

# **From 'Factions' to Attack Ads – A History of American Politics**

Class 6

William A. Reader

E-mail: [wreader@cox.net](mailto:wreader@cox.net)

# What We Will Cover Today

- Finish up on Political Machines
- The Mechanics of Voting
  - From paper ballots to touchscreen voting
- Some Notes on How Political Scientists See Elections
- The 1896 Election
- The 1912 Election
- The 1928 Election
- The Political Impact of Radio

# Political Machine

- The Progressives enacted various reforms designed to both weaken the machines and lessen their voting power. These included:
  - Voter registration
  - Australian or secret ballot
  - Literacy tests
  - Civil Service reform
  - Prohibition of electioneering close to the voting booth
  - Initiative, referendum, and recall
  - Primary

# Political Machine

- While the political machines fought some Progressive legislation
  - Civil Service reform
  - Replacing nominating by caucus or convention with the direct primary
  - Restrictions on fundraising
- Many of the machines supported socio-economic reform legislation that benefited their working class constituents

# Political Machine

- Several factors combined to bring about the demise of the machine
  - Progressive era reforms
  - The New Deal and the rise of the Welfare State
    - Governments now took over the social welfare functions of the machine
  - Social mobility
    - The children of the ethnic immigrant poor became members of the middle class and moved from the city to the suburbs
  - New mass media (radio & TV) took over the political communication function of the machine

# Some Notes About the Political Machine - 1

- It existed to secure and perpetuate power in the hands of a known political organization
- That power was primarily used to benefit those who controlled and were members of the machine
- It retained power by controlling votes
- It controlled votes by providing services and favors for voters who in turn gave the machine candidates their votes out of gratitude (and sometimes, hope of a patronage job)

# Some Notes About the Political Machine - 2

- Political machines were much more focused on local rather than national issues
- The machines often supported socio-economic reforms desired by their poor and working class constituents
- There were rural as well as urban machines
  - Pennsylvania before the 1930s
  - Several southern states (especially Virginia with the Byrd Machine)

# Some Notes About the Political Machine - 3

- What differentiated the rural machines from the urban machines was:
  - The urban boss's political power came from control of the political machine, not from any public office.
    - In fact many noted bosses (Richard Croker & Charles Murphy of Tammany Hall) did not hold public office
  - The rural boss's political power normally resulted from the fact that he had other sources of power
    - Thus rural bosses were often either large landowners, agents for the railroad, bankers, or merchants with local monopolies

# Changes in Voting Over Time

# Changes in Voting - 1

- Voter in Colonial America
  - Voter is an adult white male who owns property
  - Political leaders are personally known to the voter and members of locally prominent and well-established families
  - Voting done *viva voce* in public

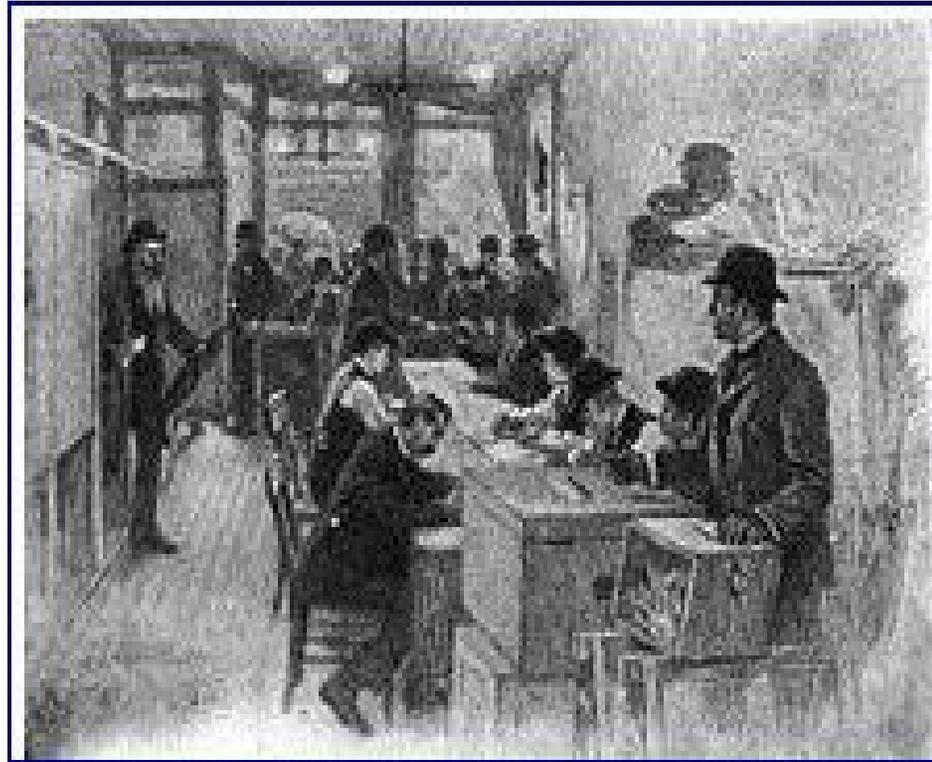
# Early *Viva Voce* Voting



# Changes in Voting - 2

- Voter in Jacksonian America
  - Voter is an adult white male who owns property
  - Voting done via printed ballots
    - Printing done by the political party or candidate
    - Since each party used different color ballots, a voter's vote was not secret
  - Given the existence of party-printed ballots, straight ticket voting from president to dog catcher was the norm

# Australian Ballot Voting



# Changes in Voting - 3

- In 1888, Massachusetts introduced the Australian or secret ballot.
- By 1891, all states had adopted it
- Characteristics of the Australian ballot:
  - Official ballot printed at public expense
  - Had the names of all the parties and candidates
  - Distributed only at the polling place
  - Marked by the voter in secret and deposited into a ballot box

# Changes in Voting - 4

- Mechanical (or Lever) Voting Machines
  - Invented in 1881 by Anthony Beranek of Chicago
    - 1892 - First used in Lockport NY
    - 1894 – Sylvanus Davis added a straight-party lever and simplified the interlock mechanism
  - In 1899, Alfred Gillespie introduced three major innovations
    - Linked the cast-vote lever to a curtain
    - Introduced the lever by each candidate's name
    - Made the machine programmable so that it could support races in which voters were allowed to vote for more than one candidate in a field.

# Lever Voting Machine



# Lever Voting Machine Closeup



# Punched-Card Voting

- Punched-card voting systems came on the scene after 1965
  - By 1996, they were used by 37.3% of all voters
  - Achieved notoriety in Florida in 2000

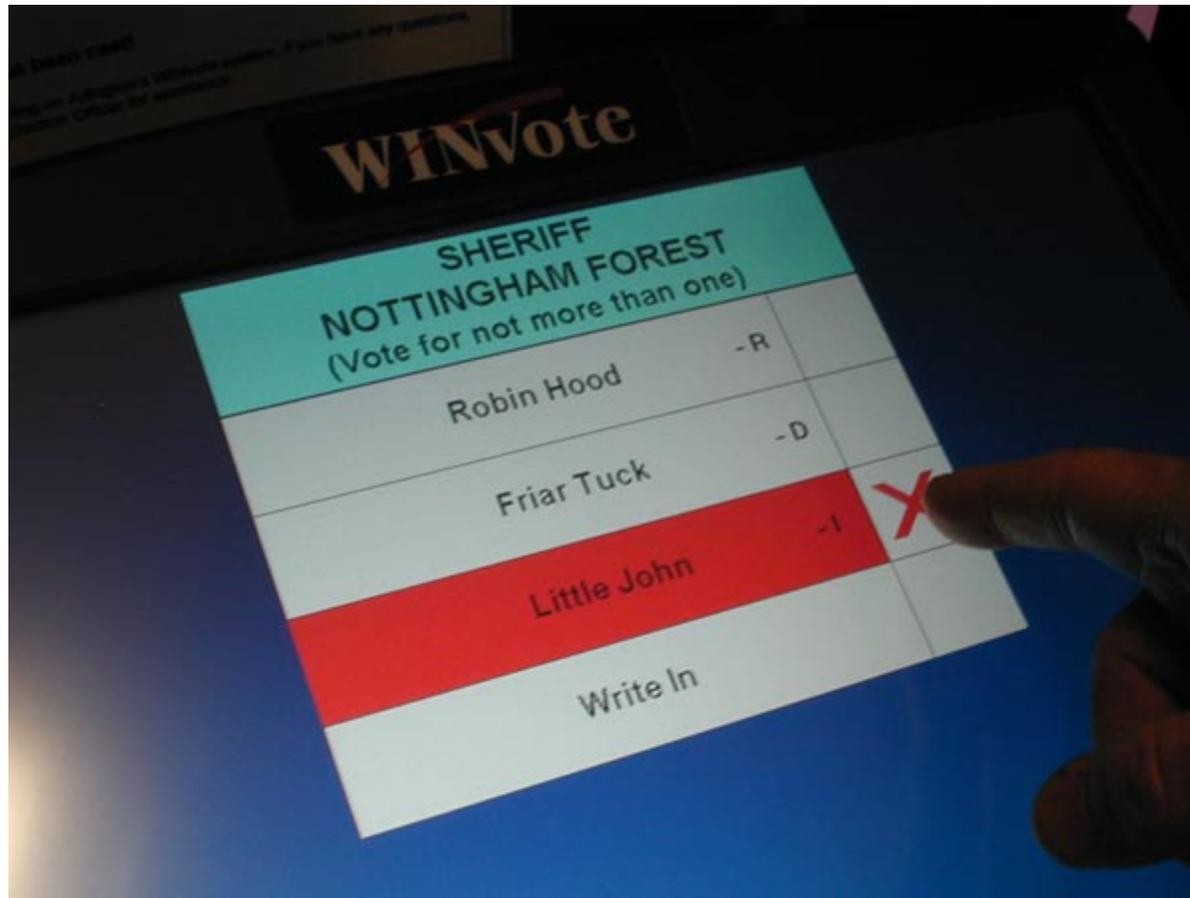
# Votomatic Punched Card Voting Machine



# Direct-recording Electronic Voting System

- An example of this system are the touchscreen voting system used in Northern Virginia
  - Tabulate data in a removable memory component and can produce a printed copy
  - Can also transmit individual ballots or vote totals from the voting precinct to a central location
- These systems were first used in 1996
- By 2004, 28.9% of voters used such a system

# Touchscreen Voting Machine



# How Political Scientists See Elections

# Political Science Views

- Political scientists see two party political systems as consisting of a majority party and a minority party
  - The majority party will have more voters affiliated with it than the other
  - This pattern will persist for long periods of time
- In this context, elections are classified as either maintaining, deviating, or realigning

# Maintaining Elections

- This type of election is the most common
- It maintains the political status quo
- The majority party wins the election because it commands the allegiance of the majority of voters in that particular political era
  - Voters see the majority party candidate as qualified for the office and consequently vote for him/her

# Deviating Elections

- In this election, the minority party wins but nevertheless remains the minority party
- The election is an exception that does not permanently alter the party system
- Deviating elections can occur for a variety of reasons
  - The majority party nominates a candidate with baggage or a seeming lack of qualifications for the office
  - The minority party nominates an incredibly popular person
    - a war hero or someone charismatic
  - The majority party suffers from factional strife so that a major faction of the party sits out the election or defects to the minority party

# Realigning Elections

- Realigning elections are the least common but the most important in terms of political and historical impact
- Realigning elections exhibit the following characteristics
  - The existing political order is disrupted due to one or more unusually powerful and divisive issues
  - Blocs of voters permanently shift their partisan loyalties from one party to another
  - Major changes in policy ensue through the action of the stronger party

# Realigning Elections - 2

- Characteristics of Realigning Elections (cont)
  - They are often preceded or accompanied by significant third party activity
  - They often feature record voter turnouts
  - They are characterized by definitive conflicting stands on one or more major issues so that voters see a genuine choice between policy alternatives and the direction of government
  - They often occur only once in a generation or two
  - Sometimes, realignment occurs over a two-election cycle in which the realignment begins in one election and is completed in the next election

# Other Important Elections

- While Realigning Elections are the most important
- There are elections (including Deviating and Maintenance elections) that are important because
  - They introduce or show the impact of new technologies
  - They introduce new campaign techniques and innovations
  - They create political scars that fester and eventually either destroy the party or lead to a realigning election
  - They result in the accession to the presidency of a person whose decisions, due to the circumstances of his presidency, have major historical consequences

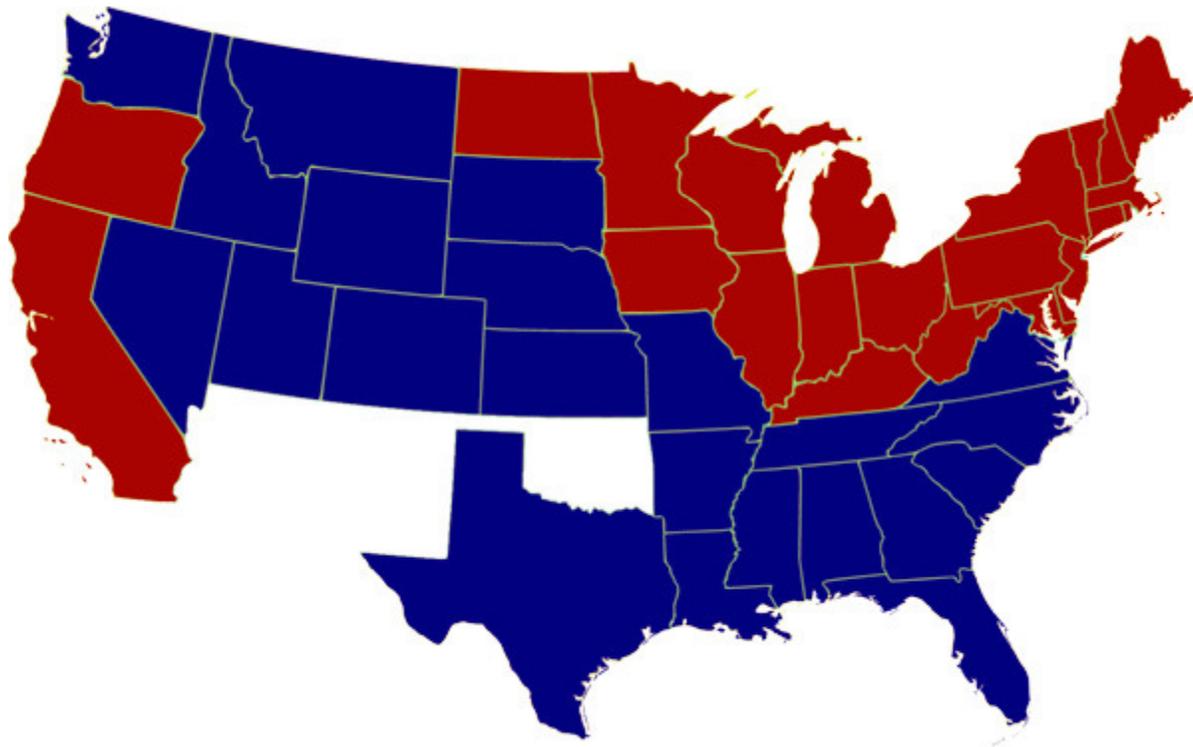
# 1896 Election

# 1896 Election

- The Republicans nominated William McKinley and Garrett Hobart, a NJ corporation lawyer
- The Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan and Arthur Sewell, a rich ME shipbuilder
  - The Populists also nominated Bryan but chose Thomas Watson of GA as their vice-presidential nominee



# 1896 Election



# Significance of the 1896 Election

- Was the first presidential election in which modern advertising played a major role
- Was the first presidential (except for 1860) in which a presidential candidate extensively campaigned
- Was fought over the issue of gold vs silver
- Resulted in the election of William McKinley as President

# Significance of the 1896 Election - 2

- Was a realigning election
  - Brought Western farmers and Silver Republicans into the Democratic Party
  - Drove workers and Gold Democrats into the Republican Party
  - Allowed the Republicans to position themselves as the party most friendly to business
  - Left the Democratic Party divided into two major factions – an urban, ethnic, workingclass faction that had largely deserted Bryan (and did not return until 1912) and a rural, white Protestant faction that strongly supported him

# Significance of the 1896 Election - 3

- Began the shift of Democratic Party ideology from states' rights and governmental minimalism to the idea that government should intervene in the economy to promote the general welfare
  - Cleveland – “the Government should not support the people”
  - Wilson – “life is so complicated that we are not dealing with old conditions, and that law has to step in and create new conditions under which we may live”

# 1912 Election

# 1912 Election

- If we were to believe the extreme partisans, the 1912 presidential election candidates consisted of:
  - A hypocrite, promoter of fraud, an ingrate who bit the hand that fed him, with the brains of a guinea pig
  - An aloof long-haired bookworm who had no business in politics and was a compulsive liar
  - The most cunning and adroit demagogue that modern civilization had produced since Napoleon and an illustrious example of a person with distorted mental processes

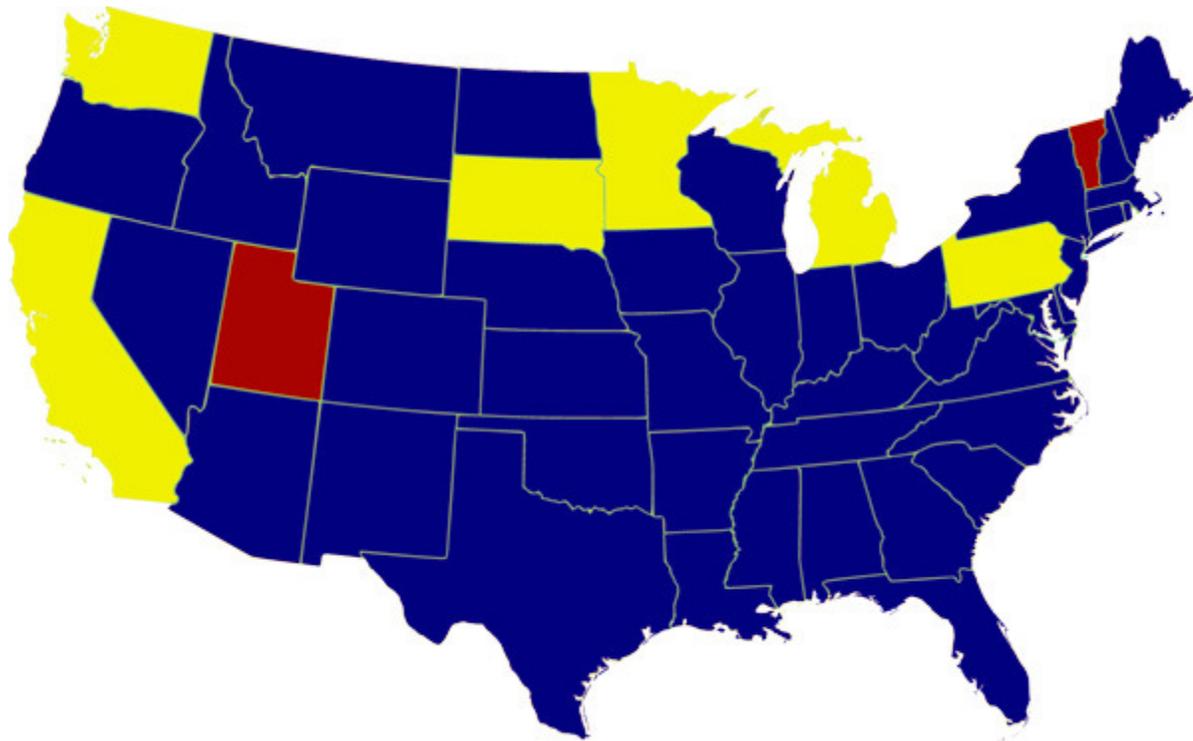
# 1912 Election

- The Democrats nominated Governor Woodrow Wilson of NJ and Senator Thomas Marshall of IN
- The Republicans renominated President William Howard Taft and Nicholas Murray Butler (President of Columbia University)
- The Progressives nominated ex-President Theodore Roosevelt and Senator Hiram Johnson of CA
- The Socialists nominated Eugene V. Debs and Emil Seidel

# Political Views

- Taft was a traditional Conservative who supported free markets, anti-trust legislation, and reforms that promoted efficiency and honesty in both government and business
- Roosevelt supported the Progressive platform which called for numerous reforms
- Wilson favored some Progressive reforms but not others
  - In racial views, he was a segregationist
- What is significant is that none of the candidates espoused traditional Laissez-faire Liberalism

# 1912 Election



# 1912 Election

- Due to the Republican split, Wilson won the election with a plurality of 41.8% of the popular vote, but with 435 electoral votes
- Roosevelt got 27.4% of the popular vote but only 88 electoral votes
- Taft got 23.2% of the popular vote but only 8 electoral votes

# Significance of the 1912 Election

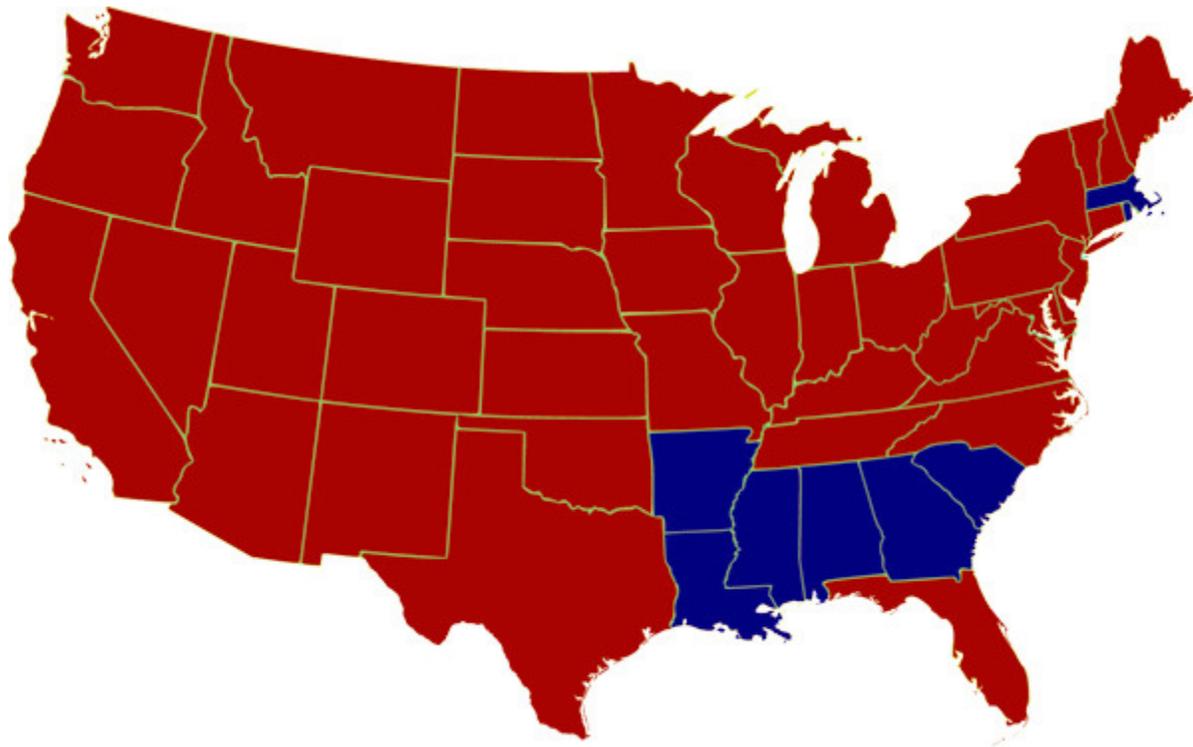
- It marked a stage in the evolution of Liberalism and the Democratic Party from 19<sup>th</sup> Century Laissez-Faire Liberalism to 20<sup>th</sup> Century State intervention Liberalism
- It produced a schism in the Republican Party between its Progressive wing and its Conservative wing that never healed
- It led to the election of Woodrow Wilson as President
  - Enactment of many progressive reforms
  - Involvement in World War I
  - The Treaty of Versailles and all its consequences

# 1928 Election

# 1928 Election

- The Republicans nominated Herbert Hoover and Senator Charles Curtis of KS
- The Democrats nominated Al Smith and Senator Joseph Robinson of AR
- The major issues were maintenance of prosperity, anti-Catholic bigotry, Prohibition, and Smith's connection to Tammany Hall

# 1928 Election



# 1928 Election

- Hoover won in a landslide, winning 58.2% of the vote and 444 electoral votes
  - Hoover won a substantial portion of the rural, dry, Protestant vote that had voted for Bryan
  - Hoover carried 5 traditionally Democratic states in the South – Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, Tennessee, and Texas
- Smith won only 40.8% of the popular vote
  - Smith carried Massachusetts and Rhode Island and nearly carried New York
  - Smith carried the 12 largest cities in the nation, something the Democrats had not done since Cleveland
- Vote totals increased by 7,702,000 over 1924, roughly 56%

# Significance of the 1928 Election

- For the first time, Radio played a significant role in a presidential election
  - Smith's deficiencies as a radio speaker led the Democrats to seek future presidential candidate who came across well on the radio
- Despite his landslide loss, Smith nearly doubled the Democratic vote over 4 years before
  - Smith attracted a large number of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation ethnic immigrant voters who had not voted in previous elections
  - These voters would go on the vote Democratic for the next 24 years and become a major component of new Democratic majority

# Significance of the 1928 Election - 2

- By making Prohibition a political issue, the 1928 election identified Prohibition with the Republican Party so that the fate of Prohibition became tied to that of the Republican Party
- By contending that the Republican party and policies had engineered the prosperity of the 1920s, the Republicans laid themselves open to the contention that they engineered the Great Depression of the 1930s

# Politics and Radio

# A Note About Radio Broadcasting

- From its origins, and especially since the creation of the radio networks in the 1920s, radio was a broadcasting medium
  - It was a medium of one-way voice communication to a large audience of diverse backgrounds, interests, and tastes
- With the coming of television, radio became a narrowcasting medium that appealed largely to a niche audience

# Political Effects of Radio - 1

- Revolutionized politics
  - Enabled politicians to go over the heads of both the press and the political party, thus weakening their relative power
  - Helped set the national agenda on significant issues and events
  - Created an ‘imagined community’ of like-minded listeners who could be politically mobilized

# Political Effects of Radio - 2

- It led people to focus on and know about what was happening at the national and international level as distinct from the local community level
  - Thanks to radio and later TV, we now have people who are well-informed about what is going on in Washington or in the Middle East, but who have no idea of who their local mayor or city council representative is

# Political Effects of Radio - 3

- Changed the nature of political speech
  - Emphasized the voice of the politician
    - This hurt politicians with heavy accents, booming voices, and an inability to stand still in front of a microphone
    - It helped politicians who could speak in a conversational tone and clear unaccented voice

# Political Effects of Radio - 4

- Along with television, It changed how people looked upon politicians because it turned politicians into celebrities
  - Before radio (and movies), people were known because they were famous, very successful, or infamous – they had accomplished something that set them apart
  - After radio (and movies), people became celebrities – known for being known because they appeared in the media

# Political Effects of Radio - 5

- The concept of the audience led to the concept of the average American
  - This provoked an interest in ratings, audience demographics, and the tastes and attitudes of the presumed average America
    - What was the average American listening to? Or buying?  
Who was listening to *Our Miss Brooks* or *The Shadow*?
- Interest in ratings in turn led to political polling
  - Roper & Gallop saw election polls as a check on polling methods and accurate election predictions as a way of gaining corporate clients

# Political Effects of Radio - 6

- Public opinion polling in turn affected how politicians handled political issues and framed public policies
  - Polls on how voters felt about a particular candidate or issue impacted on:
    - Which candidates received the blessing of political and party leaders
    - How candidates conducted their campaigns
      - Campaign trips
      - Allocation of campaign resources
    - How politicians discussed public policies
      - Linking a proposed policy to a favored or disfavored public figure, ideology, or historical event

# A Note About Roosevelt, Hoover & Radio

- FDR was the first president to address the nation directly by radio, as opposed to simply permitting a speech to a group to be broadcast
  - FDR saw radio as a way of conducting an end run around newspapers - which generally in their editorial pages opposed his reelection in 1936
- While radio changed Hoover from a poor platform speaker into an effective campaigner, he made a fatal mistake on the radio in 1932
  - He let his speech run over and knock listeners' favorite radio programs off the air

# Impact of Television on Radio

- Changed radio from a broadcasting medium to a narrowcasting medium
  - Radio survived because it could target specific demographic groups (Blacks, teenagers, farmers, and ethnic minorities) that Network television tended to ignore
- Caused the most popular radio programs and stars to migrate to TV
- Changed the prime listening hours of radio from the evening to the commuting hours
  - This turned radio from an entertainment medium into an information medium

# Impact of FM Radio

- In the 1970s, music left AM radio for FM
- To fill the void, most AM radio stations moved to a talk radio format
- Talk radio became the one mass medium available to the underclass
- Satellite technology allowed stations to distribute their shows nationwide
  - This paved the way for Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern

# Impact of Talk Shows

- Right-wing talk show hosts pushed the Republican Party more and more to the Right
  - Mobilized the Conservative base of the party against Liberal Republicans
    - This resulted in the defeat of many Liberal and Moderate Republicans in primaries
    - It led many Republican politicians to have a “no enemies to the right” stance lest they face primary opposition
  - Helped elect politicians who disdain compromise, especially on taxes

# Impact of Talk Shows - 2

- Rigidity on the Right on the issue of taxes has provoked a reciprocal rigidity on the Left on the issue of entitlements
  - The “No Net Tax Increase” pledge of Grover Norquist meets the “Do not touch entitlements” pledge of Nancy Pelosi
- The result: stalemate, gridlock, increasing budget deficits, a failure to deal with real problems, and a growing contempt for Congress