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A THEORY OF CRITICAL ELECTIONS

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PERHAPS the basic differentiating characteristic of democratic orders consists in the expression of effective choice by the mass of the people in elections.¹ The electorate occupies, at least in the mystique of such orders, the position of the principal organ of governance; it acts through elections. An election itself is a formal act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of connected antecedent and subsequent behavior. Among democratic orders elections, so broadly defined, differ enormously in their nature, their meaning, and their consequences. Even within a single nation the reality of election differs greatly from time to time. A systematic comparative approach, with a focus on variations in the nature of elections would doubtless be fruitful in advancing understanding of the democratic governing process. In behavior antecedent to voting, elections differ in the proportions of the electorate psychologically involved, in the intensity of attitudes associated with campaign cleavages, in the nature of expectations about the consequences of the voting, in the impact of objective events relevant to individual political choice, in individual sense of effective connection with community decision, and in other ways. These and other antecedent variations affect the act of voting itself as well as subsequent behavior. An understanding of elections and, in turn, of the democratic process as a whole must rest partially on broad differentiations of the complexes of behavior that we call elections.²

While this is not the occasion to develop a comprehensive typology of elections, the foregoing remarks provide an orientation for an attempt to formulate a concept of one type of election — based on American experience — which might be built into a more general theory of elections. Even the most fleeting inspection of American

¹For most of the detailed compilations of data underlying this discussion I am indebted to Stanley D. Hopper. Contributory analyses were also made by Hugh D. Price.

²Elections need not be equated to revolutions to appreciate the suggestive value in speculation about the nature of elections of the categorization of revolutions. See Carl J. Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Democracy: Theory and Practice in Europe and America* (Boston: Ginn and Company, rev. ed., 1950), pp. 145-155.

elections suggests the existence of a category of elections in which voters are, at least from impressionistic evidence, unusually deeply concerned, in which the extent of electoral involvement is relatively quite high, and in which the decisive results of the voting reveal a sharp alteration of the pre-existing cleavage within the electorate. Moreover, and perhaps this is the truly differentiating characteristic of this sort of election, the realignment made manifest in the voting in such elections seems to persist for several succeeding elections. All these characteristics cumulate to the conception of an election type in which the depth and intensity of electoral involvement are high, in which more or less profound readjustments occur in the relations of power within the community, and in which new and durable electoral groupings are formed.³ These comments suppose, of course, the existence of other types of complexes of behavior centering about formal elections, the systematic isolation and identification of which, fortunately, are not essential for the present discussion.

I

The presidential election of 1928 in the New England states provides a specific case of the type of critical election that has been described in general terms. In that year Alfred E. Smith, the Democratic Presidential candidate, made gains in all the New England states. The rise in Democratic strength was especially notable in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. When one probes below the surface of the gross election figures it becomes apparent that a sharp and durable realignment also occurred within the electorate, a fact reflective of the activation by the Democratic candidate of low-income, Catholic, urban voters of recent immigrant stock.⁴ In New England, at least, the Roosevelt revolution of 1932 was in large measure an Al Smith revolution of 1928, a characterization less applicable to the remainder of the country.

The intensity and extent of electoral concern before the voting of 1928 can only be surmised, but the durability of the realignment

³These notions have been put forward in fragmentary form elsewhere: V. O. Key, Jr., "The Future of the Democratic Party," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 28 (Spring, 1952), 161-175, where the argument is stated unencumbered by supporting data; Key, *A Primer of Statistics for Political Scientists* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1954), pp. 53-55, an analysis of an illustrative case.

⁴The campaign and its effects are described by Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), pp. 34-41.

formed at the election can be determined by simple analyses of election statistics. An illustration of the new division thrust through the electorate by the campaign of 1928 is provided by the graphs in Figure A, which show the Democratic percentages of the presidential vote from 1916 through 1952 for the city of Somerville and the town of Ashfield in Massachusetts. Somerville, adjacent to Boston, had a population in 1930 of 104,000 of which 28 per cent was foreign born and 41 per cent was of foreign-born or mixed parentage.

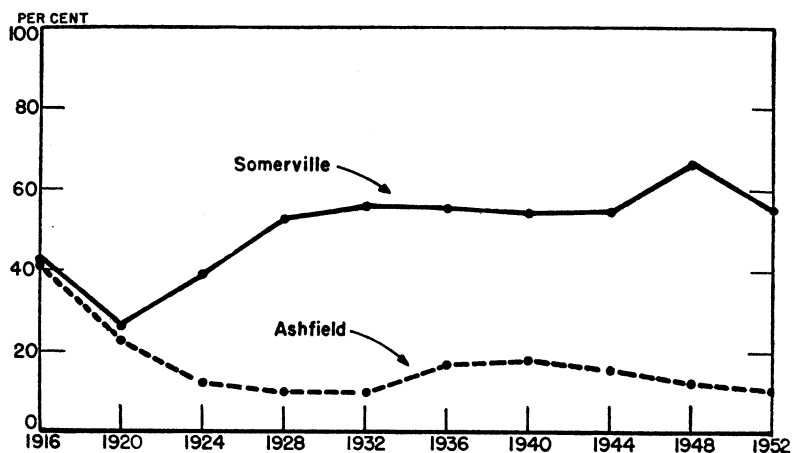


FIGURE A

DEMOCRATIC PERCENTAGES OF MAJOR-PARTY PRESIDENTIAL VOTE,
SOMERVILLE AND ASHFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS, 1916-1952

Roman Catholics constituted a large proportion of its relatively low-income population. Ashfield, a farming community in western Massachusetts with a 1930 population of 860, was predominately native born (8.6 per cent foreign born), chiefly rural-farm (66 per cent), and principally Protestant.

The impressiveness of the differential impact of the election of 1928 on Somerville and Ashfield may be read from the graphs in Figure A. From 1920 the Democratic percentage in Somerville ascended steeply while the Democrats in Ashfield, few in 1920, became even less numerous in 1928. Inspection of the graphs also suggests that the great reshuffling of voters that occurred in 1928 was perhaps the final and decisive stage in a process that had been under way for some time. That antecedent process involved a relatively

heavy support in 1924 for La Follette in those towns in which Smith was subsequently to find special favor. Hence, in Figure A, as in all the other charts, the 1924 figure is the percentage of the total accounted for by the votes of both the Democratic and Progressive candidates rather than the Democratic percentage of the two-party vote. This usage conveys a minimum impression of the size of the 1924-1928 Democratic gain but probably depicts the nature of the 1920-1928 trend.

For present purposes, the voting behavior of the two communities shown in Figure A after 1928 is of central relevance. The differences established between them in 1928 persisted even through 1952, although the two series fluctuated slightly in response to the particular influences of individual campaigns. The nature of the process of maintenance of the cleavage is, of course, not manifest from these data. Conceivably the impress of the events of 1928 on individual attitudes and loyalties formed partisan attachments of lasting nature. Yet it is doubtful that the new crystallization of 1928 projected itself through a quarter of a century solely from the momentum given it by such factors. More probably subsequent events operated to re-enforce and to maintain the 1928 cleavage.

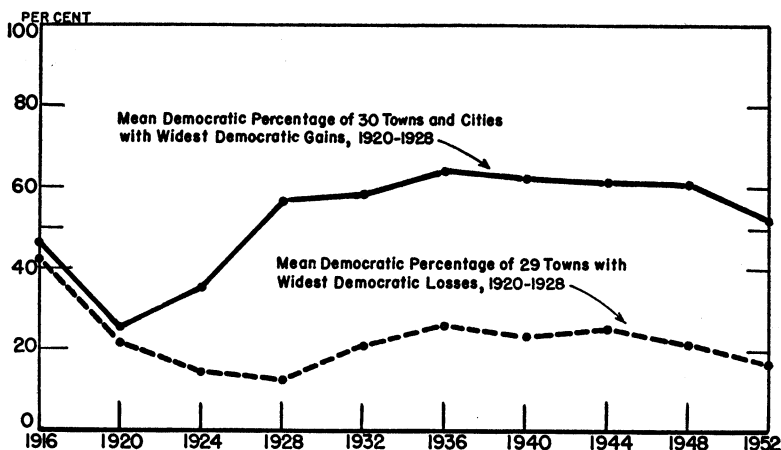


FIGURE B

PERSISTENCE OF ELECTORAL CLEAVAGE OF 1928 IN MASSACHUSETTS:
 MEAN DEMOCRATIC PERCENTAGE OF PRESIDENTIAL VOTE IN TOWNS
 WITH SHARPEST DEMOCRATIC GAINS, 1920-1928, AND IN TOWNS
 OF WIDEST DEMOCRATIC LOSSES, 1920-1928

Whatever the mechanism of its maintenance, the durability of the realignment is impressive.

Somerville and Ashfield may be regarded more or less as samples of major population groups within the electorate of Massachusetts. Since no sample survey data are available for 1928, about the only analysis feasible is inspection of election returns for geographic units contrasting in their population composition. Lest it be supposed, however, that the good citizens of Somerville and Ashfield were aberrants simply unlike the remainder of the people of the Commonwealth, examination of a large number of towns and cities is in order. In the interest of both compression and comprehensibility, a mass of data is telescoped into Figure B. The graphs in that figure compare over the period 1916-1952 the voting behavior of the 29 Massachusetts towns and cities having the sharpest Democratic increases, 1920-1928, with that of the 30 towns and cities having the most marked Democratic loss, 1920-1928.⁵ In other words, the figure averages out a great many Ashfields and Somervilles. The data of Figure B confirm the expectation that the pattern exhibited by the pair of voting units in Figure A represented only a single case of a much more general phenomenon. Yet by virtue of the coverage of the data in the figure, one gains a stronger impression of the difference in the character of the election of 1928 and the other elections recorded there. The cleavage confirmed by the 1928 returns persisted. At subsequent elections the voters shifted to and fro within the outlines of the broad division fixed in 1928.

Examination of the characteristics of the two groups of cities and towns of Figure B — those with the most marked Democratic gains, 1920-1928, and those with the widest movement in the opposite direction — reveals the expected sorts of differences. Urban, industrial, foreign-born, Catholic areas made up the bulk of the first group of towns, although an occasional rural Catholic community

⁵The measure of Democratic gain was the difference between the Democratic percentages of the town vote in 1920 and 1928. Something might be said for the use of the percentage increase from one election to another as a measure of change. Thus, a town 10 per cent Democratic in 1920 and 15 per cent Democratic in 1928 would have had, with a constant total vote, a Democratic percentage increase of 50. This sort of measure obviously has its peculiarities and conceivably its uses. It was rejected on the ground that the method of percentage differences gave a roughly comparable figure from town to town in that it represented the net proportion of the voting population affected by the trend under observation.

increased its Democratic vote markedly. The towns with a contrary movement tended to be rural, Protestant, native-born. The new Democratic vote correlated quite closely with a 1930 vote on state enforcement of the national prohibition law.

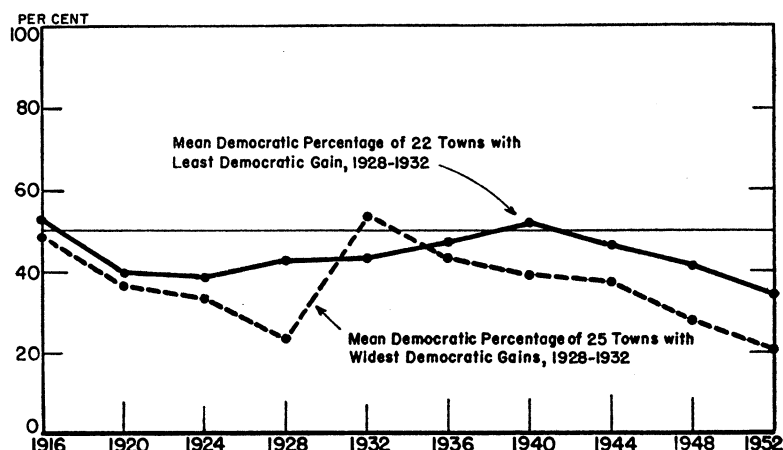


FIGURE C

IMPACT OF ELECTION OF 1932 IN NEW HAMPSHIRE: MEAN DEMOCRATIC PERCENTAGE OF PRESIDENTIAL VOTE OF TOWNS WITH SHARPEST DEMOCRATIC GAIN, 1928-1932, COMPARED WITH MEAN VOTE OF TOWNS AT OPPOSITE EXTREME OF 1928-1932 CHANGE

Melancholy experience with the eccentricities of data, be they quantitative or otherwise, suggests the prudence of a check on the interpretation of 1928. Would the same method applied to any other election yield a similar result, *i. e.*, the appearance of a more or less durable realignment? Perhaps there can be no doubt that the impact of the events of any election on many individuals forms lasting party loyalties; yet not often is the number so affected so great as to create a sharp realignment. On the other hand, some elections are characterized by a large-scale transfer of party affection that is quite short-term, a different sort of phenomenon from that which occurs in elections marked by broad and durable shifts in party strength. The difference is illustrated by the data on the election of 1932 in New Hampshire in Figure C. The voting records of the twenty-five

towns with the widest Democratic gains from 1928 to 1932 are there traced from 1916 to 1952. Observe that Democratic strength in these towns shot up in 1932 but fairly quickly resumed about the same position in relation to other towns that it had occupied in 1928.⁶ It is also evident from the graph that this group of towns had on the whole been especially strongly repelled by the Democratic appeal of 1928. Probably the depression drove an appreciable number of hardened Republicans of these towns to vote for a change in 1932, but they gradually found their way back to the party of their fathers.⁷ In any case, the figure reflects a type of behavior differing markedly from that of 1928. To the extent that 1932 resembled 1928 in the recrystallization of party lines, the proportions of new Democrats did not differ significantly among the groups of towns examined. In fact, what probably happened to a considerable extent in New England was that the 1928 election broke the electorate into two new groups that would have been formed in 1932 had there been no realignment in 1928.

The Massachusetts material has served both to explain the method of analysis and to present the case of a single state. Examinations of the election of 1928 in other New England states indicates that in each a pattern prevailed similar to that of Massachusetts.⁸ The total effect of the realignment differed, of course, from state to state. In Massachusetts and Rhode Island the number of people affected by the upheaval of 1928 was sufficient to form a new majority

⁶An analysis of the 1928-32 shifts in Massachusetts by the same techniques shows a similar pattern of behavior.

⁷This remark and others throughout ought to be read with the caution invariably applicable to inferences about individual behavior from aggregate statistics. To interpret properly the behavior underlying the graph of Figure C one would need a voting history of individual voters over a period of several elections, a body of data not readily available. The inferences from Figure C, however, parallel findings from a 1952 survey which identified a class of Republicans who indicated that they had deserted their party in 1932 or 1936 and later returned to the fold. See Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, Warren E. Miller, *The Voter Decides* (Evanston: Row, Peterson, and Company, 1954), pp. 100-103.

⁸Not only was the pattern in terms of the behavior of towns with greatest Democratic gains and widest Democratic losses similar: it is evident, too, that the same sorts of population groups were affected. In Connecticut the towns with the broadest Democratic gains 1920-1928 had a mean foreign-born population percentage of 23.8 and a mean rural-farm percentage of 14.9. In contrast, the towns showing the sharpest Democratic losses had a mean foreign-born population percentage of 15.0 and a mean rural-farm population percentage of 45.5.

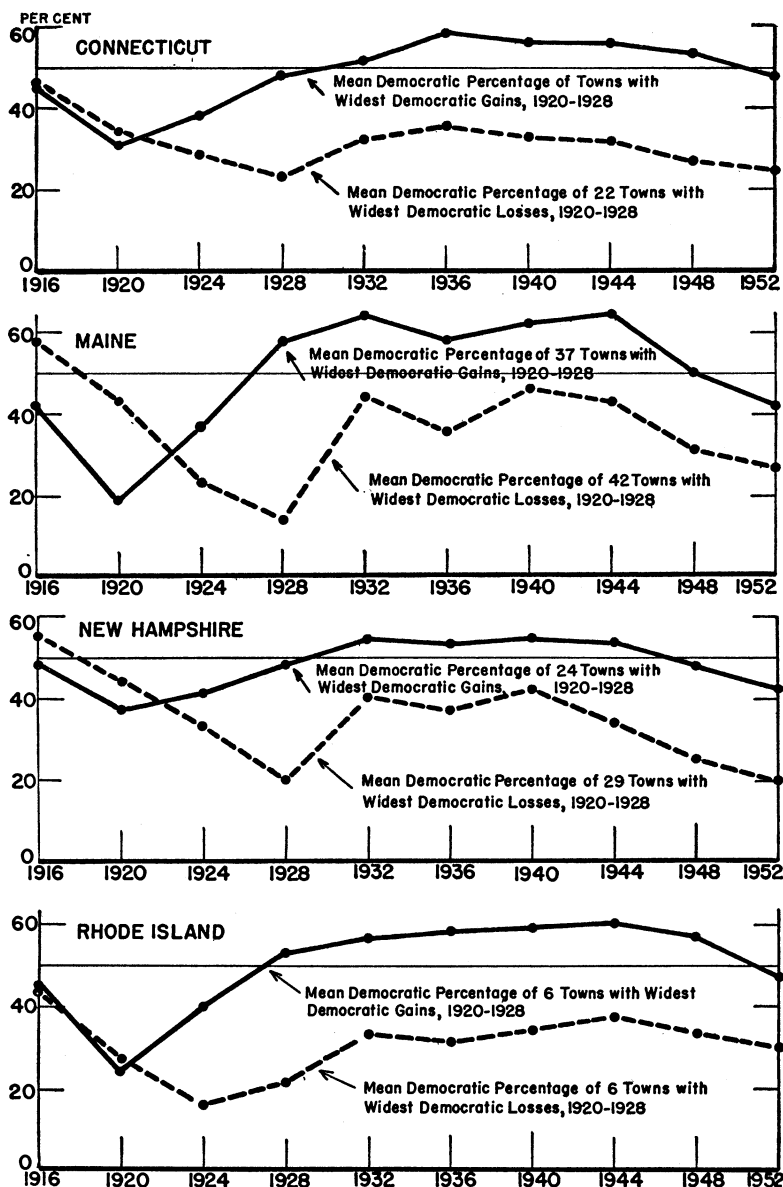


FIGURE D

REALIGNMENT OF 1928 IN CONNECTICUT, MAINE, NEW HAMPSHIRE,
AND RHODE ISLAND

coalition. In Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont the same sort of reshuffling of electors occurred, but the proportions affected were not sufficient to overturn the Republican combination, although the basis was laid in Maine and New Hampshire for later limited Democratic successes. To underpin these remarks the materials on Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island are presented in Figure D. The data on Vermont, excluded for lack of space, form a pattern similar to that emerging from the analysis of the other states.

In the interpretation of all these 1928 analyses certain limitations of the technique need to be kept in mind. The data and the technique most clearly reveal a shift when voters of different areas move in opposite directions. From 1928 to 1936 apparently a good deal of Democratic growth occurred in virtually all geographic units, a shift not shown up sharply by the technique. Hence, the discussion may fail adequately to indicate the place of 1928 as the crucial stage in a process of electoral change that began before and concluded after that year.

II

One of the difficulties with an ideal type is that no single actual case fits exactly its specifications. Moreover, in any system of categorization the greater the number of differentiating criteria for classes, the more nearly one tends to create a separate class for each instance. If taxonomic systems are to be of analytical utility, they must almost inevitably group together instances that are unlike at least in peripheral characteristics irrelevant to the purpose of the system. All of which serves to warn that an election is about to be classified as critical even though in some respects the behavior involved differed from that of the 1928 polling.

Central to our concept of critical elections is a realignment within the electorate both sharp and durable. With respect to these basic criteria the election of 1896 falls within the same category as that of 1928, although it differed in other respects. The persistence of the new division of 1896 was perhaps not so notable as that of 1928; yet the Democratic defeat was so demoralizing and so thorough that the party could make little headway in regrouping its forces until 1916.⁹

⁹The data generate the impression that the 1896 alignment persisted in its basic form until 1928, with the Democratic gains of 1916 being principally a short-term desertion of the Republican Party by classes of British origin and orientation.

Perhaps the significant feature of the 1896 contest was that, at least in New England, it did not form a new division in which partisan lines became more nearly congruent with lines separating classes, religions, or other such social groups. Instead, the Republicans succeeded in drawing new support, in about the same degree, from all sorts of economic and social classes. The result was an electoral coalition formidable in its mass but which required both good fortune and skill in political management for its maintenance, given its latent internal contradictions.

If the 1896 election is described in our terms as a complex of behavior preceding and following the formal voting, an account of the action must include the panic of 1893. Bank failures, railroad receiverships, unemployment, strikes, Democratic championship of deflation and of the gold standard, and related matters created the

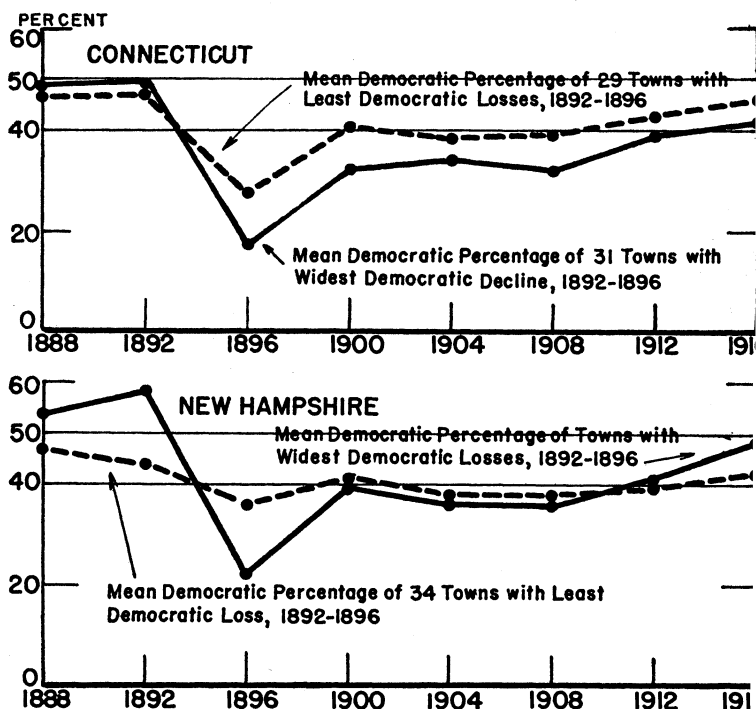


FIGURE E

REALIGNMENT OF 1896 IN CONNECTICUT AND NEW HAMPSHIRE

setting for a Democratic setback in 1894. Only one of the eight New England Democratic Representatives survived the elections of 1894. The two 1892 Democratic governors fell by the wayside and in all the states the Democratic share of the gubernatorial vote fell sharply in 1894. The luckless William Jennings Bryan and the free-silver heresy perhaps did not contribute as much as is generally supposed to the 1892-1896 decline in New England Democratic strength; New England Democrats moved in large numbers over to the Republican ranks in 1894.

The character of the 1892-1896 electoral shift is suggested by the data of Figure E, which presents an analysis of Connecticut and New Hampshire made by the technique used earlier in examining the election of 1928. The graphs make plain that in these states (and the other New England states show the same pattern) the rout of 1896 produced a basic realignment that persisted at least until 1916.¹⁰ The graphs in Figure E also make equally plain that the 1892-1896 realignment differed radically from that of 1928 in certain respects. In 1896 the net movement in all sorts of geographic units was toward the Republicans; towns differed not in the direction of their movement but only in the extent. Moreover, the persistence of the realignment of 1896 was about the same in those towns with the least Democratic loss from 1892 to 1896 as it was in those with the most marked decline in Democratic strength. Hence, the graphs differ from those on 1928 which took the form of opening scissors. Instead, the 1896 realignment appears as a parallel movement of both groups to a lower plateau of Democratic strength.

If the election of 1896 had had a notable differential impact on geographically segregated social groups, the graphs in Figure E of towns at the extremes of the greatest and least 1892-96 change would have taken the form of opening scissors as they did in 1928. While the election of 1896 is often pictured as a last-ditch fight between the haves and the have-nots, that understanding of the contest was, at least in New England, evidently restricted to planes of leadership and oratory. It did not extend to the voting actions of the electorate. These observations merit some buttressing, although the inference emerges clearly enough from Figure E.

¹⁰In the graphs in Figure E the 1912 figure is the Democratic percentage of the three-party vote which is used to provide a measure of the Democratic proportions of the electorate roughly comparable with that used for the other years in the series.

Unfortunately the census authorities have ignored the opportunity to advance demographic inquiry by publishing data of consequence about New England towns. Not much information is available on the characteristics of the populations of these small geographic areas. Nevertheless, size of total population alone is a fair separator of towns according to politically significant characteristics. Classification of towns according to that criterion groups them roughly according to industrialization and probably generally also according to religion and national origin. Hence, with size of population of towns and cities as a basis, Table 1 contrasts the elections of 1896 and 1928 for different types of towns. Observe from the table that the mean shift between 1892 and 1896 was about the same for varying size groups of towns. Contrast this lack of association between

TABLE 1

CONTRASTS BETWEEN ELECTIONS OF 1896 AND 1928 IN MASSACHUSETTS: SHIFTS IN DEMOCRATIC STRENGTH, 1892-1896 AND 1920-1928, IN RELATION TO POPULATION SIZE OF TOWNS

Population Size Group ^a	Mean Democratic Percentage		Mean Change 1892-96	Mean Democratic Percentage		Mean Change 1920-28
	1892	1896		1920	1928	
1-999	34.0	14.7	-19.3	16.5	18.6	+2.1 ^b
2000-2999	38.8	18.3	-20.5	21.0	33.1	+12.1
10000-14999	46.7	26.9	-19.8	25.8	43.7	+17.9
50000+	47.7	30.1	-17.6	29.5	55.7	+26.2

^aThe 1892-1896 towns are grouped according to 1900 population; the 1920-28 towns, according to the 1930 census. The composition of the size groups is, therefore, not the same for the two periods. It is of some interest that the identical towns included in the 1892-96 groupings had about the same group means in Democratic percentage in 1920 as in 1896. The 1920 means for the 1892-96 groups, as composed in 1900, were, in the order given in the table, 15.9; 20.2; 31.2; 31.3. The similarity of these means to those for 1896 would give comfort to supporters of the position that the 1896 cleavage persisted until 1928.

^bIt might be expected from Figure B that this figure would be negative. Although towns tend to be separated into groups with different political characteristics when classified according to size, the category of quite small towns is by no means homogeneous. A suggestion of the variety included among the 78 towns underlying this figure is provided by their division into those over and those less than 40 per cent wet in a 1930 referendum on a measure to repeal the act for state enforcement of the Volstead Act. The towns under 40 per cent wet had a mean change of -1.2 points in Democratic strength from 1920 to 1928. Those over 40 per cent wet had a mean change of +6.2.

size and political movement with the radically different 1920-28 pattern which also appears in the table.

Table 1 makes clear that in 1896 the industrial cities, in their aggregate vote at least, moved toward the Republicans in about the same degree as did the rural farming communities. Some of the misinterpretations of the election of 1896 flow from a focus on that election in isolation rather than in comparison with the preceding election. In 1896, even in New England cities, the Democrats tended to be strongest in the poor, working-class, immigrant sections. Yet the same relation had existed, in a sharper form, in 1892. In 1896 the Republicans gained in the working-class wards, just as they did in the silk-stockings wards, over their 1892 vote. They were able to place the blame for unemployment upon the Democrats and to propagate successfully the doctrine that the Republican Party was the party of prosperity and the "full dinner pail." On the whole, the effect apparently was to reduce the degree of coincidence of class affiliation and partisan inclination.¹¹ Nor was the election of 1896, in New England at least, a matter of heightened tension between city and country. Both city and country voters shifted in the same direction.¹² Neither urban employers nor industrial workers could

¹¹While the Boston ward votes of 1892 and 1896 cannot be compared directly because of boundary changes, an indirect check on the comments in the text is feasible. In 1892 the coefficient of correlation between the percentage of males 21 and over foreign-born in each ward and the Democratic percentage of the ward vote was $+0.88$, with $Y_c = 16.28 + .931X$. In 1896 the coefficient of correlation between the ward percentages of registered voters foreign-born (*Boston City Documents*, 1897, v. I, Doc. 9) and the Democratic percentage of the ward vote was $+0.82$ with $Y_c = -9.0 + 1.428X$. In 1892 the mean Democratic percentage of the wards was 58.2; in 1896, 38.1. In both years Democratic strength varied from ward to ward directly with foreign-born population proportions (which may be regarded also as an index of economic status) but in all sorts of areas, rich and poor, the Republicans apparently had a net gain of approximately 20 percentage points in 1896 over 1892.

¹²William Diamond has discussed urban-rural tension in his "Urban and Rural Voting in 1896," *The American Historical Review*, XLVI (January, 1941), 281-305. His measures of tension rest on a comparison of the Bryan percentages of the vote in cities of over 45,000 and in the remainder of each state. In his analysis New England emerges as an area of relatively high urban-rural tension. To the extent that urban-rural tension played a part in Massachusetts in 1896 it was evidently no more salient than it had been in 1892; Democratic candidates did relatively better in the cities than in the country at both elections. Between 1892 and 1896 Democratic strength declined in both rural and urban populations and to about the same extent. Rice's index of likeness between groups (which is the complement of the differences between divisions in percentages) computed for Diamond's urban and rural groups in

generate much enthusiasm for inflation and free trade; rather they joined in common cause. Instead of a sharpening of class cleavages within New England the voting apparently reflected more a sectional antagonism and anxiety, shared by all classes, expressed in opposition to the dangers supposed to be threatening from the West.¹³

Other contrasts between the patterns of electoral behavior of 1896 and 1928 could be cited¹⁴ but in terms of sharpness and durability of realignment both elections were of roughly the same type, at least in New England. In these respects they seem to differ from most other elections over a period of a half century, although it may well be that each round at the ballot boxes involves realignment within the electorate similar in kind but radically different in extent.

III

The discussion points toward the analytical utility of a system for the differentiation of elections. A concept of critical elections has been developed to cover a type of election in which there occurs a sharp and durable electoral realignment between parties, although the techniques employed do not yield any information of consequences about the mechanisms for the maintenance of a new alignment, once it is formed. Obviously any sort of system for the gross characterization of elections presents difficulties in application. The actual election rarely presents in pure form a case fitting completely

the 1892 presidential voting in Massachusetts is 91.6; for 1896, 88.6. In other words, the point of party division of urban and rural populations did not differ greatly between the two groups in either election. Apart from these quantitative resemblances there may well have been qualitative differences in urban-rural antagonisms in the two elections.

¹³An analysis of states such as that used in dealing with towns in the preparation of Figure B and similar charts shows something of the sectional coloration of the 1896 voting. Outside the South, eight states moved more than 12 percentage points (in differences in Republican proportions of the total vote) toward the Republicans from 1892 to 1896. These states with the most marked Republican gains included the New England states, New Jersey, and Wisconsin. States with the widest Republican losses were Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada. The mean percentages of these two groups, when graphed, have a suggestion of the opening scissors form. The mean percentages for the two groups were:

	1892	1896	1900	1904	1908
Gaining Republican	52	67	61	63	61
Declining Republican	38	18	42	58	45

¹⁴The 1896 voting evidently involved a great deal of crossing of party lines by Democrats while it seems probable that in 1928 the Democratic gain came

any particular concept. Especially in a large and diverse electorate a single polling may encompass radically varying types of behavior among different categories of voters;¹⁵ yet a dominant characteristic often makes itself apparent. Despite such difficulties, the attempt to move toward a better understanding of elections in the terms here employed could provide a means for better integrating the study of electoral behavior with the analysis of political systems. In truth, a considerable proportion of the study of electoral behavior has only a tenuous relation to politics.

The sorts of questions here raised, when applied sufficiently broadly on a comparative basis and carried far enough, could lead to a consideration of basic problems of the nature of democratic orders. A question occurs, for example, about the character of the consequences for the political system of the temporal frequency of critical elections.¹⁶ What are the consequences for public administration, for the legislative process, for the operation of the economy of frequent serious upheavals within the electorate? What are the correlates of that pattern of behavior? And, for those disposed to raise such questions, what underlying changes might alter the situa-

in considerable measure from the attraction of new voters into the active electorate. In 1896 electoral participation nationally was at a high level, in the neighborhood of 80 per cent of the total potential vote. From 1892 to 1896 in New England the total presidential vote increased only 3 per cent, while the Republican vote grew by 35.8 per cent and the Democratic vote declined by 37.7 per cent. Such figures point toward a large scale conversion of Democrats to the Republican cause. From 1896 to 1924 the proportions of the potential national electorate voting in Presidential elections underwent a secular decline to around 49 per cent, a movement by no means attributable entirely to the expansion of the suffrage but probably more fundamentally reflective of a contraction of national attention on matters political. In any case, by 1928 the population included large numbers of persons eligible for political activation. In 1928, the total New England presidential vote grew by 34.6 per cent over 1924, an unusually high rate of growth between elections, while the Republican vote was increasing by only 13 per cent and the Democratic by 135 per cent, a disparity accounted for in part by Democratic defections to La Follette in 1924. The absolute Democratic gain was of the general order of magnitude of the gain in the total vote. A substantial proportion of the new Democratic vote probably came from accretions to the active electorate. A re-examination of elections with an eye to the bearing on the results of sharp increases in the electorate, either sectionally or within other subdivisions, might produce significant reinterpretations of episodes in the American party battle.

¹⁵For example, the 1928 election in the South, in contrast with New England, involved large but short-lived accretions to the Republican ranks.

¹⁶See the related discussion by Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), Vol. 1, pp. 205-206.

tion? Or, when viewed from the contrary position, what consequences flow from an electorate which is disposed, in effect, to remain largely quiescent over considerable periods? Does a state of moving equilibrium reflect a pervasive satisfaction with the course of public policy? An indifference about matters political? In any case, what are the consequences for the public order? Further, what are the consequences when an electorate builds up habits and attachments, or faces situations, that make it impossible for it to render a decisive and clear-cut popular verdict that promises not to be upset by caprice at the next round of polling? What are the consequences of a situation that creates recurring, evenly balanced conflict over long periods? On the other hand, what characteristics of an electorate or what conditions permit sharp and decisive changes in the power structure from time to time? Such directions of speculation are suggested by a single criterion for the differentiation of elections. Further development of an electoral typology would probably point to useful speculation in a variety of directions.