

The 1920 Congressional Election:
A Study of Sectionalism in American Politics

By

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Abstract: This paper examines the 1920 congressional election. The 1920 election is characterized by a distinct sectional separation. In order to understand this polarization every election from 1912 to 1920 was analyzed. A historical pretext lays the foundation, and the election analyses discuss the many variables responsible for the election's outcome. This creates a unique perspective because it includes not only the historical political information, but geographic variables factor in as well. By looking at the House of Representatives elections the geographical variations in ideology surface, and a thorough record and explanation of the nation's contemporary sentiments accompanies those results.

I. Introduction

“Of all threats to national integration, sectional stress is the most serious. By dividing a nation into two or more cohesive regions with incompatible political goals, sectional stress carries with it the possibility of secession. The disruption of national ties is the clearest solution for a region which consistently loses its battles within a sectionally polarized nation” (Bensel, 3).

Politics gauges the nation’s emotional current. Studying an era’s politics reveals popular sentiment towards a wide range of issues. No other method accurately reflects the divisions prevalent in American politics. Each region’s desire to benefit from controlling the national agenda divides our nation into a political battleground. This tumultuous phenomenon, sectionalism, affects major political battles and alterations. The United States House of Representatives, characterized by sectional influences, provides a battleground for regional discord.

Sectionalism, by definition, means excessive devotion to local interests and customs. The tension between regions over such interests and customs does not separate the U.S. from other nations with popularly elected legislative bodies and leaders, but our political system possesses unique qualities. Sectionalism spreads further to other issues as well, including but certainly not limited to religion, taxes, subsidies, ecology, and civil rights. Thus, these regions with different concerns and loyalties constantly clash for national control.

The 1920 congressional election, as a study of sectionalism in American politics, provides a glance into the prominent issues of the era. The United States experienced a

transition in the years leading up to 1920 due to technological and industrial advancements. Sectionalism based solely on lingering post-Civil War resentment ceased. Social, economic, and political ideology differences now complicated sectional diversity. The cumulated contrasts exploded into a profound North/South alignment.¹ The congressional elections from 1912 to 1920 describe to what extent sectional issues divided the American electorate. This analysis of the 1920 election will enumerate the historical, political, and geographical variables behind this pattern.

II. Politics

Republicans, Civil War, and Reconstruction

To fully analyze the 1920 Congressional election, the politics leading up to the era are critical. The mid-1850s serve as a starting point to trace the roots of sectionalism. This period witnessed the creation of the Republican Party and the bloodiest war in American history, the Civil War.

❖ *The New Party*

The Republican Party formed in 1854. It was not the first American political party to bear the name “Republican,” but definitely the longest lasting and most prominent.² Previously the Whig Party mounted the strongest opposition to the Democrats, but never established an identity with national programs (Burdette, 9). Other third parties such as the Free-Soilists, and the Know-Nothings eventually merged with the Republican Party. Northern Democrats joined in opposing the extension of slavery into the western territories.

The party formed amidst the controversy of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The Act created the states of Kansas and Nebraska west of Missouri and Iowa, and divided them by the 40th parallel. It repealed the provision of the Missouri Compromise of 1820 that prohibited slavery in territories north of 36° 30'. Senator Stephen Douglas strongly supported the Act that instituted “popular sovereignty” and spawned the political turmoil responsible for the Republican Party’s formation and a dramatic loss of support for current president, Franklin Pierce.³

Interestingly the Kansas-Nebraska Act revitalized the waning political interest of future Republican Party leader and Douglas opponent Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln, like many others, did not rush to the party, “Leading antislavery Whigs of the North, despite their differences with slave-holding Whigs of the South, were understandably reluctant to dismantle their party

organizations or to risk their political future upon an uncertain tide” (Burdette, 11). Lincoln even avoided the Illinois Republican Convention in 1854 stating: “I suppose my opposition to the principle of slavery is as strong as that of any member of the Republican party; but I had also supposed that the extent to which I feel authorized to carry that opposition, practically, was not at all satisfactory to that party” (Burdette, 9). By 1856, Lincoln fully supported the party and delivered the main address at the state convention in Bloomington.

The Democrats retained the presidency in 1856 with James Buchanan. Buchanan avoided the controversy of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and supported compromise that gained him the support of southern Democrats. He won on the support of the southern Democrats and his home state Pennsylvania, then the second largest in the Union with 27 electoral votes. The Know-Nothing American Party candidate, 13th President Millard Fillmore, stole votes from the stronger Republican candidate John C. Frémont. The newly organized Republican Party had difficulty raising money and campaigning against the superbly organized and well-financed Democratic Party, yet still captured 114 electoral votes versus 178 for Buchanan (Burdette, 22). The Republican Party’s surprising strength set the stage for the 1860 election and Republican dominance.

The Panic of 1857, a short but severe depression, shaped Buchanan’s administration. The South escaped the Panic of 1857 virtually unscathed; convincing Southerners of the superiority of their slave based economy. The North and West suffered the most with the economy slowing dramatically. The blame fell upon cheap imports due to tariff reductions towards the end of Pierce’s administration (Burdette, 24). The West became increasingly dependent on the Northeast, especially with the construction of transcontinental railroads. The South regarded higher tariffs and internal improvements for Western shippers as sectional benefits, with them

the Republican Party could build alliances crucial for future success (Burdette, 25). The growing agricultural and economic ties between the North and West play an important role in the sectional politics of the 1920 Congressional Election.⁴

Lincoln's rising popularity made him the rational Republican candidate for president. The Democrats amidst the confusion of secession split into multiple nominations: Stephen Douglas, John C. Breckinridge, and John Bell.⁵ Lincoln did not receive a majority of the popular vote, but 15 of the 17 states he carried by clear majority possessed enough electoral votes to win (Burdette, 30). Lincoln's election created a bleak picture for the South, destroying hope for the preservation of their way of life. Soon after South Carolina learned of Lincoln's election, they decided to secede and Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas followed respectively.

❖ *Lincoln and the War*

When Lincoln took office he inherited the dilemma of Southern secession, which Buchanan did little to solve. He maintained a firm stance that the South could not constitutionally secede, and the South prepared for war. On April 12, 1861 the Confederacy fired on Fort Sumter and eventually took the fort and the Civil War began. Both sides set in for war and amassed large war chests and standing armies.

The Confederacy proved to be a difficult opponent for the Union. A turning point in the war is the Battle of Antietam, where a Union victory and General Lee's loss of 1/3 of his soldiers ended his plans of a northern invasion. Lincoln's original intentions of the Civil War restoring the Union began to succumb to internal pressure from Radical Republicans wanting slavery abolished. In abolition, Lincoln saw a strategic opportunity to prevent Great Britain and France from supporting the Confederacy.⁶ Northern support for abolition continued to grow and on July

22, 1862 Lincoln disclosed to his cabinet his intentions to abolish slavery but opted to wait until a surge in Union strength . Antietam served this purpose, and on January 1, 1863 he issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

In 1864 the Radical Republicans sought a more stringent candidate, but could not discount Lincoln's strength. The Radicals presented Lincoln with problems in three areas: the conduction of the war, the abolition of slavery, and the reconstruction of the South. Lincoln even doubted his own re-election possibilities, but did not foresee the string of Union victories (Burdette, 32). He regained Union support and recaptured the presidency.

The surrender at Appomatox on April 9, 1865 ended the Civil War in Virginia. In the following days John Wilkes Booth assassinated Lincoln. The grief surrounding Lincoln's death led the North to be harsh on the conquered Confederacy. The remaining Southern armies successively surrendered to the Union.

❖ *Reconstruction*

The question now before the Union was how to deal with the South. President Lincoln did not hold the open hostility towards the South that the Radicals did. However, the Congressional Election of 1866 boosted the number of Radical Republicans in Congress and intensified the hostility towards the South. Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson continued Lincoln's policy of leniency. The Radical Republicans in Congress attempted to impeach Johnson.

The debate over Reconstruction lasted from 1865 to 1877 when the Southern states tacitly conceded power to the national government in return for the ability to rule their states with minimal interference. Northerners, more specifically Republicans, desired to reconstruct the South into a society based upon free labor and equal rights guaranteed by the Constitution of

the United States. The key to restoring the Southern states fell upon the acceptance of the 14th and 15th Amendments.

The Reconstruction's lasting effects lie in the dominance of the Democratic Party in the South. This phenomenon of the Solid South stems from Southern hatred for the North and the Republican Party following the Civil War and Reconstruction. The South continued to mistrust the federal government and the Republican Party whose dominance pursued for decades. This gave rise to sectionalism. The opposition of regions, in this case the North and South, continues to play a role in party politics even today.

❖ *Mountain Republicans*

One exception to the rule of the Solid South is the mountain Republicans. In certain mountainous areas of western Virginia, eastern Kentucky, eastern Tennessee, and western North Carolina exists Republican districts as solid as the rest of the South is Democratic.⁷ V.O. Key describes the mountain Republicans as steadfast opponents of the lowland planters and their slave based economy.⁸ They had no use for slaves, and therefore disagreed with secession and war. Confederate armies came to the people and gave them an ultimatum to fight for the Confederacy or die. The mountain Republicans vote in protest to the Democrats.

Realignments

Periodically in politics, major shifts in the electorate alter history's path. These shifts represent significant deviations in the course of American electoral politics. First discussed as "Critical Elections" by V.O. Key, realignment refers to deviations in established voting patterns due to shifts in party identification.⁹ Therefore, a thorough explanation of the 1920 congressional election would not be complete without a discussion of realignment. Although

more realignment eras exist than are discussed, only the realignments of the 1850s, 1894- 1896, and 1932 pertain to the 1920 congressional election.¹⁰

❖ *The Nature of Realignments*

No two authorities are more impressive on realignment and critical elections than Walter Dean Burnham and James L. Sundquist. In their analyses of critical elections and realignment both argue the similar theories, synthesized here for a foundation of discussion. At the onset, it is important to point out that realignments must be separated from both pattern-breaking elections and gradual secular realignments (Burnham, 6). Pattern-breaking elections, including the landslides of the 1920 elections, and gradual secular realignments do not constitute the mobilization of the mass base in contrast to realigning eras. Critical realignments are typically associated with severe disruptions in normal voting patterns (Cortez, 6). Accompanying these disruptions are ideological polarizations and increased distances in salient issues usually spurred by third-party movement. Burnham and Sundquist further believe that realignments are constituent based acts. In America's two-party system, parties function as aggregators of an adverse, heterogeneous population. Realignments arise as issue-oriented, policy-shaping phenomena.

❖ *1850's*

The previous section outlines much of the issues surrounding the realignment of the 1850s. The Kansas-Nebraska Act divided the American electorate by destroying the Missouri Compromise. Franklin Pierce's Democratic administration relied on party allegiance for its' passage. Many northern Democrats defected and voted against the bill. Northern Democrats protested their party's compromises with slavery. The cleavage between northern and southern

Whigs deepened over the issue.¹¹ Siding with them were the remaining Free-Soilists (Sundquist, 75). Three regional based parties now existed with a principle strong enough for solidarity.

The Republican Party's creation stood on a single nation-dividing issue. The Whigs and Democrats were once separated by domestic economic policy and slavery split the parties within. Now slavery united the parties, and economic policy took a backseat with a centrist approach (Sundquist, 79). Republican strength originated in the Midwest and grew to the East, gradually overtaking large cities. Many northern Democrat, Whig and Free Soil leaders soon became Republican leaders. The sectional nature of the 1920 Congressional election is rooted in the Republican Party's sectional genesis and the Democratic Party's sectional vigilance.

❖ *1894-1896*

The 1894-1896 realignment can be attributed to two factors, the radicalization of the Democratic party and the 1893 depression. Since the Civil War, both parties battled on the slavery and reconstruction cleavages lingering from the era. However, the 1896 realignment witnessed the reemergence of the economic issues that separated the Whigs and Democrats prior to the 1850's.

The agrarian revolt reflected the economic conditions for farmers in the South, Midwest, and West. In 1893, for the first time the Senate published the commodities price index depicting the problem (Sundquist, 138). To the farmers the problem was simple, not enough money existed. The government had failed to upgrade output of gold to keep up with the economy. The Republicans, primarily in the industrial centers of the Northeast, viewed the maintenance of the gold dollar as the top priority. The issue soon became the main platform of both parties, superceding the previous Civil War related issues.

In 1890 the Republicans compromised on the Sherman Silver Purchase Act.¹² The Republican strategy was two-fold, to preempt a free coinage measure and to win western Republican support for a tariff proposal (Sundquist, 141).¹³ The reaction to the tariff proposal contributed to the Democratic landslide in 1890. More importantly, the Silver Purchase Act did little to ease economic stresses. Business and financial leaders in the East looked toward Grover Cleveland, who took a stand against free silver (Sundquist, 142-3). Cleveland's stance further split the party and by 1892 the country's economic condition worsened. Conservatives blamed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act and Cleveland agreed, while the South and West considered the Northeast blaming the Act a selfish motive to further reduce currency (Mayer, 240). To the silverites, Cleveland became a Wall Street puppet.

The vote to repeal the Sherman Silver Purchase Act reflected the separation in the party. Cleveland managed to regain eastern and midwestern supporters who jumped to free silver (Sundquist, 147). The repeal failed to strengthen, or even stabilize the economy. Discontent with the Democrats over the depression and coupled with a shattered party without leaders, the midterm election of 1894 produced a large Republican victory.¹⁴

The Democratic Party soon became predominantly free silver. The Populists were absorbed as the party adopted far more radical stances. The party's radicalization beckoned calls of communism, anarchy, and lawlessness (Sundquist, 155-6). The presidential election of 1896 would be a political battleground for the new platforms dividing the parties. McKinley began to gain support for his tariff policies. The financial powers that once supported Cleveland reverted to the safer Republicans. Incredulous fundraising combined with a highly organized campaign of coercion awarded a Republican presidential and congressional victory (Sundquist, 156-8).¹⁵

❖ 1932

The 1932 realignment, although following the 1920 election, is considered one of the critical elections. Soon after Harding took office in 1928, a serious economic downturn struck the nation. Much like the Democrats in 1896, economic turmoil led to splits within the majority party. Democrats, and eventually a large segment of the electorate, regularly blamed Republicans for the struggling economy. The midterm election of 1930 was not as severe as Democrats wished (Burdette, 89). However, by the 1932 election, a contempt for the Republicans and the president resulted in heavy Republican losses and an electorate exodus to the Democrats.

Pre-WWI

After taking a brief look at the Civil War era leading up to the turn of the century, the groundwork for analyzing the 1920 election is present. The Civil War era realignment along with the Republican Party's formation begins sectional politics. The deep North-South chasm from the Civil War endured to the end of the century. The 1894-1896 realignment firmly reestablished the Republicans and transformed party politics away from the antebellum issues back into the economic based politics.¹⁶ However, prior to examining the 1920 election and the four preceding elections, the period from 1900 to 1912 deserves further study.

Referring to this section as "Pre-WWI" may seem premature because the First World War did not begin until 1914 and the United States did not enter until 1917. The reasoning lies in the basis that WWI was a seminal factor in the outcome of the 1920 election. Therefore, the factors leading up to WWI must be considered as separate although they may overlap during the discussion of later elections.

❖ *Return to Party Politics*

The turn of the century witnessed the rise of the industrial revolution in the United States. The Ford Motor Company organized and the U.S Steel Corporation formed.¹⁷ Along with the rise of industrial capitalism, labor and social movements began. The 1900 election was a replay of 1896, with McKinley defeating Bryan. This time McKinley selected Theodore Roosevelt as his vice president, who succeeded McKinley after his assassination in 1901.¹⁸ Reminiscent of political ideologies today, the Republican Party gained favor by supporting economic prosperity and international power. Their Democratic counterparts supported anti-trust legislation, banking regulations, and relief for farmers and laborers.

In 1904 Roosevelt regained the Republican nomination and won the presidency.¹⁹ Republicans maintained control of Congress, which they did until 1910. Roosevelt's progressive platform included pushing the Pure Food and Drugs Act and the Hepburn Act of 1907.²⁰ Roosevelt desired to keep large corporations intact and regulate them with a strong executive branch preserving public interest. Similar was his foreign policy views, he preferred advanced nations such as the United States and England to police foreign affairs (Buenker and Kantowicz, 406).

❖ *Taft & Tariffs*

Roosevelt opted to forego a third term. He chose a successor, William Howard Taft, his Secretary of War. The Democrats once again nominated William Jennings Bryan. Taft won the presidency, but with not as large a margin as Roosevelt had previously.²¹ The Republicans dropped seats in the House of Representatives, leaving them with a 219 to 172 majority in 1908 compared to a 251 to 135 majority in 1904.²²

Taft was more conservative than Roosevelt. He may have agreed with Roosevelt's progressive policies, but did not employ the same methods. The Payne-Aldrich Act revising tariffs undoubtedly controlled politics in the beginning of Taft's term. Taft, like other Republicans, promised tariff revisions due to inflationary fears. Congressmen faced a dilemma. They must gain sectional benefits for popularity. A harsh battle ensued.

The Democrats, mostly from the South and West, wanted increased rates on some raw materials such as cotton and wool to protect their agrarian economies. Republicans, strongest in the industrial Northeast, desired protectionist tariffs to continue export dominance and economic efficiency. Progressives in both parties sought to decrease tariffs.²³ Republican Speaker Joe Canon called the insurgent progressives traitors (Mayer, 312).²⁴ The progressives threatened to split the party if Taft did not veto the act.

Taft stood strong against opposition from all sides and secured reductions on items he thought to be important to consumers. Taft struggled to keep his promise of tariff revision (Mayer, 311).²⁵ The revisions were not enough and popular anger against tariffs grew. Taft's unprepared quotation of the Payne-Aldrich Act as the best ever passed by the Republican Party coupled with his misperceived alliance with Speaker Canon led the progressive insurgents to declare all out war on the administration (Mayer, 312).

❖ *Roosevelt, Republicans, & Rifts*

Roosevelt began to sponsor progressive candidates in the mid-term election in 1910. Similar to the Democratic dilemma of keeping the party united under one umbrella in the 1890s and 1900s, the Republican Party began to fraction. Republicans and progressives split the same vote, and in 1910 the Democrats captured the House by a 230 to 162 advantage.²⁶ Taft pushed through more progressive legislation in four years than Roosevelt did in seven.²⁷ Taft's

legislative accomplishments indicate a strong public support for progressive ideals. These ideals undoubtedly meshed with Democratic platforms given the elevated Democratic success level in the early 1910s.

III. Elections

The following section breaks the period of analysis (congressional elections from 1912 to 1920) into individual elections. This serves a dual purpose. First, it presents a clear chronological order up to the 1920 election. For each election, the results and effects will be examined. This includes winners, losers, and important legislation and political events. Second, the development of sectional issue salience will also support the conclusions about the 1920 election. Every election represents a crucial piece to the puzzle.

1912

Campaigning for the 1912 election started right after the 1910 election. A decisive victory for the Democrats and progressives pushed the Republicans into an unexpected position of minority. Although the 1910 election may appear to realign the electorate, Burnham considers it a deviating election. The increasing stability of the Democratic Party after its' interior squabble over silver, along with a deepening chasm within the Republican ranks set the stage for an interesting election in 1912. The nation witnessed the first Democratic president in 16 years and the formation of the strongest third-party to challenge the traditional two-party system in nearly 60 years.²⁸

❖ *Bull Moose Progressives*

As earlier discussed, the issue of tariff revision plagued Taft's presidency. He angered many Republicans in the agrarian regions of the Midwest and West with his support for the conservatives within the party. Farmers and miners mainly composed the West and Midwest constituency. They opposed reductions in tariffs that devalued their crops and raw materials. He raised rates on certain materials to gain Southern votes in Congress, but lowered rates for

Midwestern and Western materials.²⁹ As the progressive votes in the West and Midwest began to slip away, he turned to conservative allies.³⁰

In the second half of his presidency, Taft persuaded a special session of Congress to pass a trade reciprocity agreement with Canada. Farmers in the Midwest opposed the agreement reducing tariffs on agricultural commodities. The Democrats joined Northeast Republicans in support claiming quicker annexation of Canada.³¹ Unfortunately for Taft the Canadian government rejected the proposal and Taft's popularity plummeted (Burdette, 72). The Democrats coveted any issue that would further split the Republicans. They acquired the unique ability to avoid difficult stances on divisive issues as the Republicans marched on their self-destructive path.

The progressive insurgents' discontent with Taft brought them to the search for a new candidate. Roosevelt's support for progressive candidates and his disapproval for Taft made him the obvious choice. The Republican National Convention in Chicago in June received criticism from Roosevelt for improperly chosen delegates that supported Taft. When Taft's nomination became certain, Roosevelt advised many of his supporting delegates to not vote (Burdette, 74). On June, 22, as Taft was being renominated Roosevelt urged his supporters to bolt from the party. He claimed that evening he felt like a "bull moose" (Burdette, 74). They reconvened in Chicago from August 5-7 and formed the Progressive Party, otherwise known as the Bull Moose Party.

❖ *The Election*

The Democrat nomination went to New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson over House Speaker James "Champ" Clark of Missouri. Wilson progressive tendencies and considerable stature made him formidable enough to handle Roosevelt's challenge. He reversed a corrupt

state political machine in New Jersey and possessed the ability to inspire. Roosevelt's Progressive campaign relied on alienated western farmers and eastern laborers. Roosevelt failed to capture the labor vote and Wilson won the presidency with a minority vote. Wilson polled 6,293,152 (41.8%) to Roosevelt's 4,119,207 (27.4%) and Taft's 3,486,333 (23.2%) popular vote (Congressional Quarterly, 448). While the bulk of Wilson's votes came from the agrarian South and West, he was also victorious in Massachusetts, New York, Ohio and his home state New Jersey (Buenker and Kantowicz, 137).³²

If the Republican Party disliked the outcome of the presidential election, surely they hated the congressional results. Democrats leaped from a 228 to 162 majority to dominating the House with 291 Representatives (66.9%) compared to 134 Republicans (30.8%) and 9 Progressives (2.1%).³³ Districts held by Republicans since the party's inception slipped into Democrat hands (Mayer, 333). Control of the Senate also shifted to the Democrats. Calls for compromise arose from within the Republican Party, but it would take more time to mend the cleavages.

The Solid South remained a stronghold for Democrats.³⁴ The revived strength of the Democratic Party came in the Northeast.³⁵ The large industrial cities were now Democrat territory. The Democrats gained 155 seats in the House between 1904 and 1912. 148 of those seats were outside of the Solid South, and 108 came from Northeastern industrial cities or as Kleppner refers to it "the Metropole" (126). The Democrats accessed breathing room in this election and left the Republicans were gasping for air.

1914

Most midterm elections fall into forgotten crevices without leaving a mark on electoral history. The 1914 election does not fit this description. It would determine the outcome of the Bull Moose Progressives. Surprising gains in 1912 jump-started the party, but now the Progressives faced the task of maintaining popularity in a two-party system traditionally unkind to third-party movements.

Republican confidence resided in hopes of party reunification. Obviously, the Progressives lacked true leadership outside of Theodore Roosevelt, nor could Roosevelt be successful as a Progressive candidate. Republicans expected a hasty return (Mayer, 335). Roosevelt's grim forecast for the Progressive's future did nothing to ameliorate the situation. His impulsive commitment toward change obligated him against abandonment, but his motivation dwindled while supporting many Progressive candidates in name only.³⁶

❖ *Wilson's Presidency*

Wilson's progressive agenda undermined Progressive popular support. Wilson and the large Democratic majority in Congress proceeded to pass progressive legislation.³⁷ Wilson's first move was a downward revision of the tariff. Wilson called a lengthy special session and eventually Congress passed the Underwood-Simmons bill (Mayer, 336).³⁸ Three other important pieces of legislation passed were The Federal Reserve Act (providing relaxed supervision over privately controlled banks), The Federal Trade Commission Act (regulating big business), and the Clayton Act (strengthening the Sherman Act).

Wilson's attempt to label all legislation as Democratic angered both Republicans and Progressives collaborators, furthering Republican calls for unity. Progressive legislators' opportunities for homogeneous policy crumbled into individual crusades.³⁹ The Republicans

concentrated on a single goal – opposing Wilson’s Administration. Reconciliation over domestic policy seemed futile, but in Wilson’s foreign policy shimmered hope.

Roosevelt stern nationalist views carried to his followers. Wilson’s effort to reverse the imperialistic policies of the United States enraged both Republicans and Progressives. Wilson’s poor attempt to oust the undemocratic Huerta from Mexico resulted in attacks on Americans and American property in Mexico. He refused to initiate a war over American interests, and his lesser tactics worsened the situation (Mayer, 338). Wilson’s proposed repeal of American exemption from canal tolls, coupled with his intention to grant Colombia \$25 million in damages resulting from the Panamanian revolution in 1903 met with hostility (Mayer, 338).⁴⁰ Roosevelt encouraged opposition to Wilson’s foreign policy, believing it to be capable of reuniting Republicans.

❖ *The Election*

The Progressives as a whole were unprepared to rejoin. Fervent Progressive rejection of reunification reduced Roosevelt to supporting Progressive candidates on a speaking tour (Mayer, 339). Unable to organize the party, especially at local levels, the Progressive Party never materialized into the powerful machine it aspired to become. Discussion of fusion between Progressives and Republicans weakened the Progressive movement further. Most states did not have full Progressive tickets, and only half of the House seats outside of the Midwest were contested (Mayer, 339). With much of the Progressive agenda already addressed by Congress, popular support reverted to Republicans.

Republicans achieved important gains in 1914, but Democrats still controlled the House of Representatives. They won 62 more seats in the House, decreasing the Democratic majority to 34. Progressive representation dropped from 9 to 6 members.⁴¹ Only one of those nine

Progressive congressmen elected in 1912 won reelection in 1914 (Buenker and Kantowicz, 138). Many Republican victories in 1914 occurred in districts without Progressive candidates, after Progressive challengers foiled Republican opportunities in 1912. Progressives transformed from a formidable third-party to a nagging obstacle preventing Republican election.⁴²

What contributed to the Progressive decline? Most notably, the termination of necessity for a third-party paired with a negative reaction towards Wilson's foreign policy initiatives. Foreign policy earmarked Wilson's presidency and affected the 1914 election and every subsequent election up to and including the 1920 election. The United States' increasing industrial and exportation capacities opened the door for increased international trade. The country now needed a foreign policy to support its economic destiny. Wilson opted against the imperialist policies of his predecessors in favor of neutrality.

On August 1, 1914 Germany declared war against Russia, beginning the First World War.⁴³ A rise in nationalistic views accompanied many countries' entrances into a tense international competition for political and economic supremacy. Previous U.S. commitments to the assertion of American rights in the Western hemisphere, along with predisposed Anglo-American support for the Allied Powers intensified foreign policy debates. With war looming in the European theater, Wilson's foreign policy reversals and promise of neutrality would endure severe scrutiny.

1916

The 1916 election represents a critical point in national history. It provides a cornerstone for the 1920 election analysis. With 1920 only four years away, the last presidential election

prior to America's entrance into the First World War would determine the nation's fate.⁴⁴

Neither party realized that winning would become a punishment rather than reward.

❖ *Republicans and Progressives*

By 1916, many of the divides between Progressives and Republicans diminished if not totally vanishing. Although Progressive still carried enough supporters to wreak havoc for stronger Republican candidates, the need for Progressives dwindled as:

“...Republican insurgents, mostly from the West, collaborated with Democratic progressives from the urban centers. And the responsiveness of the parties is measured by the fact when the Progressive Era ended, virtually the entire agenda of national reform legislation that had been accumulating for decades had been enacted” (Sundquist, 177).

Looking for a solution, both Progressives and Republicans entered into talks to negotiate a reunification. Simultaneous conventions aided the reunification.⁴⁵ The Republican strategy hinged on reclaiming Progressives while concurrently discouraging nomination efforts of Roosevelt (Mayer, 339).

Roosevelt dealt with uncertainty in his own political future. He faced enemies within the Republican Party and also demonstrated discontent for Wilson's foreign policy.⁴⁶ He would not entertain a Progressive nomination without a Republican nomination to match. Many Republicans did not support Roosevelt's aggressive platform, including rearmament against Germany. Wilson duplicated a segment of Roosevelt's platform calling for preparedness (Mayer, 340). When it became apparent Roosevelt was not going to win the Republican nomination, he rejected the Progressive nomination. Most of the dejected Progressives left the convention and dissolved their state party organizations.

❖ *The Election*

The Republican nomination went to Charles Evan Hughes, a former associate Justice of the Supreme Court who avoided the 1912 inner-party quarrel. Hughes appealed to Progressives, and Roosevelt declined the Progressive nomination in favor of Hughes. Obviously, Wilson gained the Democratic nomination and his popular vote went from 41.8% to 49.2%. The Republican popular vote jumped from 23.2% to 46.1% (Congressional Quarterly, 449).⁴⁷ Clearly, the Republicans absorbed Progressives, but Wilson gained as well and won reelection. Sundquist attributes Wilson's gain to support for an incumbent president who also kept the country out of war.

Wilson's support came from the Solid South and a nearly solid West. Many Democratic candidates followed Wilson into office in the face of strong Republican opposition.⁴⁸ It seemed the nation would have a Republican president until the results from California showed Wilson carried the state by a few thousand votes (Burdette, 79).⁴⁹ Wilson's strong showing in the West arose from their anti-war sentiment, their domestic concerns took priority over a war halfway around the world. Women in many western states were voting in the presidential election for the first time.⁵⁰ Theodore Roosevelt continued on his rampant crusade against Wilson and neutrality. Hughes could do little to stop Roosevelt, and a "war party" label soon fixated on the Republicans (Mayer, 346). The option was simple, peace with Wilson or war with Hughes.

Burdette argues that Wilson won on "peace, prosperity, experience, and progressivism" (79). The Midwest and East favored Hughes against Wilson's progressivism and neutrality platform. Two important events occurred prior to the 1916 election. First, the Railroad Brotherhoods threatened a nationwide strike over a labor controversy. Wilson preempted the strike by passing the Adamson Act on September 3, granting their demands for an eight-hour day

(Mayer, 344). A nationwide strike for the largest transportation industry would have meant economic stagnation and political suicide for Wilson. Hughes considered the tactic nothing short of political blackmail by the Railroad Brotherhoods. Democrats pounced on the opportunity to misrepresent Hughes over the issue although he made great strides for labor in New York (Mayer, 345).

Second, in 1916 a critical vacancy opened on the Supreme Court. Wilson chose Louis Brandeis to fill that vacancy. Brandeis's Progressive affiliation displeased some, and appointing a Jewish Justice troubled many. Progressives considered the Supreme Court to be nothing more than a tool of the corporate trusts (Mayer, 340). The Northeast dominated business in America. Its' already strong and continuously increasing economic ties to the Midwest play an incredibly important role. Essentially, Midwesterners depended heavily upon the industrial and financial centers in the Northeast. They provided the greatest market for farm products and other commodities. Wilson's attempts to hinder the financial ability of the Northeast, such as appointing a justice who disfavored the capital centers, directly affected the lives of those in the Midwest.

The congressional election results display the power of an incumbent to carry his party's congressional candidates to victory. Democrats lost 15 seats in the House and no longer held an absolute majority in the House of Representatives. Although relinquishing 15 seats does not qualify as a demoralizing defeat on its surface, upcoming discussion of the statistical evidence gives a strong indication of a revival of Republican strength.⁵¹ 215 Republicans (49.5%) compared to 214 Democrats (49.2%) simply gave Republicans a numerical advantage.⁵² The Republican resurgence forced Democrats to negotiate with a small group of independents to reelect House Speaker Champ Clark. Wilson's victory probably enabled the Democrats to

reelect Clark as Speaker of the House. The allure of simultaneous Democratic control of Congress and the White House would induce alliances in order to alleviate many political blockades.

1918

Wilson's Presidency faced considerable turmoil during his second term. The growing problems in the European theater reached hazardous levels. The proper solution became the source of considerable argumentation and struggle between the parties. With fledgling control of the House of Representatives, Democrats faced the formidable task of uniting a nation as an inevitable entrance into war approached. A strong point of Wilson's 1916 campaign centered on his neutrality, however the option of neutrality became more elusive and sectionalism intensified over the United States involvement in World War I.

❖ *World War I & The U.S. Economy*

Republicans finally reestablished themselves in 1916 as a *national* party. The reunification brought most Progressives back under the Republican umbrella. They arrived at a unique position to challenge Wilson and the Democrat's position of neutrality. The Northeast typically represented a Republican stronghold, comparable to the Democratic Solid South. In the Northeast resided the financial centers for the United States. Prior to the war, the U.S. was a debtor nation. European nations, primarily the Allied Powers, had large amounts of money invested in the American economy. The interest and dividends from these investments paid for American exports of raw materials, and agricultural products (Bensel, 107). With Europe immersed in war, they too became dependent on manufactured products. The problem lied in the extremely high protectionist tariff wall. Thus, Europe could not export to America.

European nations were forced to liquidate assets in America to pay for American exports, “During World War I both the French and British disposed of about 70 percent of their respective holdings in American shares and bonds” (Bensel, 108).⁵³ Intergovernmental debts swelled to ten billion dollars, primarily used to pay for American manufactured goods. Basically, a transformation occurred that prefaced America’s strong economy of today. Instead of being an investment opportunity for mature European economies, the United States now need an outlet for newly accumulated capital. This became the beginning of the end for protectionist tariffs. Not only did they invite retaliation from other nations, they prevented other nations from repaying war debts. The financial centers in the Northeast benefited from the dependence of European Allies, while Southern and Western states suffered dramatically because of their dependence on exporting to Europe (Bensel, 109).

By the time of the United States intervention into World War I, the U.S. money invested in Europe became so crucial to the U.S. economy that intervention was unavoidable. Wilson’s policy of neutrality met with much opposition in Congress.⁵⁴ Prior to the 1918 congressional elections, Wilson appealed for the election of a Democratic Congress. Wilson considered Republican gains to be a direct assault on his leadership (Burdette, 80). This led to public disapproval, however not inflicting as much damage as wartime issues.

Wilson became so enveloped with foreign policy and pushing neutrality he neglected important domestic issues. Fixed prices for wool and wheat enraged the West and Midwest, while the price of cotton remained flexible. They felt the South was running the country and the Democratic Party (Burdette, 80). As much power as the South appeared to have, they still could not prevent Wilson from declaring war on April 2, 1917 after Germany stepped up its’ submarine campaign.⁵⁵

❖ *The Election*

Congressional Republicans continually aided Wilson in his war efforts. Opposition from within Wilson's own party led to tension and further political blunders prior to election time.⁵⁶ Republicans gained favor for supporting the President and the country during wartime, but still possessed the political capital to attack Wilson. Democrats battled Wilson internally over both domestic issues and his management of the war. Neither party prepared any requirements for an armistice. This reflected the worst on Wilson when Germany suddenly moved towards a peace agreement.

The Republicans captured both Houses. Although it was only a two seat majority in the Senate, Republicans took 240 seats (55.2%) compared to 192 Democrats (44.2%) in the House.⁵⁷ Republican gains became apparent in the West and Midwest.⁵⁸ Wilson's call for Democratic support backfired and with the German threat approaching elimination, the Republicans relished the opportunity for greater Republican gains in 1920.

1920

After the Armistice concluded World War I, settlement issues took the front seat. Neither party readily announced their plans for Europe during the election. This issue became paramount amongst other issues of isolationism and peace. What would occur after WWI would undoubtedly affect the country for years to come.

The only terms discussed for an end to the war were Wilson's Fourteen Points in January of 1918. This was a contributing reason for Republican victories in 1918 because in September of 1918 the Germans began to seek peace. Two months before the election, Wilson fumbled for

a solution to the war (Mayer, 352). Wilson continued to push the League of Nations. To the surprise of many, Germany sought peace based upon Wilson's Fourteen Points.

❖ *League of Nations*

The League of Nations debate quickly raced to the front of national attention. Here Wilson encountered one of his most arduous political battles while president against Henry Cabot Lodge, ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.⁵⁹ The Treaty of Versailles's fate depended greatly on him.⁶⁰ The political adversaries were both well educated and vehemently partisan. Wilson's well known disapproving opinion for the Upper House directly contrasted Lodge's loathing for the presidential platform (Mayer, 360). Brilliant maneuvers by Lodge and Senate Republicans established an oligarchy leaving the treaty's future grim. Lodge never openly criticized the Treaty of Versailles, but discreetly encouraged others to while he separated himself from their position.

Lodge feared that open Republican opposition would damage the party. Lodge hoped his tongue-in-cheek approach would expose the treaty's fatal flaws (Mayer, 361). Wilson altered the treaty in Paris to avoid some objections, but remained steadfast on Article X.⁶¹ Although control over the League's responsiveness belonged to the Council, to which the United States would appoint a representative, Senate Republicans did not trust Wilson to make such an appointment. Ultimately, the Senate would not ratify a document superceding their control over U.S. foreign policy.

Originally, popular support for the League of Nations forced Republicans into a semi-reserved state. However, the news from Paris concerning the territorial settlement agreement dealt a crushing blow. German Americans considered the agreement a blatant reversal of Wilson's Fourteen Points. The Irish, Italian, and Japanese felt mistreated by the outcome.

Returning American soldiers brought stories of European discontent with Americans (Mayer, 362). Public support for the League soon declined as most Americans opposed sending away American troops to foreign battlefields to fight for ungrateful Europeans. During the intense debate in Washington over the Treaty of Versailles, the U.S. economy began to collapse. Republicans blamed numerous strikes and a growing unemployment problem on the treaty, accusing Wilson of focusing blindly on the treaty to the detriment of domestic concerns during an unstable post-war era.

Negotiating the Treaty of Versailles in Paris and battling for its survival in Washington physically taxed Wilson to the point of collapse while on a speaking tour in Boulder, Colorado. A subsequent stroke paralyzed Wilson's left side and disabled him for the next six months. After the treaty failed to obtain a 2/3 majority, Wilson and the Democrats were facing a critical upcoming presidential election with nothing to show for the past two years of effort. Republicans found themselves in a desirable position for the upcoming election.

❖ *The Election*

Warren G. Harding, a senator from Ohio, was an answer to the one-man politics of Lodge and Wilson. His demeanor and intellectual capacity to diminish problems assured many voters. Democratic nominee James M. Cox, also from Ohio, attempted to push the League of Nations to a prominent election issue.⁶² Republicans circumvented their plans by not nominating a candidate outspoken about the League of Nation. The plethora of domestic economic dilemmas overwhelmed the Democrats, while "Western farmers now suffering depression, Irish voters, and independent progressives championing civil liberties joined businessmen in giving Harding a landslide victory" (Burdette, 82). Harding carried 60.3% of the popular vote to Cox's 34.1%, including Democratic stronghold Tennessee (Congressional Quarterly, 450). Coincidentally,

Tennessee elected the only Republican Representative to the House in the South data set.⁶³ Cox only received 127 electoral votes to Harding's 404 (Burdette, 82).

The Republican landslide spilled into Congress too. Republicans claimed 302 seats with a total of 69.4% of the seats, while Democrats captured 131 seats with 30.2% of the vote.⁶⁴

Republicans dominated the Northeast with a few Democratic districts in metropolitan areas such as New York and Boston.⁶⁵ The Midwest increasingly elected Republicans over the past few elections with an almost total domination in 1920.⁶⁶

IV. Data Analysis

The data set accompanying this research links the assertions made in this paper to statistical evidence. Thoroughly exploring the 1920 election's sectional nature requires examining the districts. The screening process provided twenty single-member districts from across the nation. Every district chosen must have remained unaltered during the entire period from 1912 to 1920 to ensure accuracy.⁶⁷ Six Northeast, four South, three Midwest, one West, and six districts in Nebraska were chosen from the eligible districts because of their geographical location and voting pattern variation. Including all six districts in Nebraska provided an excellent opportunity to study the political changes entirely within one state.

Every candidate's popular vote and percentage of the total vote was recorded.⁶⁸ The data set includes any candidates receiving more than 5% of the popular vote.⁶⁹ To avoid confusion, any comparisons made in this statistical analysis section included only the two major parties unless otherwise noted. All calculations discussed in this section were derived from the data collected and rounded to a single decimal space.

The tables and linear graphs, attached as appendices, display the data in a more absorbable form. The graphs demonstrate the rise and/or fall in party strength from 1912 to 1920. For easier reference, underneath each district's chart lies a vote percentage table. The actual popular vote totals appear on the second page, along with the percentage of the total vote. Blank cells indicate no candidate from that party running that election year. The *other* column includes the scattered votes of minority candidates.

63rd Congress 1913 – 1915

❖ *Northeast*

Following the 1912 election, of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives, 291 Democrats accounted for 66.9% of the members.⁷⁰ The Solid South naturally provided the strongest centers for Democratic victory. Democrats also carried many Northeast districts, especially those in metropolitan areas such as Baltimore, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.⁷¹ Although the data collected does not accurately address Democratic strength in metropolitan areas, the average margin of victory for the Northeast districts analyzed was 8.9%. An interesting trend appeared in the Northeast states with Delaware's 1st District and Maryland's 3rd and 6th averaging a 14.6% margin of victory (NE1-NE3), while Pennsylvania's 19th, New Hampshire's 1st, and Maine's 2nd District averaging only 3.2% (NE4-NE6). With the exception of Pennsylvania, Democratic support did not affect those Northeast states farther away from the monetary centers.⁷² Three candidates in Pennsylvania's 19th District claimed over 25% of the popular vote, plus other third-party candidates involved in the race.⁷³

❖ *Progressives*

Many Democrats won in 1912 with less than 50% of the popular vote, due mostly to the moderate success of Progressive candidates.⁷⁴ Progressive candidates in Delaware and New Hampshire kept winning candidate totals below 50% (NE1, NE5). Nine Progressives took seats in the first election as an official party. Despite the party rift, Republicans held 134 seats (30.8%), winning in the Northeast, northern West and Midwest (Martis).

❖ *South*

The post-Civil War tradition continued as Mountain Republicans in western North Carolina, western Virginia, and eastern Kentucky disrupted a strong pattern of Democratic

Southern dominance.⁷⁵ The 44.4% mean Democratic margin of victory in the Southern districts analyzed characterizes this reign (S1-S4). Republican candidates in the same four Southern districts did not even capture a quarter of the popular vote (23.1%). The Republican candidate in North Carolina's 9th District only managed 8.2%, while a Progressive challenger claimed 28.9% during the same election (S2).

❖ *Midwest & West*

Democrats captured many seats in the West and Midwest, following many of the same trends as the Northeast. In Illinois 16th and 23rd, Kansas's 2nd, and New Mexico's only District the average Democratic margin of victory was 17.2%.⁷⁶ The mean Republican percentage in these four districts was 31.2% compared to 48.5% for Democrats. Democrats averaged less than 50% of the popular vote because Progressive and Socialist candidates claimed an average of 16.9% and 8.2% respectively.⁷⁷ The Progressive candidate in Illinois's 16th District won 27.6%, while the Republican candidate won only 20.3% (MW1).

❖ *Nebraska*

Election data from all six districts in Nebraska reveals an evenly divided state in 1912. The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Districts went to Democrats by an average margin of 5.1%. The mean percentage of the popular vote was 50.3% for Democrats to 45.2% for Republicans (MW4-MW6). The only third party candidates of any significance appeared in the 2nd District, with a Progressive and a Socialist candidate winning a combined 11.9% of the vote (MW5). Republican candidates elected in the 4th, 5th, and 6th Districts won by an average of 8.5%. The Republican vote percentage for the three districts was 49.8%, to 41.4% for the Democrats (MW7 – MW9). A Populist and a Socialist candidate seemingly deflated Democrat totals in the 6th

District, combining for 16.8% of the popular vote.⁷⁸ However, in the absence of a Populist or Socialist in the four following elections, Republicans gained the additional votes.

64th Congress 1915 – 1917

Democrats did not maintain the same vote total in the midterm elections in 1914. Republicans achieved minor success without the party turmoil at the national level, while the Democrats stumbled without the national leadership and platform of a strong candidate like Woodrow Wilson. Democratic membership in the House fell from 291 Representatives in 1912 to 230, holding onto a majority with 52.9%. Republicans gained 62 seats, totaling 196 (45.1%).⁷⁹ The most noticeable Republican gains came in the Northeast in metropolitan areas such as Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. Progressive representatives dropped from nine to six (Martis).

❖ *Northeast*

All six Northeast districts analyzed previously belonged to Democrats. Republicans captured Delaware and New Hampshire's 1st Districts by margins of 4.9% and 3.7% respectively in the absence of Progressive candidates.⁸⁰ In both districts, the Progressive candidates' vote percentage in 1912 covered the margin of victory, displaying the Republican schism's harmful effects (NE1, NE5). The only Progressive candidate in the Northeast data set in 1914 ran in Maine's 2nd District, getting 18.6% of the vote. The Democrat won with 46.9% to the Republican's 32.2% (NE6). Three attractive candidates ran in Pennsylvania's 19th District. The third-party Prohibition candidate seized 24.5%, keeping Democrat (35.8%) and Republican (34.6%) totals low (NE4). Excluding Pennsylvania and Maine; the mean Democrat vote percentage edged out the Republican average 48.6% to 47.3%, significantly tighter than in 1912.

❖ *South*

Democratic control in the South persisted, winning all four districts analyzed by an average of 47.8%.⁸¹ North Carolina's 9th District posted the closest race with an 8.4% margin of victory (S2). A landslide in Tennessee's 3rd District by 80.4% stood out as the greatest defeat (S3). In 1912, a Republican won 23.6% and a Progressive won 8%, breaking a trend of increased Republican success in the midterm election. The median Democratic vote percentage in the South (73.3%) towered above the Republican average (25.5%).

❖ *Midwest & West*

Democratic success in the Midwest and West continued, but did not equal the momentum of 1912. New Mexico elected the sole Republican from the four districts analyzed. Much like in the Northeast, without a third party candidate the Republican total jumped to 51.3%.⁸² The Republican total in Illinois's 16th District leaped 23.4% from 1912 to reach 43.7% without major third party opposition, however it was still not enough to overcome the Democratic counterpart (MW2). A Progressive appeared in Kansas's 2nd District for the first time, winning 18% and altering the outcome of the race.⁸³ The Democratic vote percentage averaged 46.6% compared to the Republican 42.7%, with a median Democratic margin of victory at 8.1%.⁸⁴

❖ *Nebraska*

Nebraska remained evenly, but not cleanly divided in 1914 as control over two districts switched. Nebraska's 1st District fell into Republican hands by a 1% margin.⁸⁵ The 5th District went to a Democrat by a .5% margin.⁸⁶ The gap between the Democrat and Republican in the 2nd District expanded from 1.2% to 27% (MW5). The Democratic margin of victory in the 3rd District increased as well by 9.3% (MW6). The Republican lead in the 4th District only grew 1.8%, while 6th District witnessed a 7.3% Republican climb (MW7, MW9). The median

Democratic margin of victory lunged from 5.1% in 1912 to 15.3%, and Republicans went from 8.5% to 10.6%.⁸⁷ In Nebraska's six districts, the average vote total for Democrats and Republicans varied little from 1912. Republicans captured 46.4%, down 1.1% from two years prior. The Democratic percentage increased 2.9% from 45.9% in 1912 to 48.8% in 1914.

65th Congress 1917 – 1919

The Republican Party's reunification prior to the 1916 election removed many of the of the problems with a split electorate. They recaptured crucial districts in the financial centers in the Northeast, as well as gaining ground in the upper Midwest.⁸⁸ In raw numbers, Republicans edged out Democrats in total seats 215 (49.5%) to 214 (49.2%) (Martis). Although they failed to seize control of the House of Representatives, it was a promising accomplishment against the party of a popular incumbent president.⁸⁹

Numerous reasons explain the rise of Republican strength in the Northeast, such as the reunification of the Republican Party, eminent involvement in World War I, resentment of Wilson's domestic economic policy, and a dwindling attraction to progressivism. Certainly, a conglomeration of these factors provides the best evidence why Republicans captured four out of the six Northeast districts analyzed with an average margin of victory of 4.2%.

❖ *Northeast*

Delaware's 1st and Maryland's 3rd District elected the only two Democrats in the Northeast data set. A Democrat won in Maryland's 3rd District by 8.5% of the vote, down from 11% in 1914.⁹⁰ After electing a Republican in 1914, Delaware's 1st District elected a Democrat in 1916 by only .3% (NE1).⁹¹ The Republican winning Maryland's 6th District by 7%, the

largest gap of the four Republican victories, unseated a Democrat (NE3). With a 49.1% average vote total, Republicans jumped 6.5% from the 1914 average vote total of 42.6%.

❖ *South*

The Democratic South continued to be an Alamo for Republican candidates. Although none of them captured the four districts included, the Republican campaigns were not exercises in futility. Republican candidates in North Carolina's 9th and Tennessee's 3rd District won over 45% of the vote (S2, S3). In the remaining two districts, Virginia's 7th and Arkansas's 3rd, they both won more than 37% of the popular vote (S1, S4). Two surprising totals when the average margin of victory for Democrats in 1914 soared at 47.8%. A 16.2% average Democratic margin of victory in 1916 proved Republicans made formidable opposition in these Southern districts.⁹²

❖ *Midwest & West*

The Republican momentum carried into the Midwest, winning two previously Democratic districts. In the West, New Mexico elected a Democrat after alternating in 1912 and 1914 (W1). Illinois's 23rd District stayed in Democratic hands, but the margin of victory dropped 5.6% to 8.2% (MW2). Although not as impressive as the Democratic victories two years prior, Kansas's 2nd and Illinois's 16th Districts yielded Republican triumphs.⁹³ Including New Mexico, the average vote total for Republicans (48.3%) nearly equaled that of the Democrats (48.9%).

❖ *Nebraska*

Nebraska remained evenly divided and no district changed hands. The 1st, 4th, and 6th Districts elected Republicans, while the 2nd, 3rd, and 5th Districts elected Democrats.⁹⁴ Though evenly divided, Republicans edged out Democrats in both mean vote total (49.3% to 47.7%) and average margin of victory (14% to 10.9%). The Democratic margin of victory shrank from 1914

to 1916 by 9.5% in the 2nd District and by 13.9% in the 3rd District, but grew by 10% in the 5th District.⁹⁵ The Republican margin of victory expanded by 9.7% in the 1st District and .7% in the 4th District, but remained at 19.3% in the 6th District. The surprising Democratic successes in 1916 validate Wilson's prowess as a party leader and incumbent. Democrats held off a Republican onslaught and miraculously maintained control of the House of Representatives.

66th Congress 1919 – 1921

The 1918 midterm election ushered in the first Republican Congress in the analysis period. Republicans enjoyed a 48 representative advantage with 240 seats (55.2%). Democrats relinquished 22 seats to drop to 192 (44.2%).⁹⁶ The Republican wave again dominated the Midwest states and began to spill into West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania (Martis). Examining the 1918 election results will prove crucial to understanding why and how Republicans flourished in 1920.

❖ *Northeast*

Republican control in the Northeast increased to five out of the six districts. Only Maryland's 3rd District elected a Democrat, and being a midterm election the margin of victory peaked for that district at 19.6% (NE2). The tight race in Delaware in 1916 led to a Republican victory in 1918.⁹⁷ The remaining four districts reelected Republicans by an average margin of victory of 12.6%, up from 4.2% in the same four districts in 1916.⁹⁸ Pennsylvania's 19th District elected a Republican by 25%, compared to a margin of victory of only 3.6% in 1916 (NE4). The mean vote total for Republicans increased 3% to 52.2%, while decreasing 1.3% to 46.4% for Democrats (NE1-NE6).

❖ *South*

Statistically, Republicans fared much poorer in the South in 1918. The average Democratic margin of victory skyrocketed to almost 73%.⁹⁹ The sole competitive race occurred in North Carolina, still varying by 14% (S2). Falling to a 24.5% margin of victory in the previous election, Virginia's 7th District rebounded to 77.8% (NE1). With no Republican opposition in Tennessee and Arkansas, a typical strategy for "safe seats" in midterm elections, Democrats won 100% of the vote in both districts (NE3, NE4).¹⁰⁰

❖ *Midwest & West*

The four districts analyzed from the West and Midwest all elected Republicans. In the prior election New Mexico voted in a Democrat by a margin of 1%, but elected a Republican in 1918 by 2.6% (W1). Illinois's 23rd District also elected a Democrat in 1916 by 8.2%, but voted in a Republican in 1918 by 3% (MW2). Illinois's 6th and Kansas's 2nd re-elected Republicans by an average of 16.4%, rising 13%.¹⁰¹ With an average margin of victory reaching 9.6%, the mean vote total for Republicans (53.8%) displays the incremental surge in Republican strength.

❖ *Nebraska*

All six Nebraska districts elected Republicans, converting three from Democratic representatives. The 2nd, 3rd, and 5th Districts elected Democrats by an average of 10.9% in 1916, but voted in Republicans in 1918 by a slim 2.5% margin (MW5, MW6, MW8). Nebraska's 3rd District elected a Democrat in 1916 by 4.6%; the lowest margin of the three Democratic victories, then elected a Republican in 1918 by 4%; the largest margin of the three new Republican districts (MW6). The 1st, 4th, and 6th reelected Republicans by an average margin of 21.6%, leaping 7.6% from 1916 (14%) in a true display of might (MW4, MW7,

MW9). The mean percentage of the popular vote increased 6.5% from 1916 (49.3%) to 55.8% in 1918. Similarly, the Democratic vote percentage dropped 3.9% to 43.8%.

The gain in Republican popularity in the Midwest corresponds to that in the Northeast. Wilson's concessions to Democrats, particularly those in the South, negatively affected the symbiotic economic relationship between the manufacturing and farming Midwest and the financial centers in the Northeast. Naturally, Republicans soon became the option against Democrats and gladly embraced that idea.

67th Congress 1921 – 1923

Republican domination peaked in 1920 with a crushing landslide and an emphatic sprawl across the nation. The 1920 election's sectional voting pattern created an extremely solid Republican block, especially bordering the South.¹⁰² A 171 representative advantage gave Republicans dominion in the House of Representatives. Of the 435 total seats, Republicans filled 302 (69.4%). The 131 representative Democratic membership lost 61 members (Martis).

❖ *Northeast*

Very few Democratic districts continued to exist in the Northeast. All six districts analyzed elected Republicans for the first time in the analysis period. Maryland's 3rd District stood as the sole Democratic district in 1918. After electing Democrats by an average margin of 13.5% from 1912 to 1918, a Republican won by 3%.¹⁰³ In four of the five districts reelecting Republicans, the margin of victory increased an average of 10.9%.¹⁰⁴ The 16.7% average margin of victory provided a comfortable lead in 1920, giving Republicans a mean vote total of 56.1% to 39.4% for Democrats. A 100% transformation occurred in the Northeast data set with all six districts converting from Democratic to Republican from 1912 to 1920. The Democratic mean

percentage of the popular vote fell an average of 2% each election, while the Republican percentage increased an average of 4.4% with each election.¹⁰⁵

❖ *South*

The Republican tidal wave nearly swelled over the Democratic levy protecting the South. Tennessee's 3rd District elected the only Republican in the South data set. After no Republican opposition in that district in 1918, they voted in a Republican by 3.9%.¹⁰⁶ Republicans claimed an average of 48.6% of the popular vote in the South, but Democrats won an average of 51.2%.¹⁰⁷ This difference of 2.6% made it the closest election of the five examined.

The significant statistical differences in the five-year progression prevent witnessing a clear trend of Republican growth or Democratic diminishment. However, this does allow a demonstration of the increase in support for a dominant party, Democrats in the South, during midterm elections due to lower voter turnout. In those elections occurring simultaneously with the presidential election cycle (1912, 1916, and 1920), Republicans won an average of 37.8% of the popular vote. Democrats won 58.6%. In the midterm elections (1914 and 1918) the Republican percentage plummeted to 19.5%, with the Democratic percentage skyrocketing to 79.9%. The approximately 20% alteration in both directions accompanies an 8,634.75 decrease in the average voter turnout between the two cycles.¹⁰⁸

❖ *Midwest & West*

The four districts from the West and Midwest elected Republicans by an average margin of 18.7%. Although all four districts elected Republicans in 1918 too, a convincing 9.1% rise in the average margin of victory displays the Republican' landslide's effects in the Midwest and West. They did not merely win, but overwhelmed their Democratic opponents. Capturing an average of 58.2% of the popular vote over 39.5% for Democrats ensured Republican control in

the Midwest and West. The two lowest margins of victory in 1920 were also the same two districts to elect Democrats in 1916.¹⁰⁹ The Republican success appears to be a gradual metamorphosis rather than rapid change according to both charts and collected data.

❖ *Nebraska*

Nebraska adheres to a voting pattern similar to the other regions. In fact, Nebraska returned some of the most impressive results in the data. The average margin of victory for Republicans elected in all six districts soared to 28.8%, rising 16.7% from 1918.¹¹⁰ The average Democratic percentage of the popular vote reached the lowest in the analysis period at 33%.¹¹¹ The mean Democratic percentage of the popular vote fell an average of 5.2% every election from 1914 to 1920. Similarly, the mean Republican percentage of the popular vote increased 5.2% in the same period.

V. Conclusion

The 1920 election stands out for its' distinct sectional alignment. 1912 made an excellent starting point because it included the Democrats' peak in strength and the subsequent elections charted their decline. Concluding with 1920 revealed the magnitude of the Republican landslide. What occurred between 1912 and 1920 captures the spirit of American politics – unpredictability.

Taft encountered trouble with tariff revisions. Southern and Midwestern Democrats wanted higher tariffs to protect their agrarian economies. Northeast Republicans wanted high protectionist tariffs to prolong export dominance. President Taft, who won on the promise of tariff revision, lowered rates on the items he believed important to consumers. This alienated both parties and the progressives who wanted all rates lowered. Importantly, this began the Republican Party's fracture.

In 1912, the Midwest and Northeast elected more Democrats. The Republican Party split, and both Republicans and Progressives suffered from splitting the same electorate. Woodrow Wilson became the first Democratic president in 16 years. Republicans made gains in 1914 with fewer Progressive opponents. Not contending with the inner party turmoil at the national level surely aided their effort.

Voters reelected Wilson in 1916 and the House became almost evenly tied. Although barely controlled by the Democrats, House Republicans became a respectable force in Congress. The Republican Party's reunification with Progressives solidified their power. Wilson won on a promise of neutrality accompanying an expansion in international trade capacity. Events in the European theatre soon relegated Wilson's promise to an ideal when imminent involvement in WWI controlled national politics. U.S. involvement in WWI proved short but necessary, and

Wilson reluctantly relied on support from his political opponents when Democrats disapproved of his reversal.

In 1918, Republicans clearly controlled the House. Republican support grew in the Midwest and Northeast because of their economic relationship and vested interest in saving European allies. At war's end, Wilson's preoccupation with the League of Nations to the detriment of domestic concerns dealt a fatal blow to Democratic support. A faltering economy coupled with the Treaty of Versailles' failure in the Senate left Democrats with little political capital for 1920.

The unexpected plunge in popular support for the League of Nations crippled Democratic candidates when it became a major platform plank in 1920. The swing in public sentiment between 1917 and 1920 destabilized Democrats. Republicans capitalized on Democratic blunders. Forced to regroup before the pivotal 1920 election, Democrats never recovered.

VI. Appendix

* 1920 Congressional election map attached

<u>Chart</u>	<u>Reference Number</u>	<u>Page</u>
<i>Northeast</i>		
1. Delaware – 1 st District	NE1	50 - 51
2. Maryland – 3 rd District	NE2	52 - 53
3. Maryland – 6 th District	NE3	54 - 55
4. Pennsylvania – 19 th District	NE4	56 - 57
5. New Hampshire – 1 st District	NE5	58 - 59
6. Maine – 2 nd District	NE6	60 - 61
 <i>South</i>		
1. Virginia – 7 th District	S1	62 - 63
2. North Carolina – 9 th District	S2	64 - 65
3. Tennessee – 3 rd District	S3	66 - 67
4. Arkansas – 3 rd District	S4	68 - 69
 <i>Midwest & West</i>		
1. Illinois – 16 th District	MW1	70 - 71
2. Illinois – 23 rd District	MW2	72 - 73
3. Kansas – 2 nd District	MW3	74 - 75
4. New Mexico	W1	76 - 77
 <i>Nebraska</i>		
1. 1 st District	MW4	79 - 80
2. 2 nd District	MW5	81 - 82
3. 3 rd District	MW6	83 - 84
4. 4 th District	MW7	85 - 86
5. 5 th District	MW8	87 - 88
6. 6 th District	MW9	89 - 90

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VIII. Notes

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- ¹ See attached 1920's Congressional Election map.
- ² The party of Jefferson was the first, the National Republican Party of John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay was the second but perished under Jacksonian Democracy (Burdette, 9).
- ³ Popular sovereignty allowed the newly admitted states to determine their slave status in their constitutions.
- ⁴ See attached 1920's Congressional Election map.
- ⁵ After the Southern Democrats walked out of the Convention in Baltimore the remaining Democrats nominated Douglas, the Southern Democrats nominated Breckinridge. The Constitutional Union Party, a group of conservatives opposed to sectional parties nominated John Bell.
- ⁶ France and Great Britain had both already banned slavery, and Lincoln knew they would not support a country fighting a war to defend it.
- ⁷ See attached 1920's Congressional Election map.
- ⁸ V.O. Key details the mountain Republicans in "Southern Politics in State and Nation."
- ⁹ V.O. Key's 1955 article "A Theory of Critical Elections" first addresses realignments and their accompanying elections.
- ¹⁰ These are also the three most important and generally recognized according to Sundquist (13).
- ¹¹ No northern Whig voted for the Kansas-Nebraska Act (Sundquist, 75).
- ¹² The Sherman Silver Purchase Act increased monthly purchases from 2 million to 4.5 million (Sundquist, 140).
- ¹³ McKinley's tariff act was the party's main legislative agenda (Sundquist, 141).
- ¹⁴ See Martis's "The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789-1989" pp. 149.
- ¹⁵ The organization turned into coercion by employers, buyers, and creditors. Democratic papers and the clergy too supported McKinley (Sundquist, 156-157).
- ¹⁶ Economic based politics means the revival of monetary issues in the face of the depression in the 1890s, although Civil War resentment still existed.
- ¹⁷ They formed in 1901 (Buenker and Kantowicz, 539-540).
- ¹⁸ McKinley died on September 14, 1901 from a gunshot suffered at the Pan-American Exposition (Buenker and Kantowicz, 271, 540).
- ¹⁹ Roosevelt easily won with 57.4% of the vote to Parker's 37.6% (Buenker and Kantowicz, 134).
- ²⁰ The Hepburn Act of 1907 regulated railroad rates (Buenker and Kantowicz, 406).
- ²¹ Taft won with 51.57%, while Bryan claimed 43.05% (Buenker and Kantowicz).
- ²² See Martis's "The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789-1989" PP 159, 163. There were 386 total Representatives in 1904, and 391 in 1908.
- ²³ The bulk of progressives were in the Republican Party.
- ²⁴ Canon was known for strict party allegiance and using heavy-handed tactics to obtain it.
- ²⁵ Taft's campaign promise was a special session to address tariff revision after inauguration.
- ²⁶ See Martis's "The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789-1989" PP 165. There were 394 total Representatives in 1910.
- ²⁷ Much of this legislation passed in the last two years of his presidency with more progressives support when the Democrats captured the House (Buenker and Kantowicz, 470).
- ²⁸ The Republican Party was the most successful in history and went on to establish our two-party system, leaving the Progressives as the strongest third-party. Roosevelt edged out Taft as a Progressive in 1912.
- ²⁹ Taft's work on the Payne-Aldrich act reduced rates for glass, lumber, coal, and iron. It raised rates on cotton and wool to attain Southern votes (Mayer, 311).
- ³⁰ See 1912 election in MW1-MW6, and W1.
- ³¹ The industrial East favored cheap raw materials (Mayer, 319).
- ³² Taft carried only Vermont and Utah, Roosevelt carried 11 of California's 13 electoral votes along with Pennsylvania, Michigan, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Washington (Buenker and Kantowicz, 137).
- ³³ There was also one Independent elected in 1912(.2%) See Martis's "The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789-1989" PP 165, 167.
- ³⁴ See 1912 election in appendices S1-S4.
- ³⁵ See 1912 election in appendices NE1-NE6.
- ³⁶ Mayer writes that "Roosevelt's pessimism was a reflection of his weariness with reformers and reform. He had welcomed the support of the intellectuals and idealists in his haste to settle scores with Taft. Now he

resented their sustained clamor for vigorous leadership” (335).

37 The progressive legislation was passed under a Democratic label.

38 The Underwood-Simmons bill cut industrial schedules 10% and added 100 raw materials to the free list (Mayer, 336).

39 Leadership attempts within Congressional Progressives failed due to party structure obstacles and lack of confidence (Mayer, 337).

40 Mayer states that the award to Colombia was an “unmistakable condemnation” of Roosevelt for promoting the insurrection (Mayer, 338).

41 See Martis’s “The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789 – 1989” PP 167, 169.

42 The Progressive popular vote dropped below two million as compared to about six million for each of the major parties (Buenker and Kantowicz, 138).

43 Fighting between Serbia and Austria-Hungary preceded the German declaration, and was the cause.

44 The U.S. declared war on Germany and entered WWI on April 6, 1917.

45 Simultaneous conventions was Roosevelt’s arrangement (Mayer, 340).

46 Especially after Wilson would not declare war on Germany directly after the loss of American lives incurred from the sinking of the Lusitania.

47 With Roosevelt winning 27.4% in 1912 as a Progressive candidate, Taft’s percentage was a lowly 23.2% (Congressional Quarterly, 448).

48 See congressional elections from 1912 to 1916 in appendices MW1-MW9, and W1.

49 Burdette writes that many of the first newspaper headlines reported Hughes as the victor.

50 Some western states granted women voting privileges before the federal government in 1920.

51 See the 1916 section of the data set analysis, especially appendices NE1-NE6. The Northeast data set shows a clear surge in Republican strength from 1912 to 1916.

52 See Martis’s “The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789 – 1989” PP 171.

53 Total foreign investment in the U.S. dropped from 7.2 billion in 1914 to under 4 billion in 1919 (Bensel, 108).

54 Many supported U.S. entrance into WWI for economic and/or nationalistic reason.

55 Southern Democrats were the most adamant about maintaining neutrality.

56 Wilson continued to favor Southern Democrats to the dismay of voters in the Midwest.

57 See Martis’s “The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789 – 1989” PP 173.

58 See 1918’s election in appendices MW1-MW9, and W1

59 The Senate is given the sole responsibility for ratifying international treaties, by a 2/3 majority.

60 The first article of the Treaty of Versailles established the League of Nations.

61 Article X pledged member’s intervention in the case of territorial aggression (Mayer, 361).

62 Cox’s vice presidential candidate was Franklin D. Roosevelt.

63 See appendices S1-S4.

64 One Independent Republican and Socialist was elected, filling out the final two seats and .4% of the vote. See Martis’s “The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789 – 1989” PP 175.

65 See Martis’s 1920 map and 1920 data in appendices NE1-NE6.

66 See Martis’s 1920 map and 1920 data in appendices MW1-9, and W1.

67 The district lines must have remained unchanged from 1912 to 1920. No district’s boundary lines remained unchanged from 1910 to 1920.

68 Election returns from Congressional Quarterly’s Guide to U.S. Elections, 3rd Ed. “Percentages have been calculated to two decimal places and rounded to one place. Due to rounding and the scattered votes of minority candidates, percentages in individual House races may not add up to 100” (942).

69 Only candidates from single-member districts who received (at least five percent of the total vote) for that election are included...” (Congressional Quarterly’s Guide to U.S. Elections, 942).

70 See Martis’s “The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789 – 1989” PP 166 - 167. Any further parenthetical references to Martis in this section will also refer to PP 166 – 167.

71 See appendices NE1-NE6.

72 Maryland’s 3rd District is located in Baltimore.

73 With three moderately strong candidates, there was no opportunity for a large margin of victory (NE4).

74 See appendices NE1, NE4, NE5, MW1, W2, MW5, MW7, MW8, MW9, and W1. Other third party candidates played a minor role in this phenomenon.

75 Mountain Republican victories could not be included in the data set.

76 See appendices MW1, MW2, MW3, and W4.

77 Progressives ran in Illinois's 16th and 23rd, and New Mexico. Socialists ran in Illinois's 16th and New Mexico.

78 Populist and Socialist platforms resembled those of Democrats, thereby splitting the vote. See appendix MW9.

79 See Martis's "The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789 – 1989" PP 168 - 169.

Any further parenthetical references to Martis will also refer to PP 168 – 169.

80 In 1912 a Progressive and a National Progressive candidate combined for 17.1% of the vote in Delaware's 1st District, and a Progressive in New Hampshire won 10.4%.

81 See appendices S1, S2, S3, and S4.

82 Up 14.4% from 1912 (W1).

83 Republicans won the district in the next three elections (MW3).

84 The median Democratic margin of victory in the Midwest excludes New Mexico.

85 A Democrat won the 1st district in 1912 by 4.9% (MW4).

86 A Republican won the 5th District in 1912 by 3.3% (MW8).

87 Margin of victory percentages indicate party strength only since the 1st and 5th Districts changed control. See appendices MW4 – MW9.

88 See Martis's "The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789 – 1989" PP 170 – 171. Any further parenthetical references to Martis will also refer to PP 170 – 171.

89 Democrats formed alliances with third party representatives to elect a Democratic Speaker of the House.

90 Maryland's 3rd District is located in Baltimore, explaining its high Democratic totals (NE2).

91 Candidates belonging to the same party as an elected president enjoy "coattail" success.

92 Higher voter turnout during presidential election years gives weaker candidates greater chances of success.

93 A Democrat won Illinois's 6th by 5.1% in 1914, but a Republican won in 1916 by only 2%. A Democrat won Kansas's 2nd by 5.4% in 1914, but a Republican won in 1916 by only 4.7% (MW1, MW3).

94 See appendices MW4, MW5, MW6, MW7, MW8, MW9.

95 A Socialist candidate won 6.3% in the 2nd District (MW5, MW6, MW8).

96 See Martis's "The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789 – 1989" PP 172 - 173. Any further parenthetical references to Martis will also refer to PP 172 – 173.

97 A Democrat won in Delaware's 1st District by only .3%, but a Republican won in 1918 by 3.8% (NE1).

98 The Republican margin of victory in New Hampshire's 1st District decreased by .4% (NE5). The average Democratic margin of victory in 1916 was 16.225%. See appendices S1, S2, S3, and S4.

99 The average Democratic margin of victory in 1916 was 16.225%. See appendices S1, S2, S3, and S4.

100 Safe seats are districts that continually elect candidates from a single party. In midterm years the chances of an opposing candidate winning decrease significantly. Thus, candidates or party organization opt to conserve resources.

101 2% to 16.3% in Illinois 6th, and 4.7% to 16.4% in Kansas's 2nd District. See appendices MW1 and MW3.

102 See Martis's "The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress 1789 – 1989" PP 174 - 175. Any further parenthetical references to Martis will also refer to PP 174 – 175.

103 Maryland's 3rd District is located in Baltimore, explaining its Democratic record (NE2).

104 Pennsylvania's 19th District's margin decreased .3%, with a Labor Party candidate winning 15% of the popular vote. See appendices NE1, NE2, NE3, NE4, NE5, and NE6.

105 See appendices NE1, NE2, NE3, NE4, NE5, and NE6.

106 Tennessee may also be considered a border state, on the periphery of the Solid South yet still closely resembling southern states in their voting patterns (S3).

107 See appendices S1, S2, S3, and S4.

108 An average of 24630.5 voters turned out in 1912 and 1916. An average of 15,995.75 voters turned out in 1914 and 1918. Data from 1920 could not be used due to women's suffrage in 1920.

109 Illinois's 23rd District's margin was 12.3% and New Mexico's was 5% (MW2, W1).

110 See appendices MW4, MW5, MW6, MW7, MW8, and MW9.

111 Third party candidates in the 3rd and 6th Districts kept democratic totals atypically low (MW6, MW9).