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AS GOES ILLINOIS . . . THE STATE AS A POLITICAL MICROCOSM OF THE NATION

James Przybylski

The old saying has it that in presidential elections "as goes Maine, so goes the nation." While this statement may have once been valid, over the last forty years the bellwether nature of the state of Maine has been open to serious challenge. In fact, in the last ten presidential elections Maine has cast its electoral vote for the *losing* candidate six times. The question of which state most closely follows national patterns in presidential elections is an interesting one, however, especially in this presidential year. If one could find a state in which national presidential returns were closely mirrored over a period of years — and if one had some idea why this state-national parallelism existed that state's returns would provide not only a clue to the national outcome, but also some reasons for it.

One of the likeliest candidates for the "microcosm" state in presidential elections is the state of Illinois. In the twentieth century, Illinois has cast its electoral votes for the winning candidate in every presidential election except 1916, when the Republican, Charles Evans Hughes, won the state's electoral votes over the Democrat, Woodrow Wilson. Illinois's popular vote percentages have also closely paralleled those at the national level during the twentieth century. In fact, since 1928 percentages won by the various presidential candidates in the state have never been more than five percentage points from the corresponding national figures; in some elections, the two figures have been almost identical (see Figure 1 and Table 1) 1

Even during the first quarter of the twentieth century, when popular vote figures in Illinois were somewhat biased toward Republican presidential candidates, the presidential figures never differed by as much as 8 percentage points from the national figures. The average difference for this period was 5.6 percent. Indeed, looking back into the nineteenth century. Illinois's popular presidential election returns have closely paralleled national figures since the emotion-laden election of 1860, just before the

James Przybylski is assistant professor of political science. Northeast Missouri State University Civil War. The mean Democratic percentage for Illinois for the entire period from 1870 to 1972 differs from the national mean by only 2.1 percentage points.

The means for presidential elections for the periods 1876-92, 1900-24, and 1940-60, appearing in Table 1, will give the reader an impression of relative partisan strength during these time spans. Most political scholars view these three periods as eras of partisan stability in American history. The other time periods are eras of partisan instability. The period from 1860-72 involved the Civil War and Reconstruction. The 1896 election and the 1928-36 elections took place in times of partisan realignment, the former bringing the Republicans to national dominance and the latter making the Democrats the national power. Finally, the post-1960 era has been a period of partisan instability, not clearly explained as yet

Given that presidential election results in the state have so closely resembled those at the national level for so long, it certainly appears that Illinois is a political microcosm of the nation — if only in this very limited sense. One must then ask the more fundamental question of why this is the case. Could it be that the underlying social and economic base of Illinois is an almost perfect miniature of the nation which leads it naturally to mirror the nation in presidential voting?

Such a view gains support from a recent study which concludes that, in recent years at least, the Illinois economy has been almost a duplicate of the national economy.² But the inquiry must be broadened. To proceed along these lines, one must show not only that Illinois's economy has duplicated that of the United States since at least the turn of the century (which apparently it has), but also that the state has mirrored the nation on such politically relevant social characteristics as religion, country of ancestry, and class status over this same period. As it turns out, this is only partially true. Rather, as will be shown, Illinois has achieved its status as a bellwether state not by exactly mirroring the underlying social and economic base of the nation, but by achieving the proper balance of these characteristics - and of other structural characteristics such as electoral laws and party organizational strength -that have allowed the state to reflect national patterns during different historical epochs.

Illinois is, of course, one of the largest states in the

¹ The data for Table 1 and Figure 1 are drawn from Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U S Elections (Washington, D C Congressional Quarterly, 1975), pp 265-99 The Illinois county figures in Table 2 are drawn from four sources Samuel K Gove, Illinois Votes, 1900-1958 (Urbana Institute of Government and Public Affairs, University of Illinois, 1960), Illinois Secretary of State, Official Vote for the years 1960-72, Walter Dean Burnham, Presidential Ballots, 1836-1892 (Baltimore Johns Hopkins Press, 1955); and Edgar Robinson, The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932 (New York Octagon Books, 1970)

² See Robert N Schoeplein with Hugh T Connelly, *The Illinois Economy:* A Microcosm of the United States? (Urbana: Institute of Government and Public Affairs, University of Illinois, 1975), and Robert N Schoeplein, "Illinois and the United States. Some Economic Parallels," *Illinois Government Research no.* 42 (March 1976)

Table 1

DEMOCRATIC PERCENTAGE OF THE TWO-PARTY VOTE FOR PRESIDENT, THE UNITED STATES AND ILLINOIS, 1860-1972^a

Year		Percentage Vote	Electoral College Winner		
	U.S.	.	U.S.	111	
1860 1864 1868 1872 1876 1880 1884 1884 1888 1892	42 6 45 0 47.3 44 1 51 5 49 8 50 2 50 4 47 2	48.2 45.6 44.2 43.3 46.6 48.1 48.5 50.3	R R R R R R D R D	R R R R R R R R D	
1876-92 (mean)	498	48.4			
1896 1900 1904 1908 1912 1916 1920 1924	47 8 46.8 40 0 45 5 45.3 51 6 36 1 29 0	43.4 45.7 34 1 41 7 38.8 45.2 27 4 23 4	R R R D D R R	R R R D R R R	
1900-24 (mean) ^b	42.9	37 3	· · · ·		
1928 1932 1936 1940 1944 1948 1952 1956 1960	41 2 59 1 62 5 55.0 53 8 52 4 44 6 42 2 50.1	42 6 56.8 59.3 51.1 51.7 50.4 45.0 40.4 50.1	R D D D R R D	R D D D R R R D	
1940-60 (mean)	497	48.1			
1964 1968 1972	61.3 42 9 38.2	59.5 44 3 40.7	D R R	D R R	
1860-1972 (mean)	47 4	45.3			

^a Figures for 1892, 1912, 1924, and 1968 are Democratic percentages of the three-party vote.

^b The Democratic percentage of the two-party vote was used to calculate the mean because of the extremely low Democratic vote in 1924

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Institute of Government and Public Affairs

University of Elinois

1201 West Nevada Street, Urbana, Illinois 61801

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On the other hand, New Mexico, a very small state, has thrown its electoral votes to the winning presidential candidate in every election since 1912 (when it became a state). Obviously, certain unknown factors in New Mexico's political environment have allowed it to follow national patterns despite its small size. It appears that underlying socioeconomic patterns can only partially explain a state's electoral politics. We will return to this point later, but let us first compare the politically relevant social and economic base of Illinois with that of the nation.

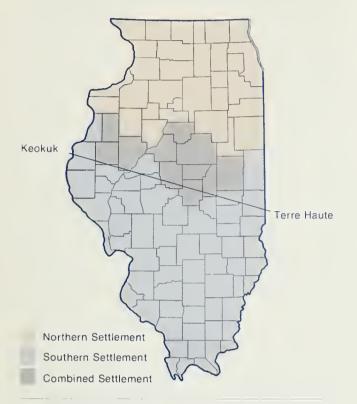
Sectional Factors

In analyzing socioeconomic characteristics that might make Illinois a microcosm of the nation in presidential voting habits, let us first consider the sectional, or regional, background of its early settlers. One cannot really explain American politics since the Civil War without reference to the regional character of the partisan vote for president, especially prior to the New Deal of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s. While American partisan configurations have undergone some shift since then, many rural areas of the country with little population growth still cling to the old pattern of a Republican North versus a Democratic South. Given the generally long-term commitment to a party shown by most voters (at least until recently), it is not surprising that even present voting patterns are somewhat affected by this North-South partisan split.

Illinois is interesting and almost unique among the states east of the Mississippi in that it was originally settled from both the North and the South. On the basis of 1880 census figures, the state can be virtually cut in half geographically between areas settled from the North and from the South. In fact, a line drawn from Keokuk, Iowa, to Terre Haute, Indiana, quite nicely divides the two areas of the state from each other (see Figure 2).

The political balance did not reflect this even geographical split. In statewide elections, the southernoriented population of Illinois was at a political disadvantage compared with those areas settled from the North. For one thing, the northern — and more urbanized — areas of the state were more heavily populated than were the southern areas. In addition, the southern-settled areas were not as committed to the southern cause as were their northern brethren to the northern one. The reason for this was that southern Illinois was settled primarily from the Upper South — states such as Kentucky, Tennessee, and

Figure 2 NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN SETTLEMENT (1880)



Definitions from Richard Jensen, The Winning of the Midwest (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), and V₋ O. Key, Jr., American State Politics (New York: Knopf, 1956).

appeal cut across sectional and ethnoreligious lines Roosevelt would have been expected to have an especially strong impact on a state such as Illinois, with its highly urbanized working-class population compared to the nation as a whole, and, as Table 1 indicates, the Democrats did increase their strength greatly in the state during and after the 1930s

A closer look at the Illinois data indicates the nature of Roosevelt's appeal. In 1928, Smith carried only one of the urban counties (St. Clair), while in 1936 Roosevelt succeeded in carrying them all. In fact, despite the increased statewide Democratic vote between 1932 and 1936, only 19 of Illinois's 102 counties showed an increase in the percentage of Democratic votes between those two years Virtually all the counties that gained Democratic votes between 1932 and 1936 were in or adjacent to the most urbanized counties in the state. The only exceptions to this urban movement to the Democrats were St. Clair County (East St. Louis), which remained virtually stationary after becoming the most Democratic county in the state, and Sangamon County, home of the Illinois state capital, with a relatively small industrial base. (The 1929 Census of Manufactures shows Sangamon County as the least industrialized among the urbanized counties in Illinois)

Franklin Roosevelt did have some followers in rural areas where organized labor was strong. An indication of this is seen in the voting figures from Franklin County. where the United Mine Workers has been an important force. This county showed a Democratic increase after the 1930s; since then it has been one of the most consistently Democratic counties of the state (see Table 2).

It appears, then, that after the 1930s social class became the dominant theme of American politics. One would expect the working-class-based Democratic Party to be favored over the more middle-class-based Republican Party in Illinois's highly urban and industrialized setting This has not been the case. The Democrats did gain in Illinois as a result of the New Deal, but the Republicans have continued to hold a slight advantage in presidential politics in Illinois as compared to the nation — at least until the very recent past. Other forces besides the basic working class-middle class cleavage have obviously been at work.

Other Factors

The older sectional and ethnoreligious factors certainly still have an effect on Illinois's presidential politics. Rural northern Illinois has continued to be a Republican bastion, while the Democrats have seen their already tenuous foothold in southern Illinois gradually slip away as they have directed their appeals at urban working populations whose religious, ethnic, and racial composition is quite different from the old-stock white Protestant populations of southern Illinois. Most of Illinois's black population is concentrated in the Chicago and East St. Louis areas, and this tends to increase the social distinctiveness of these urban Democratic strongholds from the rest of the state. This helps to explain the continuing Republican strength in downstate urban as well as rural areas.

Some other socioeconomic factors have probably also had some effect on the nature of Illinois presidential politics. The state's population has had a somewhat higher median age level than does the nation as a whole. Since older populations have tended to favor the Republicans, this may have helped the party in the state. The most recent census, however, shows age distribution in Illinois to be virtually identical with that in the nation. Illinois's black population is also now at virtually the same percentage as the national figures, reducing the earlier Republican advantage. On the other hand, the median family income in Illinois has remained higher than that of the nation a factor that might favor the Republican Party, since traditionally more prosperous populations have tended to support it.

To understand Illinois presidential politics, however, one must go beyond the socioeconomic makeup of the state. As pointed out earlier, for example, Pennsylvania's Republican strength in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries must be at least partially attributed to the organizational abilities of its Republican leaders. The disfranchisement of blacks in the South in the late nineteenth century was certainly a factor in the weakening of the Republican Party in that region, overriding underlying socioeconomic forces. Such structural factors certainly do influence the political makeup of a state, the question is one of their relative importance in affecting political events. Whatever their degree of importance, there can be little doubt that the structures a state sets up for organizing and expressing the vote can have a profound effect on that vote.

In the case of Illinois, both major presidential parties have maintained strong organizations throughout the twentieth century, signs of weakness have appeared only Immigrant status were very important in determining electoral outcomes; this was particularly true in the election of 1896. The factors that influenced the outcome of this election continued to affect American politics until the late 1920s, and thus it is clear that religion and immigrant status were quite important during the first thirty years of the twentieth century Even since then, given the stability of partisan attachments in many areas, one could expect these factors to continue to affect the political system.

Outside the South prior to 1896, old-stock American and some older immigrant groups who were members of pietistic Protestant faiths (such as Methodist, Baptist, and Congregationalist) tended to line up with the Republican Party against the Catholics and nonpietistic Protestants (such as German Lutherans). Generally of immigrant stock, Catholics and nonpietistic Protestants tended to side with the Democrats. These latter groups resided primarily in the urban centers of the North, although there were some rural pockets of German Catholic and German Lutheran strength in parts of the Midwest. The effect of the rural, nativist appeal of Democrat William Jennings Bryan, a pietistic Protestant, in the 1896 presidential campaign was to alienate a large share of the urban, newer immigrant populations from the Democratic Party. Bryan's campaign had little effect on the Republican leanings of the northern pietistic Protestants. Ironically, his great appeal in the South left the country more sectionally divided in terms of voting patterns after 1896 than it had been before. The Democratic Party took on a distinctly southern orientation, which lasted into the late 1920s, while the Republican Party was strengthened in the industrialized North and, therefore, in the nation as a whole.

During the twentieth century Illinois has contained relatively higher proportions of urban, Catholic, and foreignstock populations than has the United States at large. Since these groups were those most alienated by the nature of the Democratic Party after 1896, one might expect that Illinois would be somewhat more Republican relative to the rest of the country between 1896 and 1928 (when the Democrats nominated a Catholic of immigrant stock, Alfred E. Smith) than it was before the turn of the century.

As shown in Table 1, Illinois did become more Republican after the turn of the twentieth century than it had been before; it also became somewhat more Republican relative to the country as a whole during the first quarter of the century Further, a closer look at the data lends some support to the notion that the drop in Democratic voting was particularly severe in areas of Catholic immigrant-stock concentration such as rural Clinton County and urban Cook, Rock Island, and Peoria counties. (Compare the 1876-92 mean Democratic vote with the 1900-24 mean in Table 2.) It would appear, then, that in Illinois the desertion of the Democratic Party by peoples of Catholic and immigrantstock background added to the party's woes in the early twentieth century.

In 1928 the Democrats made a strong effort to bring these Catholic, foreign-stock populations back into the party by running one of their coreligionists, Alfred E. Smith of New York, for president. A large majority of these populations were located among the urban working class. Some have argued that the New Deal coalition of Franklin D. Roosevelt had its roots in the 1928 presidential election. Recently, others have argued that the 1928 election should probably be viewed as a phenomenon separate from the New Deal realignment.

The Illinois data lend some support to this more recent argument. In urban Macon County, with its predominantly Protestant, old-stock working population, Democratic percentages fell significantly from those generally achieved in the first quarter of the twentieth century, while in rural Clinton County, with a heavily Catholic population, there was a significant jump in Democratic votes in presidential elections (see Table 2). Thus it appears that rather than becoming the beneficiary of a massive working-class movement, in 1928 the Democratic party gained Catholic, foreign-stock votes, while losing Protestant working-class votes.

The New Deal and Class Voting

With the coming of the Great Depression in 1929 and the emergence of Roosevelt's New Deal between 1932 and 1936, the older sectional and ethnoreligious cleavages took a back seat to the new working class-middle class cleavage that has since come to characterize American politics. However, the older patterns did not die. One can still see the Republican-Democratic split among rural northern and southern populations, and Catholics and persons of more recent foreign ancestry still show a Democratic bias compared to more Protestant, old-stock Americans. Since the 1930s, however, the issue of class seems to have become more salient than the older issues.

Roosevelt's appeal after 1932 was directed primarily at working-class populations that tended to be concentrated in large urban areas. Of course, his supporters included a large part of the Catholic and foreign-stock populations that had been drawn to Smith, but his broad

Table 2	
DEMOCRATIC PERCENTAGES OF THE TWO-PARTY VOTE FOR PRESIDENT, SELECTED ILLINOIS COUNTIES, 1876-1972	

County	1876-92		1900-24				1940-60			
	(mean)	1896	(mean)	1928	1932	1936	(mean)	1964	1968	1972
Cook (Chicago)	49.6	40.6	356	46.9	57 1	64 1	52.9	63.2	50.7	46.3
Macon (Decatur)	47.7	43.3	373	28 9	56.2	63.7	51.0	66.1	47.2	40.7
Peoria (Peoria)	52.7	46.3	377	42.7	59.9	65.4	45 8	58.7	42.0	35.1
Rock Island (Rock Island-Moline)	42.1	38.9	28 5	34.5	53.8	62.7	51.9	63.8	49.3	46.4
St. Clair (East St. Louis)	53 1	48.2	44 9	54 0	67.5	67.0	60.3	72.4	50.5	48.0
Sangamon (Springfield)	53.8	48.8	42 6	39 7	54 9	52.2	45 5	56 6	40.7	33.8
Winnebago (Rockford)	27 5	22.8	18.3	188	39.9	52.1	44.5	55 0	40.5	38.4
Clinton (rural Catholic)	61.1	58.0	50.6	69 1	75.2	59 4	42 2	61.0	36.5	37.5
Franklin (rural coal mining)	53 7	52.2	46.9	53.5	66.1	58.8	51.5	64 1	47.9	45.8

^a Figures for 1892, 1912, and 1968 are Democratic percentages of the three-party vote.

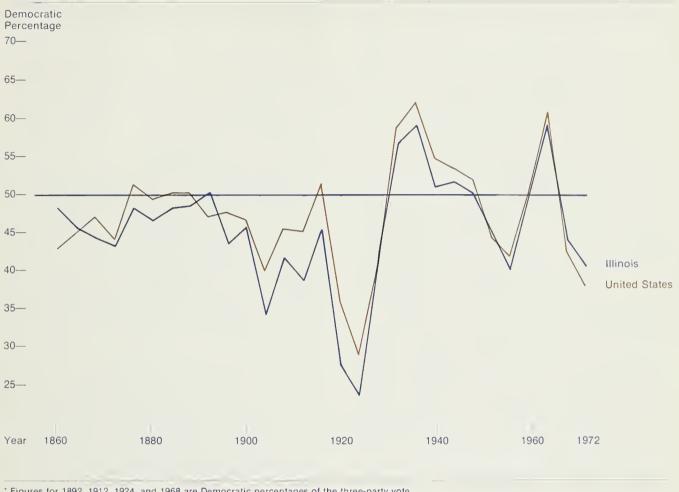


Figure 1 DEMOCRATIC PERCENTAGE OF THE TWO-PARTY VOTE FOR PRESIDENT, THE UNITED STATES AND ILLINOIS, 1860-1972*

* Figures for 1892, 1912, 1924, and 1968 are Democratic percentages of the three-party vote.

Virginia. Sentiment for the Confederacy was much less prevalent in these states than in the states of the Deep South; each of them contained areas of traditional Republican strength. Given this background, it is not surprising that during the first quarter of the twentieth century, when Civil War political divisions were still very much a part of American politics, southern Illinois was politically competitive in presidential elections, while northern Illinois remained a Republican stronghold

Regional patterns of the presidential vote during the height of the New Deal period, from 1940 to 1960, illustrate the continuing political division between northern and southern Illinois. This division continued in a more subdued form until 1972, at least in rural areas. In 1964 the most strongly Democratic counties, with the notable exceptions of urban Cook (Chicago) and Rock Island (Rock Island-Moline) counties, were generally found in southern Illinois, while nearly all the Republican counties were found in the northern part of the state. In 1968 the southern candidate, George Wallace, drew over 10 percent of the vote in twentyseven Illinois counties. All but one of these counties were areas of original southern settlement.

In 1972, the regional cast of voting in Illinois (as in the nation) was largely washed away with the overwhelming defeat of the Democrat, George McGovern, in Richard Nixon's landslide. Although most of the twenty-six counties in which McGovern received at least 40 percent of the vote were found in southern Illinois (he carried only Jackson County), the counties he lost by the smallest margins were generally either urban in character or were coal-mining areas of some union strength, such as Franklin County in southern Illinois.

While much of northern Illinois has been a Republican bastion during the twentieth century, southern Illinois has not been the Democratic bastion that the American South has been. This fact serves to explain why the state as a whole had a Republican bias prior to the New Deal It also explains why rural portions of the state have retained this bias.

Ethnoreligious Factors

Other socioeconomic factors besides region are also important in determining voting behavior. As has been documented, in the late nineteenth century religion and quite recently Such organizational strength is found in the low degree of split-ticket voting that has characterized the state's elections. Organizational strength is also evident in the state's closed primary system, which made it extremely difficult to cross party lines until 1972. The state's strong party organizations are also evident in the use of the party column ballot, which facilitates straightticket voting and helps keep partisans in line. These structures both reflect strong major party organizations and encourage their continuation. The relatively high turnout in Illinois elections compared to the nation also indicates the ability of the party organizations to turn out their followers.

A closer look at the party organizations in Illinois is instructive. The Democratic organization has been very powerful in Chicago and East St Louis, but quite weak downstate. On the other hand, Republicans, while lacking the centralized party structure that has characterized the Democratic organization, have maintained stronger party organization than the Democrats downstate and have had a strong organization in the suburban areas of Cook County as well. Here is another reason why the Democrats have been weaker in Illinois presidential voting than one might expect from socioeconomic data They have not maintained a downstate organization strong enough to pull sufficient numbers of potential Democratic voters to the polls perhaps a factor in the inability of the Democrats to maintain their majorities in downstate urban areas after 1936.

Another structural factor probably helped the Republicans maintain their relative strength until at least the mid-1960s. That was the failure of the state legislature to reapportion legislative and congressional seats on the basis of population, resulting in more legislative and congressional strength for Republican-leaning rural areas of the state than their populations would otherwise allow them. In terms of presidential politics, there were relatively more Republican than Democratic officeholders to mobilize the party faithful on election day. Of course, the Supreme Court decisions of the 1960s requiring population-based apportionment have changed this situation.

In the early 1970s, some weakening of both parties' organizations has been evident, in Illinois as in the nation. In 1972 Republican candidates for president and U.S. senator carried the state by lopsided margins, while Democrats captured the governor's chair and the secretary of state's office. In Cook County, a Republican wrested control of the state's attorney's office from the Democrats. In the 1976 Democratic presidential primary, Jimmy Carter won despite the party organization's efforts to elect an

uncommitted slate, and a black Democratic antiorganization candidate won renomination to Congress from Chicago.

Nevertheless, the party organizations in Illinois still appear to be quite powerful. Split-ticket voting appears to occur less frequently in Illinois than in many other states, and turnout still appears to be somewhat above the national average. The state Democratic organization showed a good deal of muscle in the 1976 primary, when it succeeded in deposing the antiorganization incumbent Democratic governor Given this high degree of organizational strength, it appears unwise for either a Democratic or a Republican presidential candidate to take the state for granted.

The addition of the eighteen-year-old vote is a recent structural change that could also influence Illinois politics. Because age distribution in the state is very much like that in the nation, state and national voting returns should be affected in about the same way by this factor Certainly the bonanza which the McGovern forces expected in 1972 by the addition of this group did not materialize, but there do appear to be localized effects in areas where the eighteen-year-old vote has been mobilized effectively. For example, three of McGovern's strongest counties in Illinois were areas with large college student populations. He succeeded in carrying Jackson County (Southern Illinois University) and drew better than would have been expected in normally Republican Champaign County (University of Illinois) and DeKalb County (Northern Illinois University).

Conclusion

It appears that while Illinois's socioeconomic base gives the Democrats an edge in presidential voting, generally the Republicans have been able to more effectively mobilize their potential following in the state. This has made Illinois quite competitive in presidential elections, and it has closely mirrored the presidential voting patterns of the nation. Where changes presently occurring in state and national politics will lead is open to speculation. Some say that the parties are decomposing as viable political organizations Others feel that a somewhat changed New Deal cleavage will again emerge. Still others foresee a period of instability until the parties find new cleavages that are relevant to the present political period. All these changes will lead to a different kind of presidential politics. With these changes, Illinois's presidential voting patterns may diverge from those of the nation. For now, the state remains a national electoral microcosm.



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