time has come when the railroad corporations will either own the people or the people must own the railroads, and should the government enter upon the work of owning and managing all railroads, we should favor an amendment to the Constitution by which all persons engaged in the government service shall be placed under a civil-service regulation of the most rigid character, so as to prevent the increase of the power of the national administration by the use of such additional government employes.

FINANCE. – We demand a national currency, safe, sound, and flexible, issued by the general government only, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, and that without the use of banking corporations, a just, equitable, and efficient means of distribution direct to the people, at a tax not to exceed 2 per cent. per annum, to be provided as set forth in the sub-treasury plan of the Farmers’ Alliance, or a better system; also by payments in discharge of its obligations for public improvements.

1. We demand free and unlimited coinage of silver and gold at the present legal ratio of 16 to 1.
2. We demand that the amount of circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than \$50 per capita.
3. We demand a graduated income tax.
4. We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand that all State and national revenues shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government, economically and honestly administered.

5. We demand that postal savings banks be established by the government for the safe deposit of the earnings of the people and to facilitate exchange.

TRANSPORTATION—Transportation being a means of exchange and a public necessity, the government should own and operate the railroads in the interest of the people. The telegraph, telephone, like the post-office system, being a necessity for the transmission of news, should be owned and operated by the government in the interest of the people.

LAND.—The land, including all the natural sources of wealth, is the heritage of the people, and should not be monopolized for speculative purposes, and alien ownership of land should be prohibited. All land now held by railroads and other corporations in excess of their actual needs, and all lands now owned by aliens should be reclaimed by the government and held for actual settlers only.

EXPRESSION OF SENTIMENTS

Your Committee on Platform and Resolutions beg leave unanimously to report the following:

Whereas, Other questions have been presented for our consideration, we hereby submit the following, not as a part of the Platform of the People's Party, but as resolutions expressive of the sentiment of this Convention.

1. RESOLVED, That we demand a free ballot and a fair count in all elections and pledge ourselves to secure it to every legal voter without Federal Intervention, through the adoption by the States of the unperverted Australian or secret ballot system.
2. RESOLVED, That the revenue derived from a graduated income tax should be applied to the reduction of the burden of taxation now levied upon the domestic industries of this country.
3. RESOLVED, That we pledge our support to fair and liberal pensions to ex-Union soldiers and sailors.

4. RESOLVED, That we condemn the fallacy of protecting American labor under the present system, which opens our ports to the pauper and criminal classes of the world and crowds out our wage-earners; and we denounce the present ineffective laws against contract labor, and demand the further restriction of undesirable emigration.
5. RESOLVED, That we cordially sympathize with the efforts of organized workingmen to shorten the hours of labor, and demand a rigid enforcement of the existing eight-hour law on Government work, and ask that a penalty clause be added to the said law.
6. RESOLVED, That we regard the maintenance of a large standing army of mercenaries, known as the Pinkerton system, as a menace to our liberties, and we demand its abolition. . . .
7. RESOLVED, That we commend to the favorable consideration of the people and the reform press the legislative system known as the initiative and referendum.
8. RESOLVED, That we favor a constitutional provision limiting the office of President and Vice-President to one term, and providing for the election of Senators of the United States by a direct vote of the people.
9. RESOLVED, That we oppose any subsidy or national aid to any private corporation for any purpose.
10. RESOLVED, That this convention sympathizes with the Knights of Labor and their righteous contest with the tyrannical combine of clothing manufacturers of Rochester, and declare it to be a duty of all who hate tyranny and oppression to refuse to purchase the goods made by the said manufacturers, or to patronize any merchants who sell such goods.

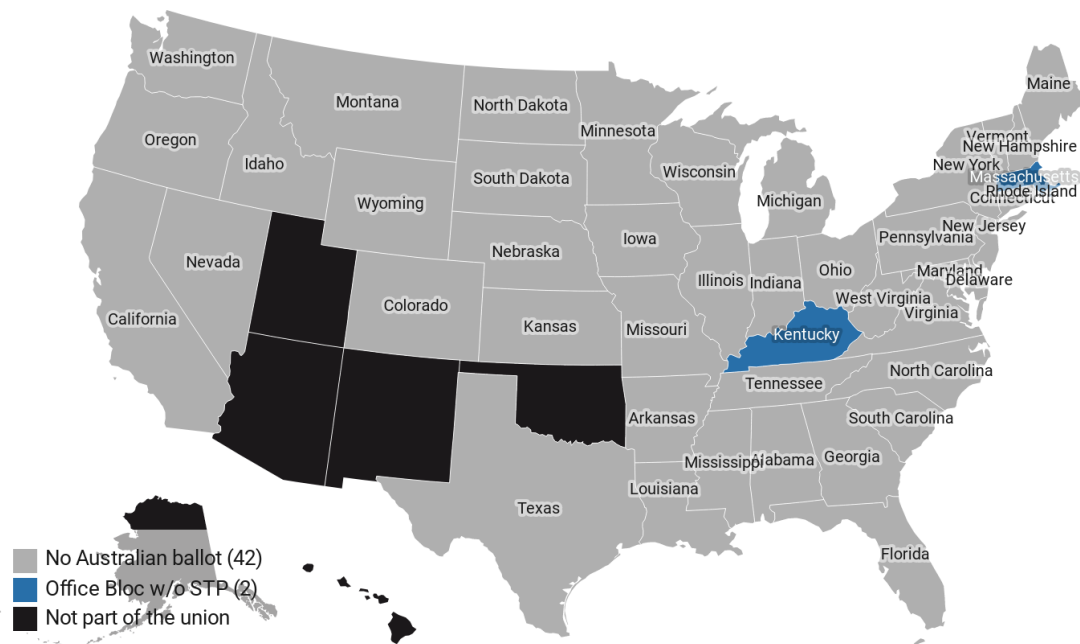
Appendix C

Appendix to Chapter 4

C.1 Change in State Ballot Formats 1888–1910

1

Figure C.1: State Ballot Format in 1888



¹Data and information contained in figure C.1 through figure C.12 is found in Ware (2002, 122-124) and Ludington (1911). I also want to attribute Dr. Scott James, PhD, professor of political science at UCLA, for inspiring me with his own map visualizations.

Legend:

- No Australian ballot (30)
- Party Column w. STP (2)
- Party Column w/o STP (1)
- Office Bloc w. STP (3)
- Office Bloc w/o STP (8)
- Not part of the union

Legend:

- No Australian ballot (11)
- Party Column w. STP (17)
- Party Column w/o STP (1)
- Office Bloc w. STP (3)
- Office Bloc w/o STP (12)
- Not part of the union

Figure C.4: State Ballot Format in 1894

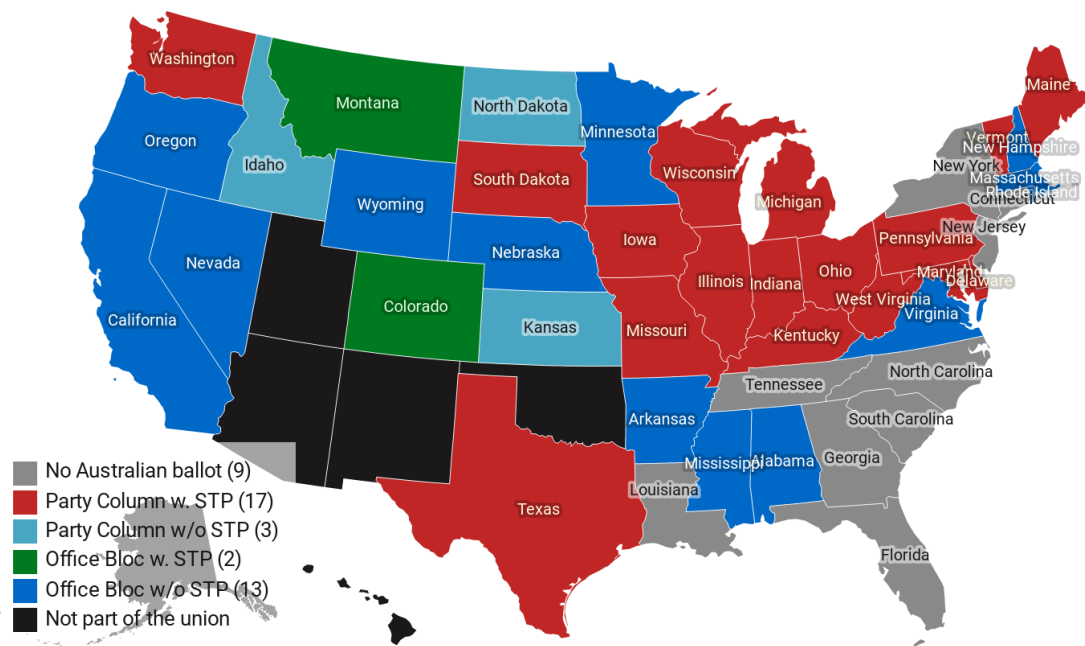


Figure C.5: State Ballot Format in 1896

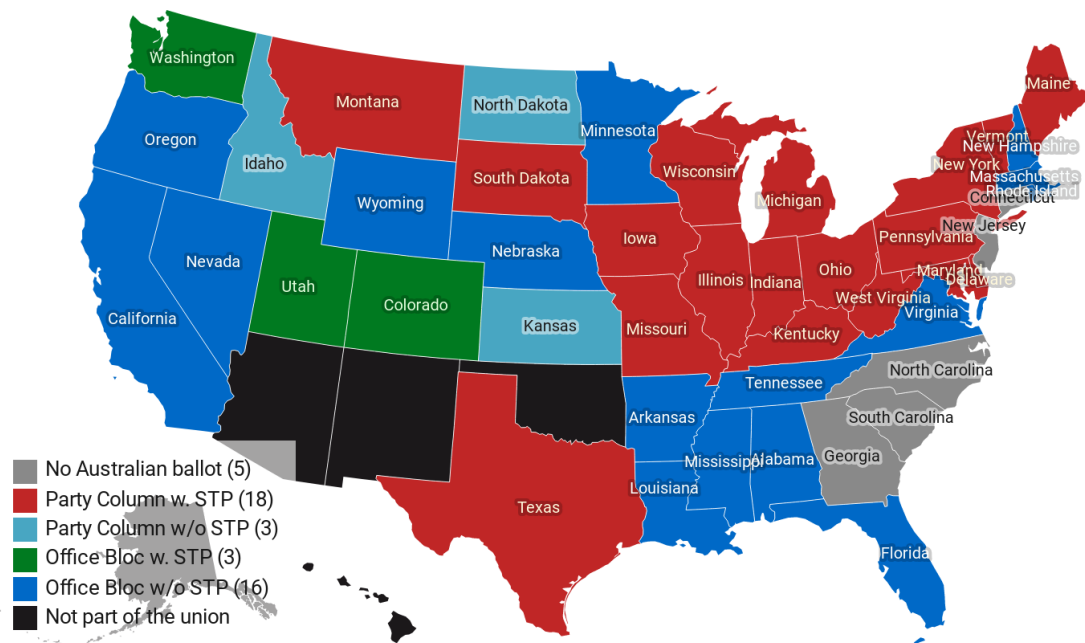


Figure C.6: State Ballot Format in 1898

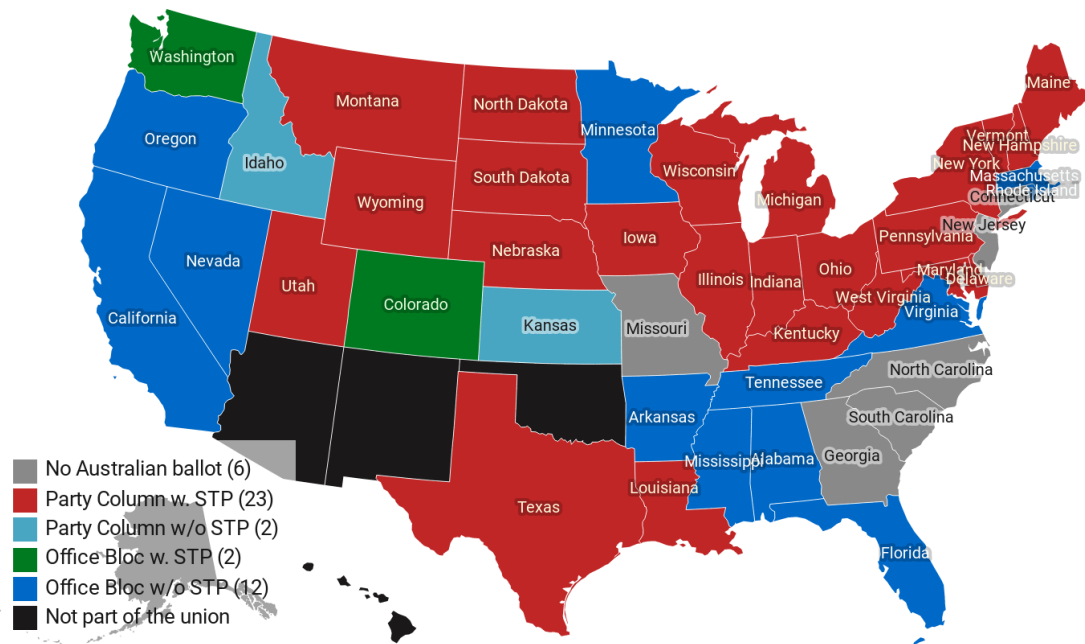


Figure C.7: State Ballot Format in 1900

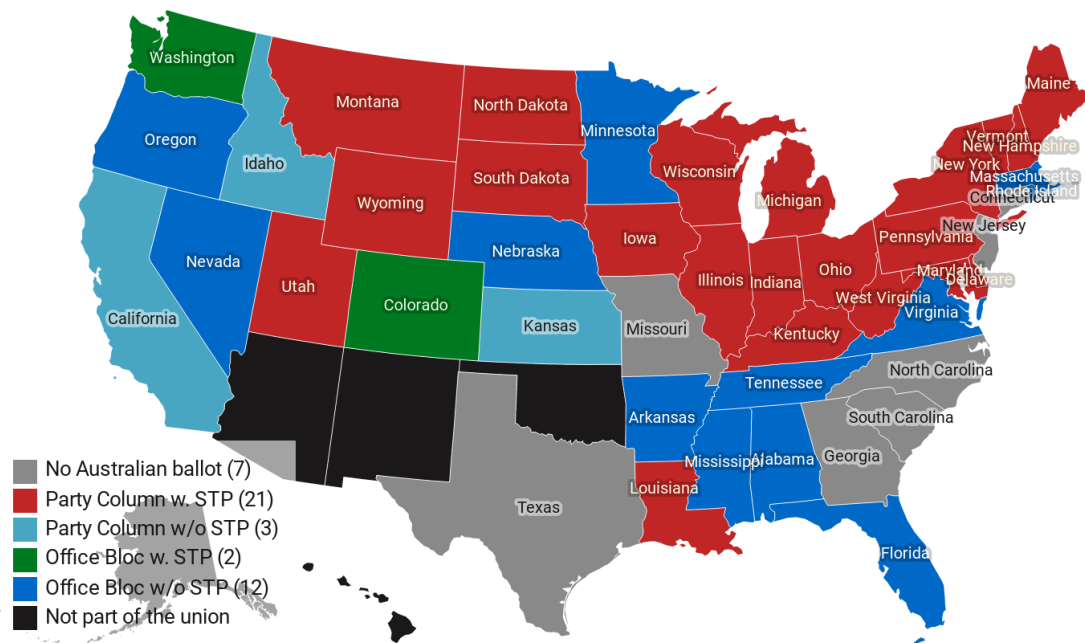


Figure C.8: State Ballot Format in 1902

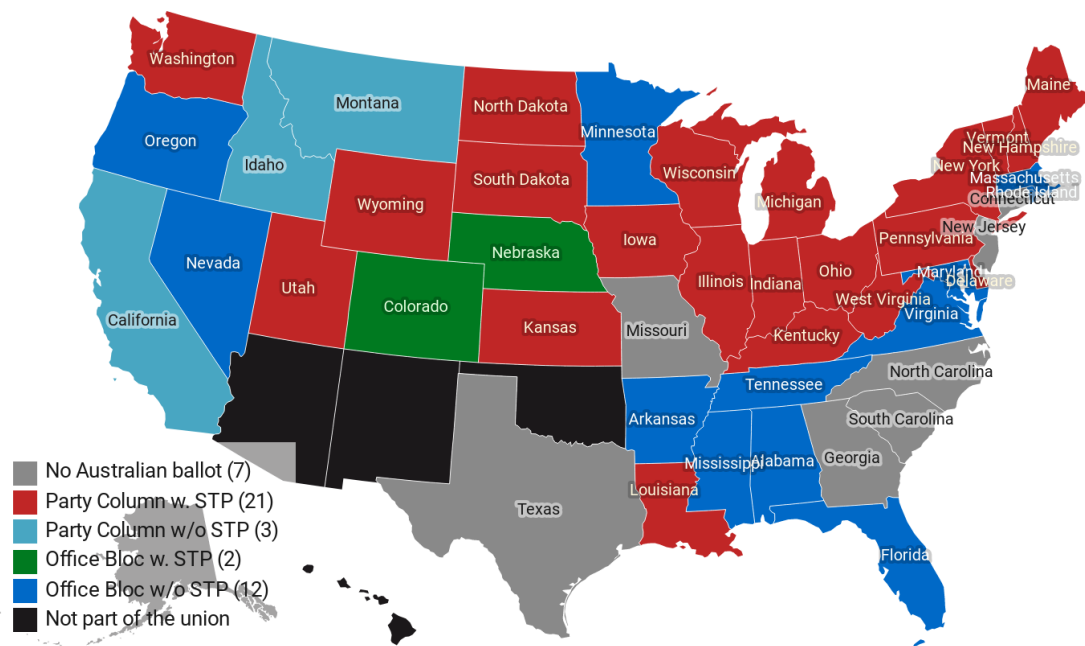


Figure C.9: State Ballot Format in 1904

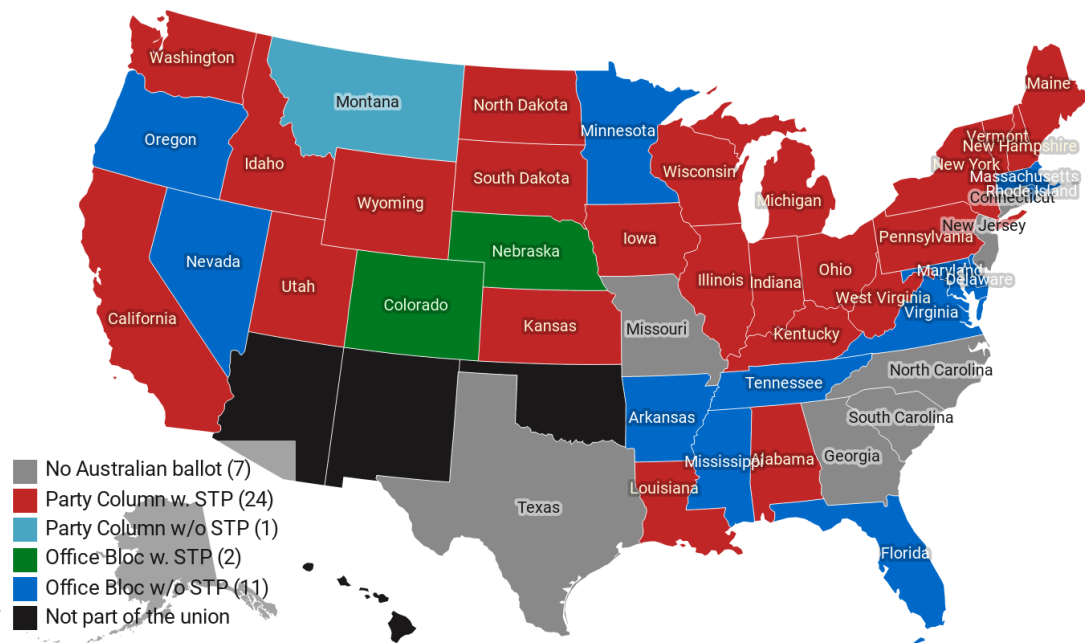


Figure C.10: State Ballot Format in 1906

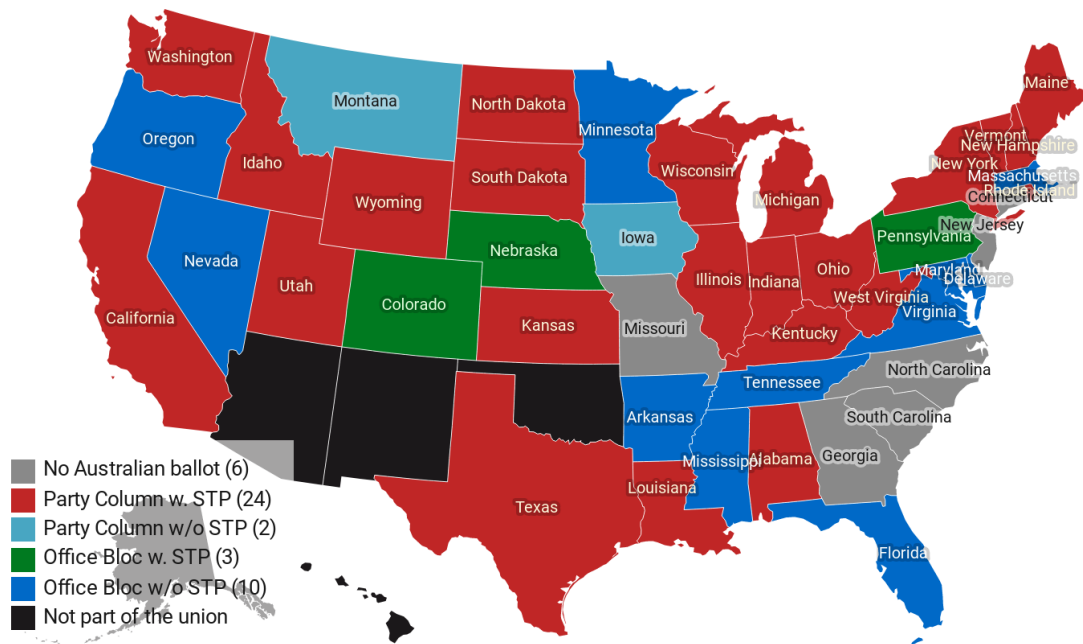


Figure C.11: State Ballot Format in 1908

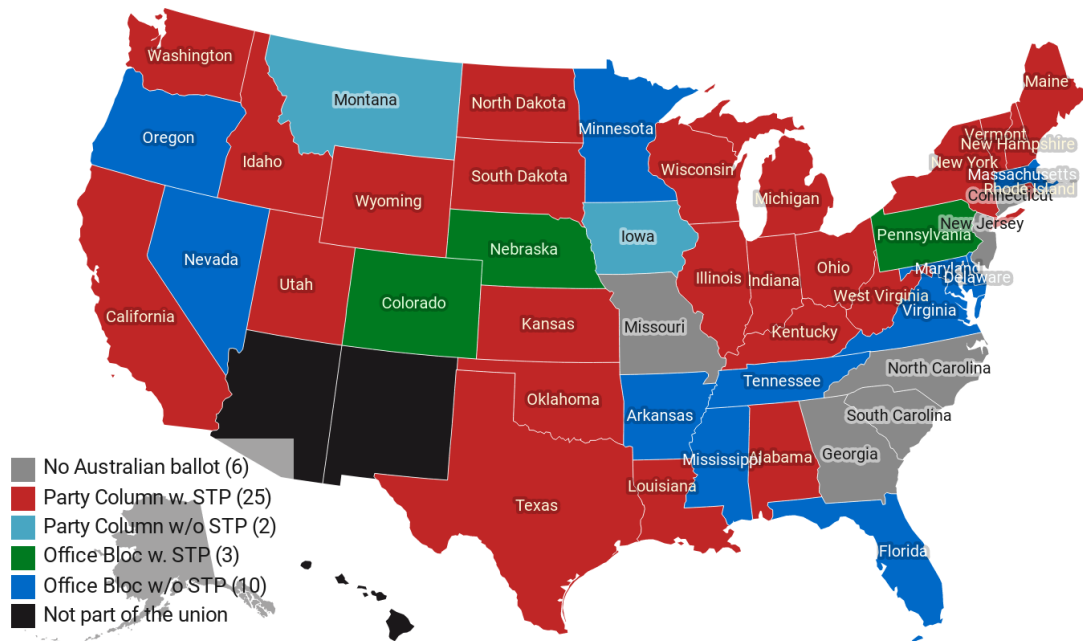
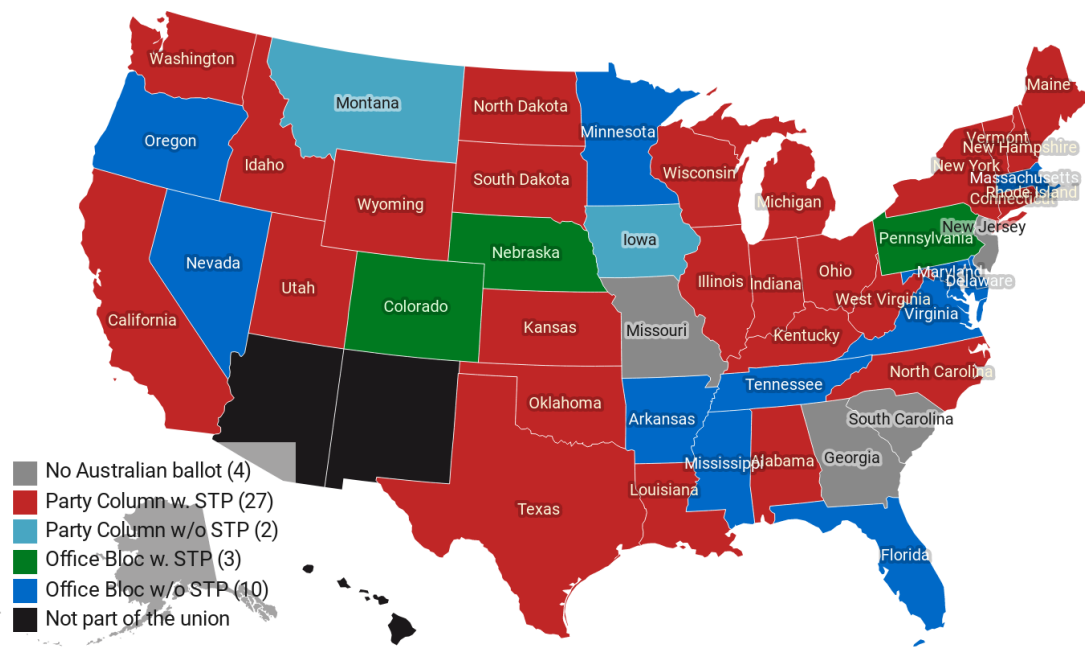


Figure C.12: State Ballot Format in 1910



C.2 Spread of Direct Primary Elections, 1903–1915

Figure C.13: States Adopting Direct Primary Elections, 1903

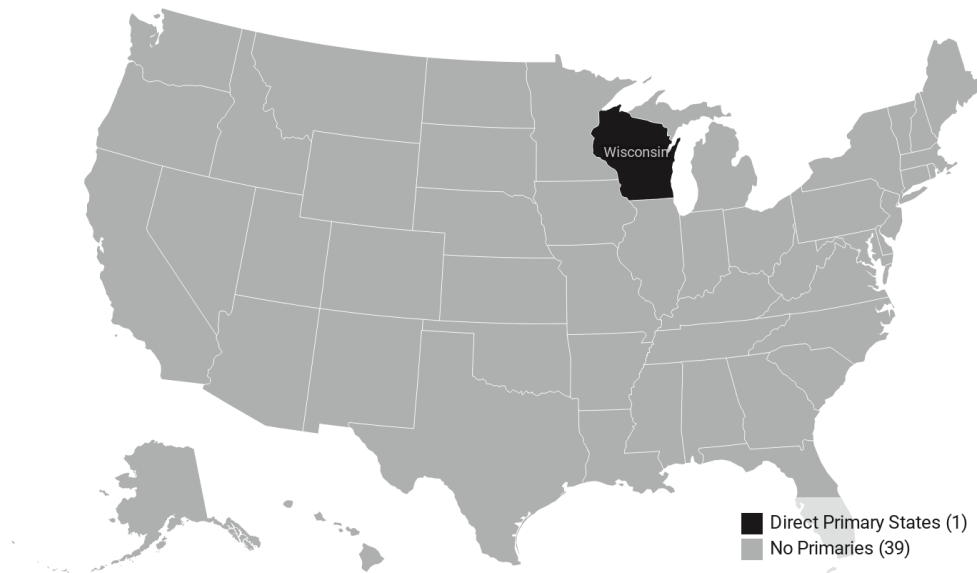


Figure C.14: States Adopting Direct Primary Elections, 1904

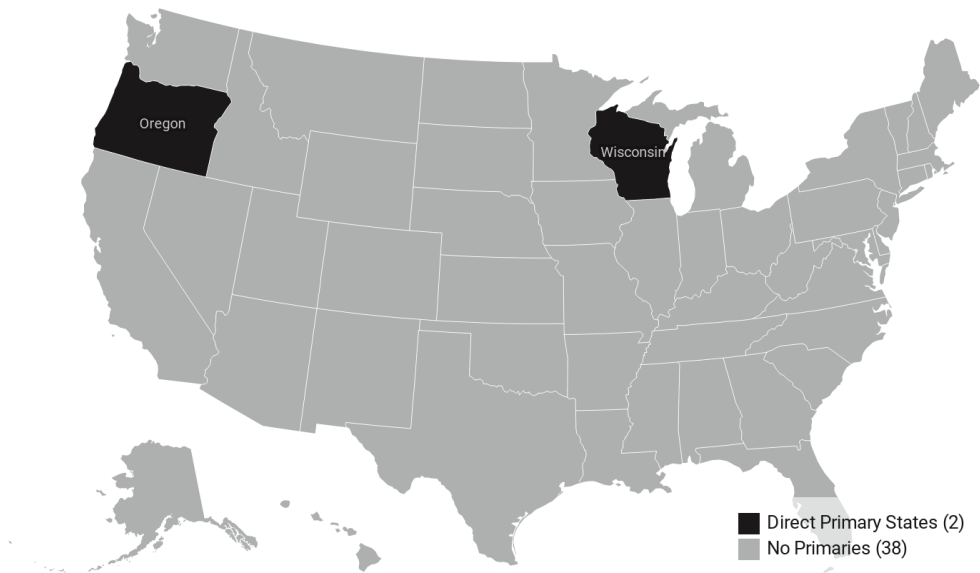


Figure C.15: States Adopting Direct Primary Elections, 1907

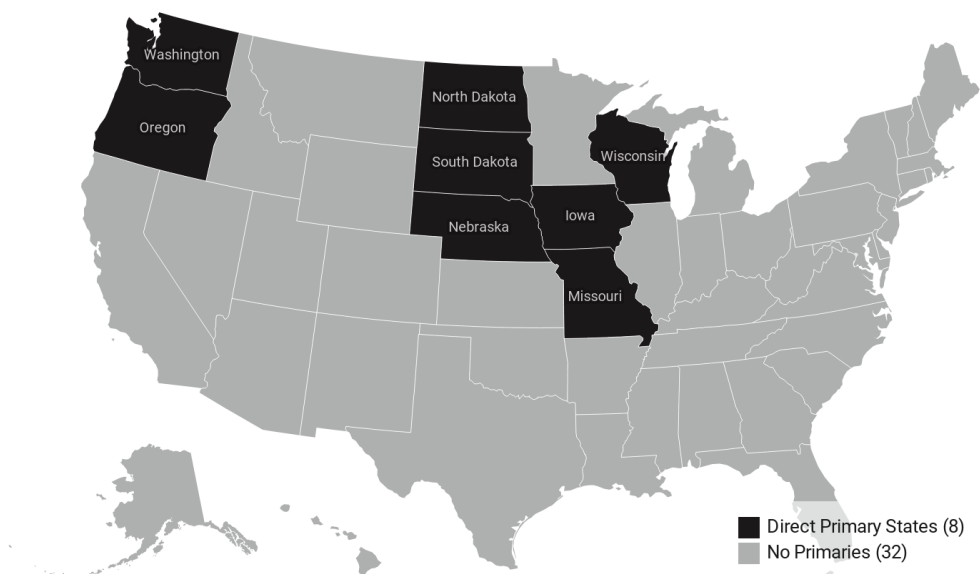


Figure C.16: States Adopting Direct Primary Elections, 1908

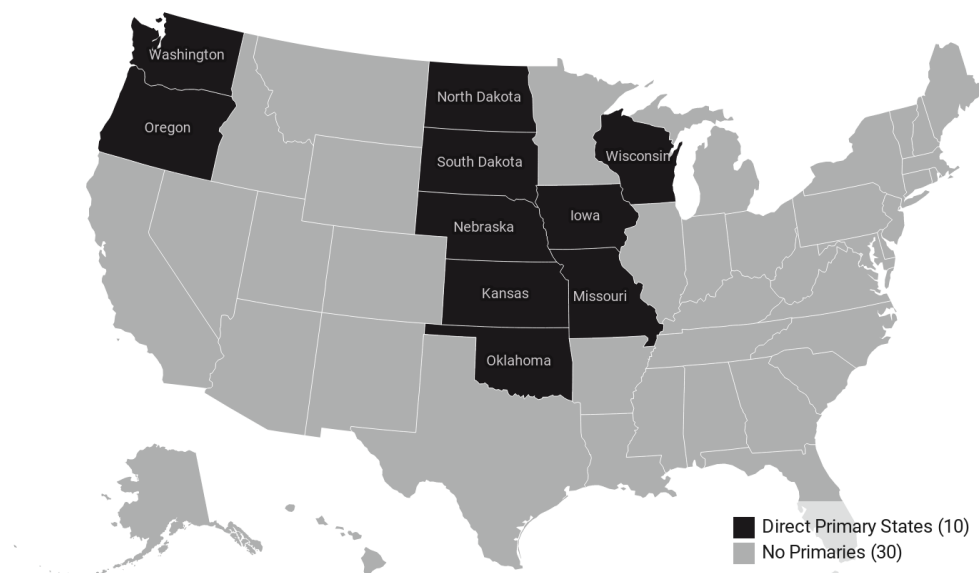


Figure C.17: States Adopting Direct Primary Elections, 1909

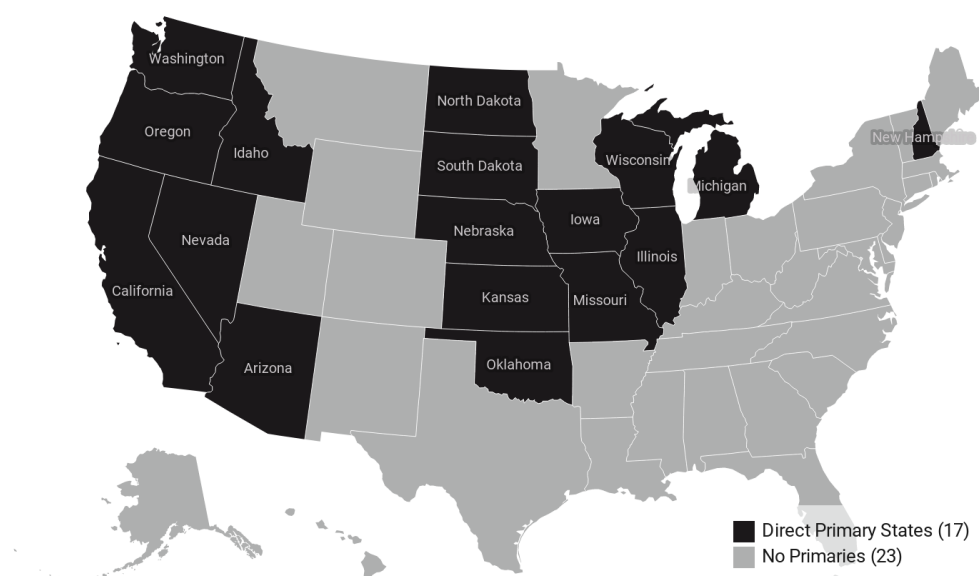


Figure C.18: States Adopting Direct Primary Elections, 1910

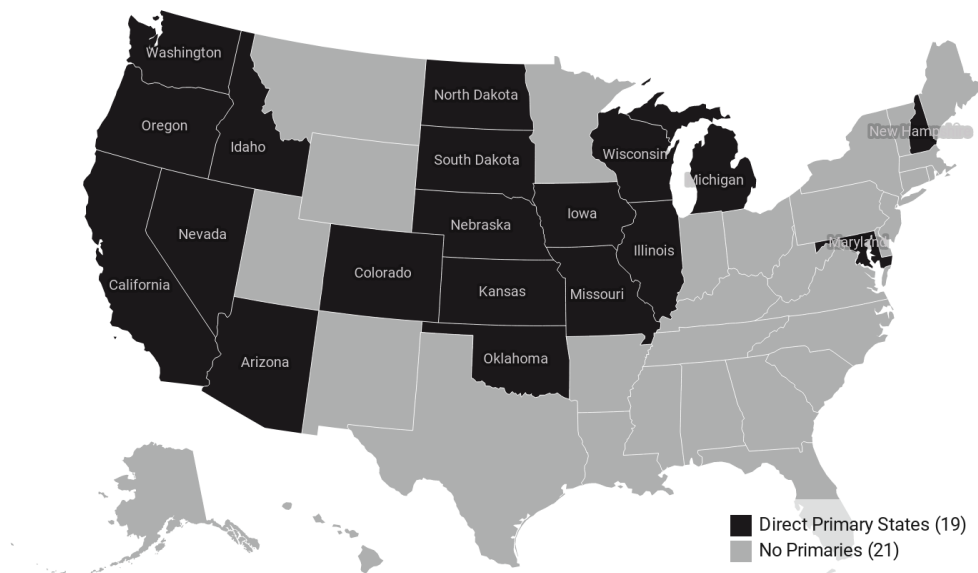


Figure C.19: States Adopting Direct Primary Elections, 1911

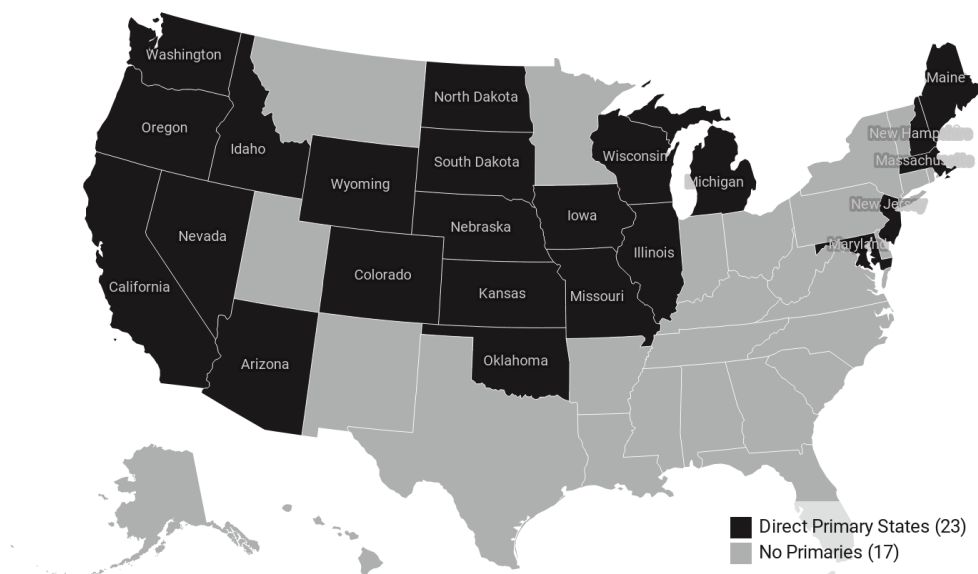


Figure C.20: States Adopting Direct Primary Elections, 1912

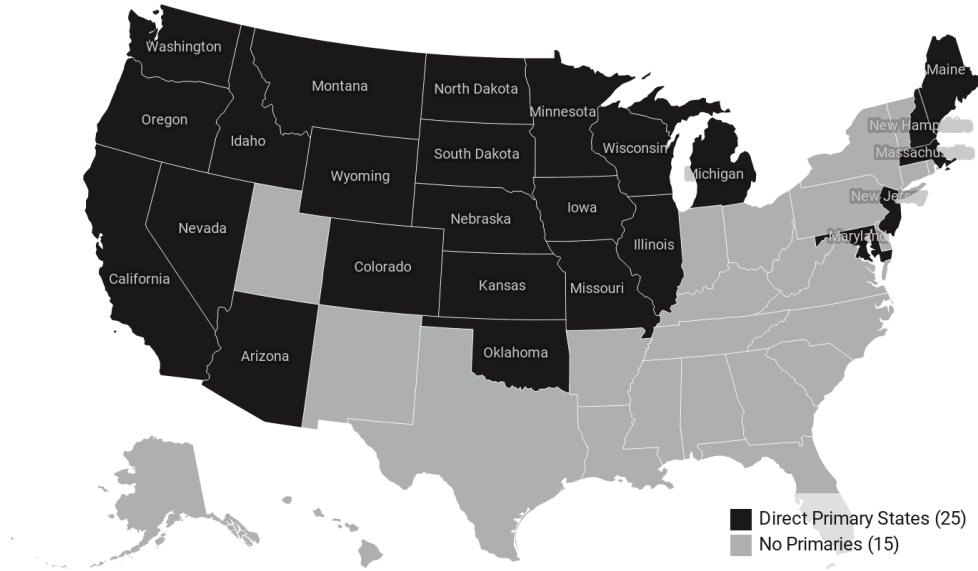


Figure C.21: States Adopting Direct Primary Elections, 1913

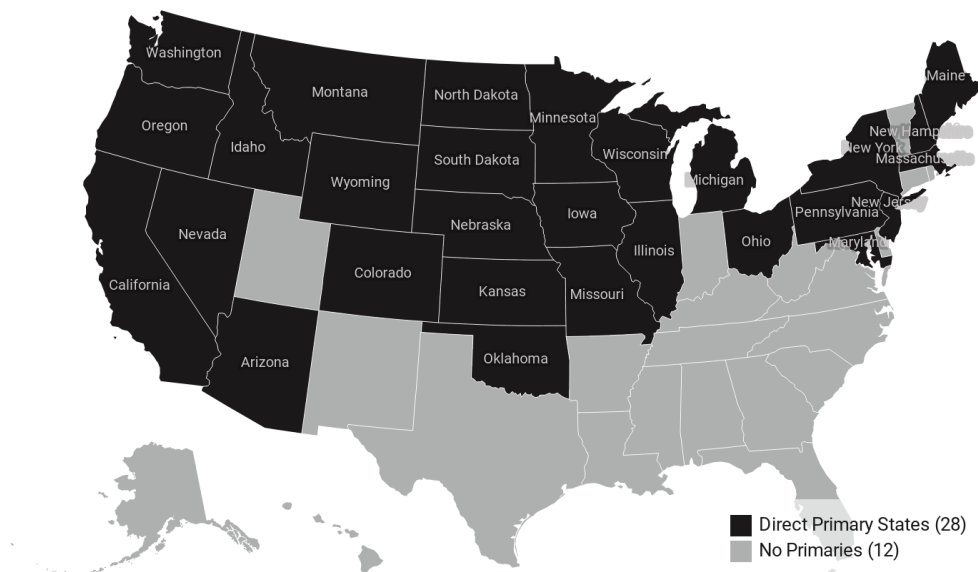
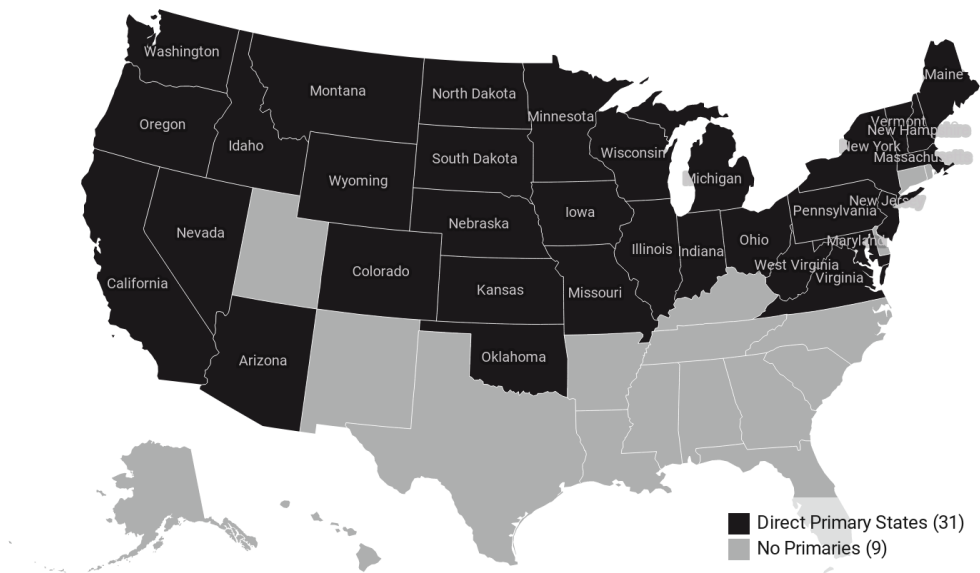


Figure C.22: States Adopting Direct Primary Elections, 1915



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