

Title Page

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Popular campaigning and the presidential election of 1824.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>AJPS</i>	<i>American Journal of Political Science</i>
<i>APSR</i>	<i>American Political Science Review</i>
BL	British Library, London
<i>CP</i>	<i>Congress & the Presidency</i>
<i>IMH</i>	<i>Indiana Magazine of History</i>
<i>JAH</i>	<i>Journal of American History</i>
<i>JER</i>	<i>Journal of the Early Republic</i>
<i>JSH</i>	<i>Journal of Southern History</i>
LC	Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
n.d.	No date
n.n.	No name
n.p.	No place of publication
NCHC	North Carolina Historical Commission
NYSL	New York State Library
<i>POQ</i>	<i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i>
<i>PSQ</i>	<i>Political Science Quarterly</i>
RUL	Rochester University Library, New York
<i>THQ</i>	<i>Tennessee Historical Quarterly</i>
THS	Tennessee Historical Society

Note on quotations: Wherever possible, spelling, punctuation, italicisation, and capitalisation follows the original.

Introduction

In the place of two great parties arrayed against each other in a fair and open contest for the establishment of principles in the administration of Government which they respectively believed most conducive to the public interest, the country was overrun with personal factions. These, having few higher motives for the selection of their candidates or stronger incentives to action than individual preferences or antipathies, moved the bitter waves of political agitation to their lowest depths.²

Written by former President and perennial partisan Martin Van Buren in his retirement, these two sentences set a precedent for historical accounts of the presidential election of 1824. To James Chase, the contest offered ‘a rare demonstration of what happens when a triumphant party, having vanquished its opposition, also exhausts its ideology, heroes, and organization.’³ The campaign ‘lack[ed] basic issues,’ James Hopkins agreed.⁴ Unsurprising then, Richard McCormick concluded, that with ‘numerous sectionally based candidates, backed by minimal organizations, the election of 1824 did not greatly arouse the electorate.’⁵ As Donald Ratcliffe has observed, these descriptions convey the impression that the election was merely a ‘mildly interesting popularity contest,’ occurring in a ‘political limbo’ that preceded the emergence of a national mass-orientated two-party system.⁶

² Martin Van Buren, *Inquiry into the Origins and Course of Political Parties in the United States* (n.p., 1867), pp. 3-4, cited in Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley, 1970), p. 227.

³ James S. Chase, *Emergence of the Presidential Nominating Convention, 1789-1832* (Illinois, 1973), p. 41.

⁴ James F. Hopkins, ‘Election of 1824,’ in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Fred L. Israel (eds.), *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968* (New York, 1971), vol. I, p. 364.

⁵ Richard P. McCormick, *The Presidential Game: The Origins of American Presidential Politics* (New York, 1982), p. 147.

⁶ Donald J. Ratcliffe, *The Politics of Long Division: The Birth of the Second Party System in Ohio, 1818-1828* (Ohio, 2000), pp. xi-xii.

Yet on closer examination, the 1824 election exhibits several of the characteristics commonly reserved by historians for the so-called Party Period. Although ultimately decided in Congress, the contest was the first of its kind in which ordinary citizens played a significant role. Since the last competitive presidential election in 1812, the number of states in which electors were chosen by popular vote had increased from eight to eighteen, with only six retaining selection by the legislature. In addition, a widespread relaxation of suffrage restrictions had extended the franchise to include almost all adult white males outside of Louisiana, Rhode Island and Virginia. These changes contributed to a revival of interest in the presidential question. The popular turnout of 27% in 1824 was nearly three times higher than the nadir of 1820, and signalled the beginning of a series of increases that would soon see over 80% of the electorate voting in presidential elections.⁷

The 1824 presidential election was also the first in which candidates engaged in significant popular campaigning. This development reflected the new value attached to the popular vote, and was further encouraged by the unprecedented number of contenders for the presidency. The most immediate consequence, as Michael Heale originally detailed, was ‘the introduction of new techniques to mobilize popular opinion behind a candidate, a new kind of campaign which anticipated the “image politics” of later generations.’⁸ Equally importantly, Donald Ratcliffe has recently

⁷ Table 5.2. ‘Turnout by Region and Office Category, 1788/89 – 1844/45 (percentage),’ in Walter Dean Burnham, ‘Critical Realignment: Dead or Alive?’ in Byron E. Shafer (ed.), *The End of Realignment?: Interpreting American Electoral Eras* (Wisconsin, 1991), p. 123.

⁸ Heale, p. 38.

demonstrated, ‘the complex loyalties created in 1824, however generated, were not going to pass away, but were capable of dictating the future pattern of politics.’⁹

If some aspects of the 1824 election anticipated the Party Period, others recalled the era of the Revolution. Richard McCormick pioneered the approach of considering each presidential election as a game, in the sense of ‘a contest conducted according to definable rules,’ which may be respected, manipulated, or transgressed.¹⁰ For the candidates in 1824, these rules were largely inherited from the Founding Fathers, not only in the formal provisions of the Constitution, but also through the informal legacy of a system of values and beliefs known collectively as republicanism.

Republicanism is one of the most studied concepts in United States historiography.¹¹ In brief, the Founding Fathers believed that ‘the object of government...is the happiness of the people.’ However, ‘the caprice and wickedness of man’ creates the danger that those chosen to govern may ‘aim at an ambitious sacrifice of the many to the aggrandizement of the few.’ Therefore, the purpose of the election process is ‘to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society,’ and to thwart those that display ‘talents for low intrigue, and the little arts of popularity.’¹² Michael Heale has dubbed this ideal republican candidate the ‘Mute Tribune.’¹³

⁹ Ratcliffe, *Politics of Long Division*, p. 122.

¹⁰ McCormick, *Presidential Game*, p. 4.

¹¹ See Daniel T. Rodgers, ‘Republicanism: The Career of a Concept,’ *JAH* 79 (1992).

¹² *The Federalist Papers* (1787-1788), no. 57, 62, 68, FoundingFathers.info,

<http://www.foundingfathers.info/federalistpapers/>.

¹³ Heale, pp. 1-22.

The tension between established principles and evolving practices caused a number of problems for the participants in the 1824 election. To openly abandon the 'Mute Tribune' model was inconceivable; contemporary commentators agreed that 'if we venerate that inheritance of freedom which has descended to us from the fathers of the Revolution, and would preserve it unpolluted for our children and for posterity, we must resist every attempt to corrupt the purity of our elections.'¹⁴ Yet with multiple candidates in contention, how could each justify his pursuit of the presidency? If all were to remain mute, how could any conduct an effective campaign? And given the traditional distrust of demagoguery, who would prove most adept at courting the popular electorate?

These questions illustrate that far from being 'a mere prologue to a more interesting tale,' the presidential election of 1824 was an important stage in the gradual transition of the United States from a republican to a democratic mode of politics.¹⁵ This study will not provide a comprehensive narrative of the election itself, particularly in its intricacies in each state. Rather, it will use one aspect, the popular campaign, to explore how the contest compelled a generation of politicians to reshape the rules they inherited from the past to meet the needs of the present, a process that Marc Kruman has called 'the transformation of revolutionary republicanism.'¹⁶

¹⁴ n.n., *An Address to the People of Ohio, on the important subject of the next Presidency* (Cincinnati, 1824), p. 6.

¹⁵ Ratcliffe, *Politics of Long Division*, p. xi.

¹⁶ Marc W. Kruman, 'The Second American Party System and the Transformation of Revolutionary Republicanism,' *JER* 12 (1992).

Chapter I. The Presidential Candidates

‘The presidency is not an office to be either solicited or declined,’ responded Congressman William Lowndes upon learning of his nomination by the South Carolina legislature in 1821.¹⁷ Lowndes was widely commended for reaffirming the republican rule that ‘a contest for individual advancement...proves, that the man who can resort to it, must act alone from motive – from selfish considerations, and be wanting in those honorable feelings which qualify for the possession of office.’¹⁸ Yet as the presidential election drew closer, the *Delaware Gazette* complained that ‘interest and ambition multiplies candidates for office like maggets in the hot sun.’¹⁹ Although death removed Lowndes from the race prematurely, his simple statement illustrates the first challenge confronting the remaining contenders in the 1824 election: how could each justify his pursuit of the presidency?

Contemporary criticisms of the candidates’ motives are echoed in historical accounts that portray the 1824 election as lacking in issues. Richard McCormick typifies the traditional view of the contest as a ‘Game of Faction,’ in which ‘ambitious aspirants...contend[ed] for the prize’ in the absence of ‘party lines...[and] explicit issues of principle or policy.’²⁰ Yet as early as 1939, Albert Ray Newsome noted that ‘a survey of the campaign shows that the strongest and most frequent appeals to the voters were based on public issues with which the candidates were identified rather

¹⁷ Lowndes to James Hamilton, 29 December 1821, in Harriott Horry Ravenel, *Life and Times of William Lowndes of South Carolina, 1782-1822* (n.p., 1901), p. 226, cited in Heale, p. 1.

¹⁸ ‘Wyoming,’ *The Letters of Wyoming, to the People of the United States, on the Presidential Election, and in favour of Andrew Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1824), p. 22.

¹⁹ [Wilmington] *Delaware Gazette*, 25 March 1823, in Robert P. Hay, “‘The Presidential Question’: Letters to Southern Editors, 1823-24,” *THQ* 31 (1972), p.182.

²⁰ McCormick, *Presidential Game*, pp. 117-118. See also Hopkins, ‘Election of 1824,’ pp. 349-350.

than on their personalities.’²¹ Donald Ratcliffe subsequently confirmed that ‘there were issues at stake in this election...and differences between the candidates seem to have been clearly perceived.’²² Indeed, republican expectations made it essential for each candidate to convince the electorate that issues were important, and that they alone stood not for private gain, but for the public good.

One issue in the 1824 campaign was the confused condition of party politics. Since the retirement of George Washington in 1796, two parties had contested the presidency: the Federalists and the Republicans. However, the idea of a party system was incompatible with the republican concept of a single common good; as contemporary theorist John Taylor rationalized, ‘truth is a thing, not of divisibility into conflicting parts, but of unity. Hence both sides cannot be right.’²³ Therefore, these first parties were paradoxical entities, the existence of each justifiable only on the grounds that the other was ‘subversive of the principles of good government and dangerous to the union, peace and happiness of the Country.’²⁴ Accordingly, while Republicans rejoiced ‘the great depression of the Federal party’ after 1816, they also recognised that their triumph would ‘relax the bonds by which the Republican party has been hitherto kept together.’²⁵ Respect for James Monroe ensured that his re-election in 1820 went unopposed, but five candidates emerged to contest the presidency in 1824, and all were nominally members of the Republican Party.

²¹ Albert Ray Newsome, *The Presidential Election of 1824 in North Carolina* (North Carolina, 1939), p. 165.

²² Donald J. Ratcliffe, ‘The Role of Voters and Issues in Party Formation: Ohio, 1824,’ *JAH* 59 (1973), p. 849.

²³ John Taylor, *A Definition of Parties: Or the Political Effects of the Paper System Considered* (Philadelphia, 1794), p. 2, cited in Thomas M. Coens, ‘The Formation of the Jackson Party, 1822-1825,’ Doctoral Dissertation (Harvard University, 2004), p. 19.

²⁴ Alexander Hamilton to Edward Carrington, 26 May 1792, in Harold C. Syrett (ed.), *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (Columbia, 1961-1987), vol. XI, p. 429, cited in Heale, p. 17.

²⁵ William H. Crawford to Albert Gallatin, 12 March 1817, in Henry Adams (ed.), *The Writings of Albert Gallatin* (Philadelphia, 1879), vol. II, p. 27, cited in Charles S. Sydnor, ‘The One-Party Period of American History,’ *AHR* 51 (1946), p. 450f.

Secretary of the Treasury William H. Crawford styled himself as the ‘genuine Republican candidate,’ and defender of the country against the continued threat of Federalism.²⁶ Crawford’s supporters believed that he had ‘established a peculiar claim to the esteem of the republican party, by his manly and disinterested conduct’ in declining to challenge Monroe for the nomination in 1816.²⁷ Their confidence was understandable, for it was universally conceded that ‘Crawford is the favorite of Congress,’ and custom dictated that the Republican members of that body would choose the party’s official candidate.²⁸ The Crawford campaign urged ‘the republicans of the country to rally around the venerated banner of the party,’ and cautioned that ‘our adversaries have not lost their disposition to avail themselves of those divisions [in the Republican Party], to regain their ascendancy.’²⁹

In contrast, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams reasoned that the renewal of party hostilities would only hinder the pursuit of the public good. The Monroe administration had gloried in the appellation ‘Era of Good Feelings,’ and many contemporaries shared the president’s conviction that ‘our government may go on and prosper without the existence of parties.’³⁰ Moreover, Adams was the most eligible candidate according to the conventional republican criteria of public character and past service, but he was also a former Federalist, and his allies argued that ‘the attempt to revive the distinctions and animosities of *party*...has been got up only as a

²⁶ *Washington Gazette*, 9 November 1822, cited in Heale, p. 41.

²⁷ ‘Address by Senator Benjamin Ruggles to the Republicans of the United States, Washington, February 21, 1824,’ in Hopkins, ‘Election of 1824,’ Appendix, p. 404.

²⁸ Rufus King to Christopher Gore, 9 February 1823, in Charles R. King (ed.), *Life and Correspondence of Rufus King* (New York, 1894-1900), vol. VI, p. 499, cited in Chase, p. 42.

²⁹ *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, 2 November 1824, cited in Newsome, p. 103; ‘Address by Senator Benjamin Ruggles to the Republicans of the United States, Washington, February 21, 1824,’ in Hopkins, ‘Election of 1824,’ Appendix, p. 402.

³⁰ James Monroe to James Madison, n.d., in S. M. Hamilton (ed.), *The Writings of James Monroe* (New York, 1898-1903), vol. VI, pp. 289-291, cited in Hofstadter, p. 200.

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counterpoise to the superior qualifications and pretensions of John Quincy Adams.’³¹

Privately, Adams recorded, ‘upon the foundation of public service alone must I stand; and when the nation shall be called to judge of that, by the result, whatever it may be, I must abide.’³²

However, other observers feared that ‘while the wounds of ancient party contests were gradually healing, new ones have been inflicted by former friends.’³³ Since the War of 1812, the Republican Party had divided internally over the issue of how to define the constitutional limits to federal power. Radical Republicans, who gravitated toward Crawford, contended for a strict construction, which limited the federal government to those powers explicitly enumerated in the Constitution. In contrast, National Republicans believed in a broad construction, which granted the federal government greater latitude to legislate for the general welfare. As the 1824 election approached, the *Muskingum Messenger* predicted that party lines would be redrawn ‘between the friends and *enemies* of roads, canals and domestic manufactures.’³⁴

Two candidates competed to become the standard bearer for the National Republicans: Speaker of the House Henry Clay and Secretary of War John C. Calhoun. Both were younger than their rivals, and so neither could justify his pursuit of the presidency by pointing to a past record of party loyalty or public service. Instead, each took the unprecedented step of campaigning on the promise of future

³¹ n.n., *Sketch of the life of John Quincy Adams; taken from the port folio of April, 1819. To which are added, the Letters of Tell: originally addressed to the editor of the Baltimore American* (n.p., 1824), p. 16.

³² 2 May 1820, in Charles Francis Adams (ed.), *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, comprising portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848* (Philadelphia, 1874-1877), vol. V, p. 80, cited in Heale, p. 18.

³³ n.n., *An Address to the People of Maryland, on the subject of the Presidential Election* (n.p., n.d.), p. 1.

³⁴ [Zanesville, Ohio] *Muskingum Messenger*, 9 July, 20 August, 5 November 1822, 25 February, 13 May, 10 June, 25 November 1823, cited in Ratcliffe, *Politics of Long Division*, p. 77.

policies. Clay was acclaimed as the architect of the ‘American System,’ a plan that involved the adoption of a protective tariff for domestic industry, federal aid for internal improvements, and a national banking system. Likewise, Calhoun was renowned for proposing that Congress ‘bind the Republic together, with a perfect system of roads and canals. Let us conquer space.’³⁵ Advocates of both men argued that these measures were ‘of the last importance to the welfare and prosperity of our country, and the[ir] successful and vigorous prosecution...must depend upon the elevation of a statesman who is identified with them.’³⁶

Sectional issues also influenced the candidates’ campaigns. As the nation had expanded from thirteen states to twenty-four, so contemporaries became concerned that ‘the union is no longer actuated by one soul, and bound together by one entirety of interest.’³⁷ These anxieties were exacerbated by events surrounding the admission of Missouri as a slave state in 1821, which Northerners in Congress had blocked until balanced by the admission of Maine as a free state. In the aftermath of the crisis, one newspaper concluded that ‘every consideration is now subordinate to the great distinction between south, east, and the west.’³⁸

Slavery did not intrude directly upon the election, for its future was regarded as settled by the Missouri Compromise. Nevertheless, the fact that four of the five previous presidents had hailed from the slaveholding states caused considerable

³⁵ Calhoun, quoted in ‘Carolina,’ *An Address to the Citizens of North-Carolina, on the subject of the Presidential Election* (n.p, n.d.), p. 13.

³⁶ ‘A Citizen of New-York,’ *An Address to the Republicans and People of New-York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, upon the state of Presidential Parties* (New York, 1824), p. 10.

³⁷ Proceedings of the Harrisburg Convention, Pennsylvania, quoted in [Baltimore, Maryland] *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 20 March 1824, cited in Paul C. Nagel, ‘The Election of 1824: A Reconsideration Based on Newspaper Opinion,’ *JSH* 26 (1960), p. 323.

³⁸ [Ohio] *Cleveland Herald*, 21 November 1822, cited in Ratcliffe, *Politics of Long Division*, p. 73.

resentment outside the South, where ‘a suspicion of attachment to or respect for Mr. Crawford, who was regarded as the southern candidate, was looked upon as a most heinous political sin.’³⁹ As the only nonslaveholder in contention, Adams could count on the support of antislavery stalwarts like New York Federalist Rufus King, who subordinated all other considerations to the conclusion that ‘between him and Black [slaveholder] Candidates, I prefer him.’⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the Kentucky legislature championed the cause of their favourite son Clay with the reminder that the Western states had never provided a president, and therefore ‘the time has arrived...for a favourable consideration of their equal and just claim to a fair participation in the executive government.’⁴¹ In contrast, Calhoun supporters downplayed his South Carolinian roots by emphasising that ‘he has, with an unvarying consistency, pursued a course purely national, regardless of sectional interests.’⁴²

The final issue to impact upon the 1824 campaign was the Panic of 1819. The Panic was a financial crash that caused commodity prices to plummet and bankruptcies to soar. During the prolonged economic depression which followed, commentators complained that ‘the industrious are impoverished whilst the speculating part of the community are growing daily more wealthy.’⁴³ Bound by their traditional mentality, contemporaries interpreted their predicament as evidence that those in power were placing private interest before the public welfare; ‘virtue is on the wane,’ proclaimed

³⁹ *Proceedings and Address of the Convention of Delegates, That Met in Columbus, Ohio, Dec. 28, 1827, To Nominate a Ticket of Electors Favorable to the Reelection of John Quincy Adams, President of the United States, To Be Supported at the Electoral Election of 1828* (Columbus, 1828), cited in Ratcliffe, *Politics of Long Division*, p. 74.

⁴⁰ King, in Charles R. King (ed.), *Life and Correspondence of Rufus King* (New York, 1894-1900), vol. VI, p. 507, cited in McCormick, *Presidential Game*, p. 128.

⁴¹ ‘Recommendation of Henry Clay for the Presidency, Frankfort, November 18, 1822,’ in Hopkins, ‘Election of 1824,’ Appendix, p. 392.

⁴² ‘A Citizen of New-York,’ *Measures, not Men. Illustrated by some remarks upon the public conduct and character of John C. Calhoun* (New York, 1823), p. 47.

⁴³ Petition circulated in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania (n.d.), quoted in Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York, 2005), p. 212.

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‘Wyoming,’ ‘and the republican principles with which we set out, are fast declining.’⁴⁴ The result, as Calhoun remarked to Adams in 1820, was ‘a general mass of disaffection to the Government, not concentrated in any particular direction, but ready to seize upon any event and looking out anywhere for a leader.’⁴⁵

Promising to provide this leadership was the fifth and final candidate: General Andrew Jackson. Aside from his famous victory over the British at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, Jackson seemed to possess few qualifications for the presidency. He was retired from public life, had few party associations, and was not identified with any particular policy or regional concern. However, Jackson’s supporters turned these apparent obstacles to his advantage by arguing that ‘in contra-distinction to all the other candidates he is unconnected with party politics, local feelings or sectional jealousies, and of course the only one among them, who can go into the Presidential chair, unpledged to any thing but the interests of his country.’⁴⁶ The core message of Jackson’s campaign was that he alone could rescue the republic from its present corruption. As the *Lancaster Journal* avowed, ‘the Giant Augean Stable at Washington wants cleansing, and we know of no other Hercules.’⁴⁷

The five candidates in the 1824 election justified their pursuit of the presidency in a number of different ways. William H. Crawford crowned himself the true champion of the Republican Party, fighting off the traditional foe of Federalism. John Quincy

⁴⁴ ‘Wyoming,’ p. 12.

⁴⁵ 22 May 1820, in Allan Nevins (ed.), *The Diary of John Quincy Adams, 1794-1845: American Diplomacy, and Political, Social and Intellectual Life, from Washington to Polk* (New York, 1951), pp. 241-242.

⁴⁶ [Tennessee] *Nashville Gazette*, quoted in [Virginia] *Richmond Enquirer*, 30 July 1822.

⁴⁷ [Ohio] *Lancaster Journal*, quoted in [Greensburg, Pennsylvania] *Westmoreland Republican*, 6 December 1822, cited in Kim T. Phillips, ‘The Pennsylvania Origins of the Jackson Movement,’ *PSQ* 91 (1976), p. 502.

Adams pleaded that public concord could only be preserved by the elevation of the most qualified candidate, regardless of defunct party distinctions. Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun proclaimed that new policies were needed to prepare the country for impending perils. Andrew Jackson pledged to rid the government of corruption and restore the nation to its former republican glory. At the root of all these claims was the candidates' continued reference to a set of rules they inherited from the Revolution, which required every contender for public office to prove that he alone possessed the 'most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of society.'⁴⁸

Yet the intensity of the campaign brought into question the very concept of a republican harmony of interest. Historians have often overlooked the importance of issues in the election, perhaps because with so many candidates in contention the differences between them appear less clearly defined than in a two-party system. Yet the debate over partisan identities suggests that these already possessed real meaning for voters, even before the Party Period; one observer commented, 'the most damning political crime that can be charged against a candidate is that of *federalism*.'⁴⁹ Meanwhile, disputes over policy laid the foundations for the new partisan division between Democrats and Whigs that would emerge during the 1830s. As contemporaries feared, sectional conflict would also continue to escalate until the eruption of the Civil War in 1861. Finally, the Panic of 1819 threatened to divide the country into two classes: the people and the politicians. With the future of the republic uncertain, commentators agreed that 'at no period of our government, has it been more important to inquire, with the most rigid scrutiny, into the qualifications and

⁴⁸ *Federalist Papers*, no. 57.

⁴⁹ 'Letter from Tennessee. Letter VI,' [Tennessee] *Nashville Whig*, 24 November 1823, cited in Coens, p. 34.

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opinions of those who aspire to the highest honor in [the people's] power to bestow.'⁵⁰

⁵⁰ n.n., *Address to the People of Maryland*, p. 1.

Chapter II. The Public Canvass

‘My political creed prompts me to leave the affair uninfluenced by any expression on my part: and to the free will of those who have alone the right to decide,’ promised Andrew Jackson as the 1824 election approached.⁵¹ Jackson’s creed was republicanism, which ruled that ‘the practice of electioneering for office, and particularly for that which is first in the gift of the nation, is not only ridiculous, but dangerous: and none, who is a republican in principle and at heart, can, or will resort to it.’⁵² Yet with so many candidates in contention, an ally of John Quincy Adams observed as early as 1820 that ‘preparations were making for a violent canvass for the Presidential election of 1824.’⁵³ Jackson, Adams, and the other aspirants faced their second challenge: if all were required to leave the affair uninfluenced, how could any press their claim to the presidency?

Historians have conventionally reasoned that ‘the rise of the party system’ was ‘the primary force behind [a] revolution in campaign attitudes and techniques.’⁵⁴ Even some relatively recent studies have rested on the assumption that ‘not until 1828 would an evolving electoral system and angry polarization make possible the brash effrontery of a popular campaign for the presidency.’⁵⁵ Yet Michael Heale challenged this consensus twenty-five years ago with his contention that ‘the campaign of 1824 has a good claim to be regarded as the first in which some kind of communication was

⁵¹ Jackson to H. W. Peterson, 23 February 1823, in John Spencer Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (Washington D.C., 1926-1935), vol. III, p. 190.

⁵² ‘Wyoming,’ pp. 44-45.

⁵³ 2 May 1820, in Nevins (ed.), p. 239.

⁵⁴ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., ‘Introduction,’ in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (ed.), *Running for President: The Candidates and their Images* (New York, 1994), vol. I, p. xi.

⁵⁵ Roger A. Fischer, *Tippecanoe and Trinkets Too: The Material Culture of American Presidential Campaigns, 1828-1984* (Illinois, 1988), p. 2. See also McCormick, *Presidential Game*, p. 12.

effected between the candidates and the people.’⁵⁶ Robert Dinkin subsequently confirmed that ‘while the overall amount of electioneering was small compared to later contests, the groundwork for larger operations was established.’⁵⁷ Working within the continuing constraints of a republican code of conduct, the candidates were responsible for a number of departures from traditional practice that pre-empted the presidential campaigns of the Party Period.

Since republican convention required them ‘neither to seek, or decline public invitations to office,’ the first task for each candidate was to covertly engineer his nomination for the presidency by an assembly that might plausibly claim to represent the popular will.⁵⁸ In previous elections, a caucus of the Republican members of Congress had chosen the party’s official candidate. In 1824, William H. Crawford was assured of the caucus nomination, and his allies were adamant that ‘this is the plain old republican path, and a deviation from it may be dangerous to the party and to the interests of the nation.’⁵⁹ In addition, they alleged, ‘assembled as they are from the different quarters of the Union [and] coming from the various classes of the community...[the Republican members of Congress] bring into one body as perfect a representation as can be expected of the interests and wishes of all.’⁶⁰

However, recognizing that each on his own could not challenge Crawford for the nomination, the other candidates united in condemnation of the Congressional caucus.

⁵⁶ Heale, p. 38.

⁵⁷ Robert J. Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices* (Westport, Connecticut, 1989), p. 41.

⁵⁸ Jackson to H. W. Peterson, 23 February 1823, in Bassett (ed.), vol. III, p. 189.

⁵⁹ [Zanesville, Ohio] *Muskingum Messenger*, 9 July, 20 August, 5 November 1822, 25 February, 13 May, 10 June, 25 November 1823, cited in Ratcliffe, *Politics of Long Division*, p. 77.

⁶⁰ ‘Declaration of New York Republican Caucus, April 22, 1823,’ in Hopkins, ‘Election of 1824,’ Appendix, pp. 397-398.

Their case was founded on the contention that the caucus was ‘anti-republican in principle and deleterious in tendency, being a departure from the constitution; promotive of intrigue and corruption, and, by forestalling public opinion, an usurpation of the rights of the citizens, in whom alone the elective franchise is vested.’⁶¹ Admittedly, when ‘the adversary was in the field, and even a small loss of Republican strength would have been followed by discomfiture,’ the practice had been ‘a necessary *evil*.’⁶² Freed from Federalist manipulation, however, the people ‘are able to judge for themselves; they do not want a master to direct them how they shall vote.’⁶³ These arguments proved persuasive; public sentiment turned against the caucus, and only sixty-six Congressmen, barely one-quarter of those eligible, dared attend the meeting on 14 February 1824, which duly nominated Crawford for the presidency. ‘Never was any political measure quite so unpopular in the United States,’ reported *Niles’ Weekly Register*, that ‘the *mere fact* of such a nomination...must inevitably destroy all his prospects.’⁶⁴

Having employed the rhetoric of republicanism to censure the Congressional caucus, Crawford’s opponents turned it to the task of justifying their preferred method of nomination. One option was recommendation by a state legislature. Dissident Republicans had resorted to this practice on previous occasions to challenge the party’s caucus candidate. In the 1824 election, all of the contenders received at least one endorsement from a legislature in which their supporters predominated.⁶⁵

Advocates asserted that local nominations were ‘the only way to put down a congress

⁶¹ [Greensburg, Pennsylvania] *Westmoreland Republican*, 3 January 1823, cited in Coens, p. 97.

⁶² ‘A Citizen,’ *The Election of the President of the United States, considered* (Boston, 1823), p. 10.

⁶³ [Baltimore, Maryland] *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 26 January 1822, cited in Sydnor, p. 443.

⁶⁴ [Baltimore, Maryland] *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 13 March 1824, cited in Robert V. Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York, 1991), pp. 236-237.

⁶⁵ Chase, pp. 43, 51.

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caucus & keep this election where it ought to be amongst the people.’⁶⁶ Yet this method remained vulnerable to the Crawfordite charge that ‘it seems to savor a little of inconsistency, when the friends of those candidates, who are holding caucuses in every state legislature...condemn in most pointed terms, the holding of a congressional caucus.’⁶⁷

A preferable alternative was nomination by a popular convention. These had been used before to recommend contenders for other public offices, but never for the presidency. They were unlike modern party conventions, for most were organized by the supporters of a single candidate, and therefore open to the criticism that ‘the manner in which the delegates are generally elected is no expression of the public sentiment.’⁶⁸ Nevertheless, they possessed the practical advantage that they could be convened in every locale where a few friends of one candidate could congregate together, regardless of who controlled the state legislature. Furthermore, they could be portrayed as superior in principle, because ‘a Caucus may express an opinion against that of the people...as it consists of members of legislative bodies, who are chosen long before-hand, and are subject to the arts and wiles of corrupt politicians,’ whereas ‘a Convention...consists of delegates expressly chosen for the purpose...[and so] is free from all these objections.’⁶⁹ Consequently, the 1824 election prompted a proliferation of popular conventions, held in the service of every candidate, and heralded as the only ‘truly republican mode’ of nomination.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Pleasant M. Miller to John Overton, 25 June 1822, John Overton Papers, THS, cited in Coens, p. 107.

⁶⁷ [Boston, Massachusetts] *New England Galaxy*, 27 February 1824, cited in Coens, p. 194.

⁶⁸ [?] Gardner, speech in the Pennsylvania state legislature, quoted in [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania] *Franklin Gazette*, 24 December 1823, cited in Coens, pp. 193-194.

⁶⁹ ‘Caucus and Convention,’ *Washington Republican*, 16 February 1824, cited in Coens, p. 175.

⁷⁰ [New York] *Ithaca American Journal*, 13 August 1824, cited in Coens, p. 188.

Once a respectable endorsement had been obtained, the second task for each candidate was to actually conduct his campaign. Republican protocol precluded their overt involvement, but did not prevent them from supervising the activities of their supporters in secret. Crawford's contribution was severely restricted by a paralytic stroke in September 1823, but he had previously been accused of employing government patronage to persuade others to participate in 'electioneering practices at the public expense.'⁷¹ Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun both engaged in extensive correspondence; the latter advised one ally, 'my friends must now all write, and write constantly wherever it can be done with safety.'⁷² Adams adopted a more personal approach, recording in his diary that 'my time is chiefly worn out with visitors, of whom the number personally received in the course of the month [May 1824] has been two hundred and sixty-four.'⁷³ In contrast, Jackson delegated the chore of coordinating his supporters' efforts to Senator John H. Eaton, who effectively functioned as the first presidential campaign manager.⁷⁴

Jackson was also responsible for another innovation in presidential politics: the public platform. Previously, candidates had relied upon their past record to illuminate their position on matters of policy. Unlike his competitors, however, Jackson lacked a long career in civil office, and so his opinion on many issues was unknown. To overcome this obstacle, Jackson clarified his views to a correspondent, and then arranged for the letter to be published in the press. The contents were largely unexceptional; one reference to Jackson's support for a 'judicious examination and revision' of the tariff allegedly prompted Clay to announce 'well by —, I am in favor of an *inj*udicious

⁷¹ 6 January 1822, in Nevins (ed.), p. 275.

⁷² Calhoun to Micah Sterling, 27 March 1823, in Robert L. Meriwether et. al. (eds.), *The Papers of John C. Calhoun* (South Carolina, 1959-2003), vol. VII, p. 547.

⁷³ 31 May 1824, in Nevins (ed.), p. 325.

⁷⁴ Gabriel L. Lowe, Jr., 'John H. Eaton, Jackson's Campaign Manager,' *THQ* 11 (1952), pp. 101-114.

tariff.’⁷⁵ Of far greater significance was Jackson’s justification that ‘as my name has been brought before the nation for the first office in the gift of the people, it is incumbent upon me, when asked, frankly to declare my opinion upon any political or national question.’⁷⁶ Despite the republican rationale, Jackson’s originality was too much for the other candidates. Adams notified one enquirer that he had no problem with privately explaining his position, but ‘wished him only not to suffer it to get into the newspapers, as that would look too much like advertising my opinions.’⁷⁷

Nevertheless, Adams proved equally prepared to reshape the rules of republicanism when it advanced his own aspirations. The printed word had provided the primary medium for political debate in previous elections, and the new necessity of persuading a popular audience only increased its importance in 1824. Competition was fierce and frequently seditious; Adams characterised newspaper editors as ‘assassins who sit with loaded blunderbusses at the corner of streets and fire them off for hire or for sport at any passenger whom they select.’⁷⁸ Republican etiquette prohibited the candidates from publicly engaging in mudslinging matches, although all were guilty of providing patronage, information, and even anonymous articles to their preferred organs of the press. However, when one critic questioned his conduct during the negotiation of the Treaty of Ghent in 1814, Adams responded by openly authoring a 256-page pamphlet refuting the allegations. Although evidently calculated to enhance his candidacy, Adams convinced himself that the right to defend his reputation

⁷⁵ Jackson to L. H. Coleman, 26 April 1824, in Bassett (ed.), vol. III, p. 249; Clay, quoted in John C. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Autobiography of Martin Van Buren* (Washington, 1920), p. 240, cited in Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom, 1822-1832* (New York, 1981), p. 70.

⁷⁶ Jackson to L. H. Coleman, 26 April 1824, in Bassett (ed.), vol. III, p. 249.

⁷⁷ 8 May 1824, in Nevins (ed.), p. 322.

⁷⁸ 7 September 1820, in Nevins (ed.), p. 244.

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justified his personal intervention; as he subsequently remarked, ‘to parry the daggers of assassins is not to canvass votes for the Presidency.’⁷⁹

In addition, the 1824 election witnessed the introduction of several new methods for attracting the popular vote. Chief amongst these was the campaign biography, at least one of which was published for every candidate except Clay.⁸⁰ These first attempts to advertise the life of a presidential contender to a popular audience were commonly justified on the grounds that ‘a correct knowledge of the [candidates’] conduct, character, and qualifications...is of indispensable importance to a judicious exercise of that great attribute of popular sovereignty, the elective franchise.’⁸¹ Typical was the promise of one Calhoun partisan to provide ‘a living picture, though necessarily an imperfect one, of this great statesman, and afford such of you as do not already possess them, the means of forming your own opinions of his qualifications for the presidency.’⁸²

The contest may also have been marked by the first use of material ephemera to promote a presidential candidate. Roger Fischer has catalogued a number of objects produced during this period to commemorate Jackson’s victory at the Battle of New Orleans, including pitchers, plates, snuff boxes, and medalets, although the evidence on whether any were created expressly for campaign purposes is inconclusive. Political trinkets remained relatively expensive, which restricted their circulation, and they were often designed more for the personal gratification of the purchaser than for

⁷⁹ 5, 6, 23 January 1823, in Charles Francis Adams (ed.), *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, compromising portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848* (Philadelphia, 1874-1877), vol. VI, pp. 120, 135, cited in Heale, p. 43.

⁸⁰ William Miles (ed.), *The Image Makers: A bibliography of American presidential campaign biographies* (Metuchen, New Jersey, 1979), pp. 1-3.

⁸¹ ‘A Citizen of New-York,’ *Measures, not Men*, p. 3.

⁸² n.n., *Address to the People of Maryland*, p. 2.

publicly advertising the merits of a particular candidate. Nevertheless, the existence of a commercial market for campaign memorabilia illustrates the increasing popular interest in presidential elections.⁸³

Political activists also endeavoured to exploit the growing power of the popular electorate through parades and public meetings. These were a common feature of local politics, but now appeared in unprecedented numbers in the presidential campaign.⁸⁴ Some were spontaneous, but most were arranged to demonstrate the strength of a particular candidate. ‘A South Carolinian,’ for example, claimed that popular opposition to Crawford was ‘shewn by the convocation of thousands, almost daily, from one end of the continent to the other, speaking the strongest language in favor of Jackson or Adams, whilst we find but very few meetings, and those very small, in favor of Mr. C.’⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the genuine enthusiasm generated by these gatherings proves their importance as an avenue for popular involvement in presidential politics.

The proliferation of public meetings lent itself to another innovation: the taking of straw polls. Although the canvassing of individual voters was commonplace, the *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette* reported that the practice of ‘prematurely collecting the opinion of the people...was never resorted to, we believe, on any former occasion.’⁸⁶ Counts were conducted at any place where people congregated, including taverns, militia musters, and grand juries, and the results were

⁸³ Fischer, pp. 8-16, 24.

⁸⁴ Coens, p. 195.

⁸⁵ ‘A South-Carolinian,’ *Some objections to Mr. Crawford as a candidate for the Presidential chair, with a few remarks on the charges preferred against South-Carolina as being “in error, and uncertain in her Politics”* (n.p., n.d.), p. 26.

⁸⁶ *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, 24 August 1824, cited in Tom W. Smith, ‘The First Straw?: A Study of the Origins of Election Polls,’ *POQ* 54 (1990), p. 31.

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frequently published in the press. As with mass gatherings, straw polls emerged partly as an independent mechanism for the expression of public opinion, and partly as a method for political activists to shape that opinion.⁸⁷ Like all the campaign innovations, their primary significance was that they reflected the increased importance attached to the popular will. As the *Carolina Observer* commented, ‘the expression in black and white of numbers that are in accordance with facts rather than conjecture, is better evidence as to the popularity of men than whole columns of declamation.’⁸⁸

The 1824 election heralded a number of changes in the way that presidential contests were conducted. The demise of the Congressional caucus coincided with the dawn of the popular nominating convention. Direct communication between the candidates and the electorate was initiated through the media of the public platform and the personal publication. Several new methods for attracting mass support were introduced, including the campaign biography, material ephemera, parades and meetings, and straw polls. Many of these practices had previously been employed in local elections, but their entrance onto the national stage reflected the new importance of the popular electorate in presidential politics, and pre-empted the campaigns of the Party Period.

Yet if the transformation in campaign techniques was prompted by changing electoral circumstances, it was shaped by the continuing influence of a Revolutionary code of conduct, which ruled any sign of electioneering to be proof of a candidate’s unsuitability for office. In justifying their departures from customary practice,

⁸⁷ Smith, p. 30.

⁸⁸ [Fayetteville, North Carolina] *Carolina Observer*, 27 July 1824, cited in Smith, p. 30.

contemporaries most commonly resorted to the republican principle of popular sovereignty, which holds that all political power derives from the people. Nominating conventions were commended as ‘the only true and legitimate mode of concentrating the public voice.’⁸⁹ Direct contact with the electorate was defended on the grounds that politicians were servants of the people; when asked by one public committee about his availability as a candidate, Jackson replied, ‘I shd have consulted my own feelings by continuing to avoid speaking on the subject but the respectable source from whence the inquiry emanates, prohibits any but a candid notice of your communication.’⁹⁰ Finally, new campaign methods were portrayed as necessary to inform the popular will, for as one mass meeting proclaimed, ‘of small advantage would be even the right of election, if the people had no means of understanding each other’s minds, and of coming to some general understanding about “men and measures.”’⁹¹ The candidates had pledged their faith in the popular electorate, and all eyes now turned to the question of who would emerge as ‘the chosen man of the *People*.’⁹²

⁸⁹ ‘Caucus and Convention,’ *Washington Republican*, 16 February 1824, cited in Coens, p. 175.

⁹⁰ Jackson to H. W. Peterson, 23 February 1823, in Bassett (ed.), vol. III, p. 189.

⁹¹ n.n., *Democratic Meeting. Jackson and Schulze*, quoted in [Lexington] *Kentucky Gazette*, 24 July 1823, cited in Coens, p. 169.

⁹² n.n., *Address of the Committee appointed by a Republican meeting in the County of Hunterdon, recommending Gen. Andrew Jackson, of Tennessee, to the People of New Jersey, as President of the United States* (Trenton, 1824), p. 5.

Chapter III. The People's Choice

'There was a time, when he who was looked to, as aspiring to the chief control of this country, would, had he been found courting and fawning, and caressing for the office, have been spurned indignantly by the whole nation,' commented one observer on the 1824 election.⁹³ This rule reflected the Founding Fathers' conviction that 'of those men who have overturned the liberties of republics, the greatest number have begun their career by paying an obsequious court to the people; commencing demagogues, and ending tyrants.'⁹⁴ Yet times were changing, and as the principle of popular sovereignty became a practical reality, politics became a contest for the affections of the people; 'if our adversaries are republicans, we must be democratic; if they are democratic, we must be jacobinal,' reasoned one New York politician.⁹⁵ In this context, the presidential candidates faced the final challenge of the popular campaign: given the traditional distrust of demagoguery, which would construct the most effective appeal to the mass electorate?

'The choice of a President,' William Brown has suggested, involves 'a search for a symbol – a symbol that will represent the whole complex of ideals and beliefs that the American people [hold] dear.'⁹⁶ This assertion appears particularly apt in the case of Andrew Jackson, whose name has since become synonymous with an 'expansion of democratic rights and power for ordinary white men.'⁹⁷ Yet it would be a mistake to assume, as some scholars have, that 'the nature of political participation' was a

⁹³ 'Wyoming,' p. 26.

⁹⁴ *Federalist Papers*, no. 1.

⁹⁵ John C. Spencer to Albert H. Tracy, 28 May 1821, Albert Tracy Papers, NYSL, cited in Wilentz, p. 253.

⁹⁶ William Burlie Brown, *The People's Choice: The Presidential Image in the Campaign Biography* (Louisiana, 1960), p. xii.

⁹⁷ Wilentz, p. 514.

‘central issue’ in Jackson’s first presidential campaign.⁹⁸ As Thomas Coens recently concluded, ‘to see the election of 1824 as pitting populists against elitists, to see it as marking a revolution in the development of American democracy, is to feed at the trough of party rhetoric.’⁹⁹ If each set of supporters sought to ‘create out of the raw material of the[ir] candidate’s real life the biography of an ideal citizen of the Republic,’ then the degree of similarity between their efforts demonstrates that ‘political debate in the 1820s rested on a remarkably resilient ideological consensus.’¹⁰⁰

Robert Hay was the first historian to argue that the participants in the 1824 election ‘had their eyes set far more firmly upon the Revolutionary past than upon the democratic future.’¹⁰¹ Certainly, all of the contenders pandered to the popular electorate; ‘the specious title of the “People’s Candidate,” &c. has been so often blazoned forth, that it has lost all its significance,’ complained the *Public Leger*.¹⁰² Yet the campaign was coloured by an atmosphere of apprehension. Typical was the warning of ‘Wyoming’ that:

The patriots of the Revolution, and with them those elevated sentiments of the rights of man which characterized that period, have nearly passed away.... Contrast the men now in power, with those who directed the affairs of the nation at that period...and there will be found but little reason to infer that the mind is

⁹⁸ Robin Kolodny, ‘The Several Elections of 1824,’ *CP* 23 (1996), p. 1. See also Harry L. Watson, *Andrew Jackson vs. Henry Clay: Democracy and Development in Antebellum America* (Boston, 1998), pp. 65-66.

⁹⁹ Coens, p. 149.

¹⁰⁰ Brown, p. xiii; Coens, p. 149.

¹⁰¹ Robert P. Hay, ‘The Case for Andrew Jackson in 1824: Eaton’s *Wyoming Letters*,’ *THQ* 29 (1970), p. 141.

¹⁰² [Richmond, Indiana] *Public Leger*, 26 June 1824, cited in Robert P. Hay, ‘The American Revolution Twice Recalled: Lafayette’s Visit and the Election of 1824,’ *IMH* 69 (1973), p. 58.

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on the march, or the nation pressing to that proud advancement, which her sanguine friends have anticipated.¹⁰³

Fearing for the future of the republic, contemporaries agreed on the necessity of ‘recur[ring] to revolutionary *principles*, though...deprived of the services of revolutionary *men*.’¹⁰⁴ The people’s choice would be the presidential candidate that proved himself a ‘living symbol of the American Revolutionary tradition.’¹⁰⁵

A review of the campaign literature reveals several shared conventions. Firstly, each candidate was praised for his republican principles. Henry Clay was presented as ‘a pure and incorruptible statesman as ever adorned our country.’¹⁰⁶ If voters venerated ‘economy in the public expenses, a strict accountability in the public officers...[and] a scrupulous regard for the constitution of the federal government...then should Mr. Crawford obtain their suffrages,’ advised ‘A Southron.’¹⁰⁷ Evidence of republican heritage was even better. John C. Calhoun reputedly ‘imbibed those noble sentiments of national devotion’ from ‘a mother of Roman virtues, who had been often compelled to desert her home by the ravages of the tories.’¹⁰⁸ Yet he was surpassed by John Quincy Adams, whose father ‘was among the first of his countrymen to proclaim *resistance* to the oppressive demands of the British ministry,’ and who was

¹⁰³ ‘Wyoming,’ p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Algeron Sidney,’ *Principles and Men: Considered with Reference to the Approaching Election of President. By a Citizen of Rhode Island* (Providence, 1823), p. 3, cited in Hay, ‘American Revolution Twice Recalled,’ p. 53.

¹⁰⁵ Hay, ‘American Revolution Twice Recalled,’ p. 61.

¹⁰⁶ ‘A Citizen of New-York,’ *Address to the Republicans*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ ‘A Southron,’ *To the People of South-Carolina. An Address on the Subject of the Approaching Presidential Election, in which the claims of William H. Crawford, are impartially canvassed* (n.p., 1824), p. 62, cited in Heale, p. 40.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Carolina,’ p. 6.

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‘brought up within the domestic circle of such men as *Samuel Adams, Josiah Quincy,* and *John Hancock.*’¹⁰⁹

However, as ‘Wyoming’ observed, ‘to call a man a republican [does] not constitute him one; it is too important an appellation for the aspirants of this country not to assume; yet to determine how far the name may be justly assumed, it is necessary to look to conduct.’¹¹⁰ Consequently, the authors of campaign literature also celebrated the achievements of their candidate. ‘Has any man, since the establishment of our government, done more for it than Wm. H. Crawford,’ enquired one essayist. The answer, according to another, was Calhoun, who ‘for the last twelve years...has been either the author or the supporter of almost every important measure which has contributed to the welfare and honor of the republic.’¹¹¹ Any association with a national hero was an advantage. ‘Mr. Adams enjoyed the unlimited confidence and esteem not only of the present Chief Magistrate, but also of Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Madison,’ claimed ‘A Citizen.’¹¹² Classical allusions were also common. Crawford and Clay, both wealthy slaveholders, were alleged to have risen ‘Cincinnatus like...from the plough, and like him will defend the true interests of their country.’¹¹³

Another campaign tactic was to criticise the conduct of opposing candidates. Crawford’s allies accused Calhoun of corruption in the War Department, and Calhounites retaliated by charging the Secretary of the Treasury with financial

¹⁰⁹ n.n., *Sketch of the life*, p. 32.

¹¹⁰ ‘Wyoming,’ p. 33.

¹¹¹ n.n., *Address to the People of Maryland*, p. 13.

¹¹² ‘A Citizen,’ p. 4.

¹¹³ Alex Keech, *To the Voters of the Second Electoral District of Maryland, composed of Calvert, a part of Prince George’s & Montgomery Counties* (Maryland, 1824).

mismanagement.¹¹⁴ For his distinguished diplomatic career, Adams was denounced as ‘a pampered child of *favoritism*...[who] has already received more than TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS, from the public treasury.’¹¹⁵ As for Clay, ‘A Citizen’ proclaimed, ‘he, who spends his *nights at the gaming table, or in the revels of a brothel*, in contempt of the laws of God and man, can never be a safe depository of those laws, whose spirit and vigor are founded in publick opinion and in publick morals.’¹¹⁶ The *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser* noted that any uninformed spectator would suppose that ‘our Presidents, Secretaries, Senators, and Representatives, are all traitors and pirates, and the government of this people, had been committed to the hands of public robbers.’¹¹⁷

As the campaign escalated, Adams observed that ‘there is nothing so deep and nothing so shallow which political enmity will not turn to account.’¹¹⁸ His cause was particularly wounded by associations with his Federalist father; ‘do you wish for the BLESSINGS of another Adams administration – for the restoration of the GAG-LAW – of VIOLENCE, TURBULENCE, and PROSCRIPTION – in short, for a *second “REIGN OF TERROR,”*’ demanded one broadside.¹¹⁹ Crawford had largely recovered from his paralytic stroke before balloting occurred, yet still reports circulated that his illness ‘entirely disqualified him from adequate attention to any business that requires ordinary mental and bodily exertion.’¹²⁰ Although already in his forties, Calhoun was

¹¹⁴ Charles M. Wiltse, ‘John C. Calhoun and the “A. B. Plot,”’ *JSH* 13 (1947), *passim*.

¹¹⁵ Broadside, *Democratic Nominations* (Connecticut, n.d.), Broadside Collection, Portfolio 6, Folder 17, LC.

¹¹⁶ ‘A Citizen,’ p. 18.

¹¹⁷ [Maryland] *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 7 June 1824, cited in Chase C. Mooney, *William H. Crawford, 1772-1834* (Kentucky, 1974), p. 287.

¹¹⁸ Adams, quoted in Paul C. Nagel, *John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, a Private Life* (Harvard, 1997), p. 272.

¹¹⁹ Broadside, *Democratic Nominations*.

¹²⁰ [Richmond, Virginia] *Constitutional Whig*, 29 October 1824, cited in Mooney, pp. 266-267.

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condemned as ‘too young to have such power and confidence entrusted to him.’¹²¹

Clay faced similar charges, and also blamed ‘the fabrication of tales of my being withdrawn’ for his flagging support.¹²²

Despite the efforts of his competitors, Jackson swiftly emerged as the favourite of the electorate. ‘The rapid march of Genl. Jackson’s popularity, has far exceeded the expectations of his warm, decided friends. He may now be called, emphatically, the idol of the people,’ observed one New Yorker.¹²³ ‘The air is made to ring with the names of the other candidates, in the mouths of a few...vociferous proclaimers,’ but ‘General Jackson is decidedly [sic] the choice of the people,’ reported a North Carolinian.¹²⁴ Some politicians were initially inclined to dismiss the enthusiasm generated by the Jackson campaign; ‘mere effervescence...can accomplish nothing,’ concluded one Calhoun partisan in Pennsylvania.¹²⁵ Yet the power of the popular tide was demonstrated in that state on 4 March 1824 when a general nominating convention unexpectedly chose Jackson over Calhoun, a result that caused the latter to withdraw from the presidential race.¹²⁶

Jackson’s campaign image was no more innovative than his opponents’. His followers commended his ‘uniform and constant profession and support of *republican* principles,’ commemorated his ‘great and splendid *services*,’ and criticised the

¹²¹ ‘Philo-Jackson,’ *The Presidential Election, written for the benefit of the People of the United States, but particularly for those of the State of Kentucky* (Louisville, 1823), Second Series, p. 18.

¹²² Clay to Josephus B. Stuart, 6 December 1824, in James F. Hopkins (ed.), *The Papers of Henry Clay* (Kentucky, 1959-), vol. III, p. 891.

¹²³ J. B. Mower to Thurlow Weed, 5 March 1824, Thurlow Weed Papers, RUL, cited in Remini, *Andrew Jackson*, p. 78.

¹²⁴ John D. Hawkins to William Polk, 14 February 1824, William Polk Papers, LC, cited in Newsome, p. 93.

¹²⁵ George M. Dallas to William Darlington, 27 January 1824, quoted in Wilentz, p. 248.

¹²⁶ Phillips, *passim*.

‘intrigues and corruptions’ of the other contenders.¹²⁷ Instead, Jackson’s success can be ascribed to several advantages that assisted his otherwise conventional attempt to assume the mantle of republicanism.

Firstly, Jackson was the only candidate to have been involved in the Revolution. Every previous president could claim this distinction, but time had taken its toll on the Revolutionary ranks, and all of Jackson’s competitors in 1824 had been born too late to participate. In contrast, as his enthusiasts repeatedly reminded the electorate, ‘the youthful Jackson, fired with the spirit of the times and the wrongs of a bleeding country,’ had ‘enrolled himself in the army of the republic and [become] one of its active and suffering defenders,’ even being taken prisoner and receiving a wound from ‘a haughty and tyrannical British officer’ for refusing to polish his boots.¹²⁸

For contemporaries, no feat could surpass Revolutionary service as proof of republican principles. ‘Philo-Jackson’ spoke for many when he stated, ‘my invariable rule has been, in regard to elections and appointments, always to prefer the candidate, if equal to the necessary duties, who had been actively engaged in the Revolutionary war.’¹²⁹ The *Floridian* implicitly criticised the qualifications of Jackson’s competitors by declaring that upon his death, ‘we will have to close the volume and commence a new era; then we will have to look to those whose claims arise out of Congress services, and missions to Europe.’¹³⁰ The Jackson campaign also benefited from the coincidental return of Revolutionary hero General Lafayette for a ceremonial tour of the United States. The *Allegheny Democrat* predicted that:

¹²⁷ n.n., *Address of the Committee*, pp. 3, 13.

¹²⁸ n.n., *Address to the People of Ohio*, p. 9.

¹²⁹ ‘Philo-Jackson,’ p. 17.

¹³⁰ [Pensacola] *Floridian*, 16 August 1823, cited in Hay, ‘American Revolution Twice Recalled,’ p. 58.

The same feeling of gratitude for revolutionary services which welcomes La Fayette to our shores, pervades the nation in favor of Andrew Jackson, and will be evinced, not by empty professions, but by elevating this last surviving soldier of the revolution on whom this honor can ever conferred, to the first office in the gift of a free people.¹³¹

The second factor in Jackson's favour was his triumph at the Battle of New Orleans. As one of his advocates attested, 'the glorious exploits which have crowned his military career are fresh in the memory of every man...[and] they are willing to promote him; because, by them they appreciate his worth.'¹³² In vain, critics cautioned that 'the hero in war, does not always prove to be the best leader in peace,' and circulated reports of 'the wanton violence and cruelties with which his military career had been tarnished.'¹³³ Jackson supporters simply countered that 'in General Washington...we have satisfactory proof, that a distinguished military man and a good civilian, are quite compatible terms.'¹³⁴

Jackson's competitors underestimated the complexity of his campaign image. Clay commented to one correspondent, 'I cannot believe that killing 2500 Englishmen at N. Orleans qualifies for the various, difficult and complicated duties of the Chief Magistracy.'¹³⁵ The implication that much of the popular attachment to Jackson was ill-considered is also evident in the complaint of a local activist that 'it is very

¹³¹ [Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania] *Allegheny Democrat*, quoted in [Charles-Town, Virginia] *Farmers' Repository*, 29 September 1824, cited in Hay, 'American Revolution Twice Recalled,' pp. 60-61.

¹³² Thomas Jefferson Green to William Polk, 2 February 1824, William Polk Papers, LC, cited in Newsome, p. 93.

¹³³ n.n., *Sketch of the life*, p. 31; 'A Citizen of New-York,' *Address to the Republicans*, p. 7. For an example, see n.n., *A Brief Account of the Execution of the Six Militia Men* (Washington D.C., 1823).

¹³⁴ 'Wyoming,' p. 91.

¹³⁵ Clay to Francis P. Blair, 29 January 1825, in Hopkins (ed.), *The Papers of Henry Clay*, vol. IV, p. 47.

difficult to electioneer successfully against Genl. Jackson – his character and services are of that kind which *alone* the people can appreciate and feel – one cup of *generous whiskey* produces more military ardour, than can be allayed by a month of reflection and sober reason.’¹³⁶ Certainly, some Jackson supporters may have been motivated by such superficial concerns as the Irishman who reportedly voted for the General ‘for the best rason [sic] in the world, becace [sic] he beat the English at Orleans.’¹³⁷ However, many others considered Jackson’s military record to be further confirmation of his republican credentials. As the Alabama state legislature proclaimed, ‘he is the *man of the people* because he has gloriously defended and protected their rights and liberties.’¹³⁸

The final advantage enjoyed by Jackson, and endlessly emphasised in his campaign literature, was his position as a political outsider. ‘The hero of Orleans is at home, asking for nothing – desiring nothing, and for that alone should he be preferred to those who are immodestly urging their own pretensions, and intriguing for success,’ wrote ‘Wyoming.’¹³⁹ Another advocate affirmed:

No *Congressional Caucus* has been held to sustain and give character to his cause; - no *Cabinet influence and patronage* has been employed to promote his election. But, unaided by any such or other improper means, and opposed by an organised corps of *Leading men* and intriguing politicians, in almost every state of the Union, he is emphatically the CANDIDATE OF THE PEOPLE.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ John Owen to Bartlett Yancy, 21 July 1824, Miscellaneous Papers, Series One, 1755-1912, NCHC, cited in Newsome, p. 137.

¹³⁷ [Cincinnati, Ohio] *Advertiser*, 3 November 1824, cited in Ratcliffe, ‘Role of Voters and Issues,’ p. 863.

¹³⁸ Resolution of the Alabama state legislature, quoted in [Cahawba] *Press and Alabama State Intelligencer*, 13 December 1823, cited in Hay, ‘American Revolution Twice Recalled,’ pp. 58-59.

¹³⁹ ‘Wyoming,’ pp. 45-46.

¹⁴⁰ n.n., *Address to the People of Ohio*, p. 9.

Jackson profited enormously from the popular revolt against politics caused by the Panic of 1819. ‘An ARISTOCRACY is rising in our land, and soon, very soon, the people of this country, with all their boasted privileges, will become the mere instruments of the men in power,’ warned ‘Wyoming.’¹⁴¹ According to his admirers, only Jackson could rescue the republic. ‘If he be made President, he will hang every scoundrel in Washington within five minutes after his inauguration,’ promised the *New York Statesman*.¹⁴² To no avail, his opponents objected, ‘they say, that if elected, [Jackson] will (to use their own language) “probe corruption to the bone”.... But what abuses they mean, they do not know.’¹⁴³ In principle, Jackson’s candidacy offered the people a chance to prove their continued commitment to republicanism. ‘He wishes to make you the instruments of perpetuating the liberty which Washington secured, and of bringing back the general character of the country to what it was when Washington lived and acted,’ proclaimed ‘Philo-Jackson.’¹⁴⁴ In practice, the Jackson campaign also provided a convenient vehicle for many self-interested local movements against established elites. In Pennsylvania, the *Franklin Gazette* noted, ‘a new set, either wholly unknown or known only for their obliquities and disaffection, [has] supplied the places which have generally been filled by our most respected names.’¹⁴⁵

Each of the candidates in the 1824 election endeavoured to construct a campaign image that would appeal to the popular electorate. In explaining the particular success

¹⁴¹ ‘Wyoming,’ p. 23.

¹⁴² *New York Statesman*, quoted in *Washington City Gazette*, 16 September 1822, cited in Coens, pp. 28-29.

¹⁴³ n.n., *A Review of Gen. Jackson’s Letter to Mr. Monroe* (n.p., n.d.), p. 7, cited in Coens, pp. 29-30.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Philo-Jackson,’ p. 12.

¹⁴⁵ [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania] *Franklin Gazette*, 6 February 1824, cited in Phillips, p. 503. For other examples, see Newsome, pp. 172-173; and Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., ‘Jackson Men with Feet of Clay,’ *AHR* 62 (1957), p. 537.

of Andrew Jackson, some scholars have been seduced by the declarations of his supporters that ‘he has always been a uniform and consistent democrat’ and ‘a friend to the *rights of man* and *universal suffrage*.’¹⁴⁶ Yet for all the contemporary rhetoric of a contest ‘between the ARISTOCRACY and the DEMOCRACY of the Nation,’ no candidate actually promised to extend the privileges of the common man.¹⁴⁷ In reality, the core message of the Jackson campaign was far from innovative; when his followers called for a ‘return to first principles,’ they referred to republican values that were venerated by all the candidates.¹⁴⁸ However, in the common quest to assume the mantle of republicanism, Jackson possessed three decisive advantages: his service in the Revolution; his triumph at the Battle of New Orleans; and his position as a political outsider. Thus, a review of the campaign confirms the conclusion of Robert Hay: ‘the early Jacksonians went to the polls not so much to usher in a new age of democracy as to continue the old age of Revolutionary republicanism.’¹⁴⁹

The manner in which Jackson emerged as the choice of the people illustrates several significant features of the 1824 campaign. Firstly, the personal conduct of the candidates was itself a primary issue; most contemporaries would have agreed with ‘A Citizen’ that ‘our Republican Institutions and habits can only be preserved in their purity, by requiring private as well as public virtue and integrity in those entrusted with the enactment and execution the laws.’¹⁵⁰ Secondly, at this stage in his career, Jackson’s identification with democracy was no more than an incidental consequence of his thoroughly traditional conviction that ‘the people alone by their virtue, and

¹⁴⁶ ‘Declaration of Support for General Andrew Jackson, Philadelphia, October, 1823,’ in Hopkins, ‘Election of 1824,’ Appendix, p. 399.

¹⁴⁷ Broadside, *Democratic Nominations*.

¹⁴⁸ Duff Green, *Address of the Committee Appointed by the Jackson Meeting in St. Louis, To the People of Missouri*, quoted in *Harrisburg Pennsylvanian*, 19 June 1824, cited in Coens, p. 186.

¹⁴⁹ Robert P. Hay, ‘Presidential Question,’ p. 183.

¹⁵⁰ ‘A Citizen,’ p. 18.

independent exercise of their free suffrage can make [our republican government] perpetual.’¹⁵¹ Finally, by offering citizens ‘a symbolic struggle to save the republic...from corruption,’ the Jackson campaign contributed to the institutionalisation of a mentality that Marc Kruman has called ‘the enduring republican crisis.’¹⁵² With its plea for voters to ‘sacrifice individual wishes at the shrine of their country’s prosperity,’ this theme would provide the perfect campaign tool for the heterogeneous electoral coalitions of the Party Period, and thereby ensure the continued relevance of Revolutionary republicanism for a democratic electorate.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Jackson, quoted in Paul E. Johnson, *The Early American Republic, 1789-1829* (New York, 2007), p. 151.

¹⁵² Kruman, pp. 532-533, 536.

¹⁵³ *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, 2 November 1824, cited in Newsome, p. 103.

CONCLUSION

All parties are beginning to feel something like a disgust at the bare mention of the Presidency. Yet...it is nevertheless the all-absorbing topic of every circle: the political veteran of the legislative hall, and the novice of the school-room – the silver-headed matron and the blooming maiden – the wrinkled beldame, and the ruddy Miss – all, all must have much to *say*, and much to do, in making a President.¹⁵⁴

As this passage from the *Western Carolinian* illustrates, the presidential election of 1824 was far more than a ‘mildly interesting popularity contest.’¹⁵⁵ Multiple contenders confronted a range of important issues. Novel campaign methods engaged ordinary citizens in unprecedented numbers. Competition was fierce for the title of ‘the People’s Candidate.’ Truly, 1824 heralded a new era of public involvement in presidential politics.

Yet despite the increased importance of the popular electorate, the contest was not to be settled in the conventional manner. 27% of those eligible turned out to vote, a figure that would have been higher had sectional loyalties not made the election uncompetitive in several states; five of the seven highest turnouts occurred in states that were also among the seven most closely contested, while five of the seven lowest turnouts occurred in New England, where John Quincy Adams won 84% of all ballots cast.¹⁵⁶ Logistical obstacles may also have prevented many voters from attending the

¹⁵⁴ [Salisbury, North Carolina] *Western Carolinian*, 8 June 1824, cited in Newsome, p. 140.

¹⁵⁵ Ratcliffe, *Politics of Long Division*, p. xii.

¹⁵⁶ Table 5.1. ‘Turnout and Competition in Presidential Elections, 1824-1844: Percent of Adult White Male Vote, Index of Competition,’ in William N. Chambers and Philip C. Davis, ‘Party, Competition, and Mass Participation: The Case of the Democratizing Party System, 1824-1852,’ in Joel H. Silbey,

polls in frontier regions.¹⁵⁷ These qualifications aside, Andrew Jackson emerged the clear leader with 41.3% of the popular vote and 99 out of a possible 261 electoral votes, followed by Adams with 30.9% and 84 respectively. However, since no candidate obtained an outright majority in the Electoral College, the Constitution dictated that the election be decided in the House of Representatives, where each state delegation would cast one vote.

The House election was a key event in the history of the United States. Henry Clay had previously calculated that ‘if the election comes to the H. of R....my election I think certain,’ but having finished fourth in the Electoral College he was automatically eliminated.¹⁵⁸ The influential Speaker of the House then threw his support to Adams, who was elected on the first ballot by the bare minimum of thirteen states, despite having trailed Jackson in both the popular vote and the Electoral College. Jackson supporters immediately charged that a ‘Corrupt Bargain’ had been struck, an accusation that appeared to be corroborated when Adams appointed Clay as his Secretary of State. To his friends, Jackson raged, ‘so you see, the *Judas* of the West has closed the contract and will receive the thirty pieces of silver. His end will be the same. Was there ever witnessed such a bare faced corruption in any country before?’¹⁵⁹

The ‘Corrupt Bargain’ seemed to confirm everything that the Jackson campaign had warned was wrong with the republic. In fact, the allegation was almost certainly

Allan G. Bogue, and William H. Flanigan (eds.), *The History of American Electoral Behavior* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 176-177.

¹⁵⁷ Donald J. Ratcliffe, ‘Voter Turnout in Early Ohio,’ *JER* 7 (1987), p. 250.

¹⁵⁸ Clay to Richard Bache, 17 February 1824, in Hopkins (ed.), *The Papers of Henry Clay*, vol. III, p. 645.

¹⁵⁹ Jackson to Major William B. Lewis, 14 February 1825, in Bassett (ed.), vol. III, p. 276.

untrue. Clay had long believed that ‘the state of Mr. Crawford’s health is such...[that] he can no longer be held up for the Presidency,’ and he refused ‘by contributing to the election of a military chieftain, to give the strongest guarranty that this republic will march in the fatal road which has conducted every other republic to ruin,’ leaving Adams as the only alternative.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, many contemporaries considered the decision of Congress to hand the presidency to Adams against the popular will as evidence of a more pervasive corruption; even the new president later acknowledged that the election had not transpired ‘in a manner satisfactory to pride or to just desire; not by the unequivocal suffrages of a majority of the people; with perhaps two-thirds of the whole people adverse to the actual result.’¹⁶¹ Jackson’s followers immediately began organizing for the next presidential contest, and the conditions were in place for what Donald Ratcliffe has described as ‘the most cataclysmic, most complete partisan realignment in American history.’¹⁶²

In a wider context, the events of the 1824 election support the conclusion of Ronald Formisano that ‘the early republican era is best viewed as a deferential-participant phase somewhere between traditional forms and mass party politics, having some features of both.’¹⁶³ With regard to the issues raised, the electioneering methods employed, and the attention paid to courting public opinion, the election pre-empted the Party Period. Yet throughout the popular campaign, the conduct of the candidates was guided by a system of values and beliefs that they inherited from the Revolution. This ideology of republicanism was central to the identity of the nation, and the

¹⁶⁰ Clay to Francis T. Brooke, 28 May 1824; and Clay to Francis T. Brooke, 28 January 1825, in Hopkins (ed.), *The Papers of Henry Clay*, vol. III, p. 767; and vol. IV, pp. 45-46.

¹⁶¹ 31 December 1825, in Nevins (ed.), pp. 354-355.

¹⁶² Ratcliffe, *Politics of Long Division*, pp. xii-xiii.

¹⁶³ Ronald P. Formisano, ‘Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic’s Political Culture,’ *APSR* 68 (1974), p. 473.

passing of the Revolutionary cohort from the political scene did not diminish its significance; if anything, contemporaries were more convinced that ‘this is the season for paying compliment to revolutionary principles and revolutionary virtues.’¹⁶⁴ Thus, the 1824 presidential campaign compelled a new generation of politicians to reshape the rules they inherited from the past to meet the needs of the present, and thereby ensured that republican principles would continue to co-exist alongside increasingly democratic practices.

The 1824 election also brings into doubt the role of the political party as an agent of democratisation. Historians have conventionally assumed that ‘national parties were central to the initial stimulation and continued maintenance of a mass, *voting* electorate.’¹⁶⁵ Yet from his work on Ohio, Donald Ratcliffe has observed that popular turnout in state elections began to increase in the period following the Panic of 1819.¹⁶⁶ This trend was mirrored in national contests; 1824 was the first campaign to bring to the polls a significant number of ordinary citizens not previously involved in presidential politics. All of this occurred in the absence of national parties; even Thomas Coens, whose work is entitled ‘The Formation of the Jackson Party, 1822-1825,’ acknowledged that ‘there was no single, national Jackson party institution in 1824.’¹⁶⁷ These findings suggest that the Panic of 1819 generated a level of popular discontent with the existing state of politics sufficient to provide the initial stimulation for an increase in voter turnout, and the emergence of a national mass-orientated two-

¹⁶⁴ *New York Statesman*, quoted in [Evansville, Indiana] *Gazette*, 12 August 1824, cited in Hay, ‘American Revolution Twice Recalled,’ p. 54.

¹⁶⁵ Chambers and Davis, p. 196. See also Formisano, pp. 473-474, 482-483.

¹⁶⁶ Ratcliffe, ‘Voter Turnout,’ p. 250. For supporting evidence from other states, see Table 1.

‘Percentages of Adult White Males Voting in Elections,’ in Richard P. McCormick, ‘New Perspective on Jacksonian Politics,’ *AHR* 65 (1960), p. 292.

¹⁶⁷ Coens, p. 180.

party system during the 1830s served only to extend and institutionalise an existing phenomenon.

A study of this size will always leave some questions unanswered. As indicated above, more work is required to determine the extent to which the popular campaign was developed to politicise an apathetic public, or to persuade a politically engaged electorate to vote for a particular candidate. In order to construct a comprehensive account of the 1824 election, it would also be necessary to examine the effect that local circumstances had upon campaigning in each state. Finally, it might prove profitable to investigate the influence of other factors on the contest, such as the ethno-cultural prejudices that Donald Ratcliffe has identified amongst Ohio voters, or the rivalry between large and small states recently highlighted by Thomas Coens.¹⁶⁸ Further research into each of the areas will provide a fuller understanding of how contemporaries conducted themselves in a political culture that continued to be shaped by the traditional values and beliefs of republicanism even as it adapted to the emergence of an electorate-orientated style of politics structured around mass political parties.

¹⁶⁸ Ratcliffe, 'Role of Voters and Issues,' pp. 863, 868; Coens, pp. 110-111, 147-148.

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