

DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE OF 1912

EDGAR EUGENE ROBINSON
Leland Stanford Junior University

All are familiar with the assertion that party managers in the United States can no longer depend upon a steady partisan vote because of the increase in the number of independent voters. Various causes have been ascribed, important among which are the greater diffusion of common knowledge of public affairs and the increasing desire of the electorate to make the government more responsive to the public will. The most recent expression of national opinion has been widely considered as evidence of this condition and of these important causes. Inasmuch as the campaign of 1912 not only introduced a powerful third party but also witnessed the active presentation of different conceptions of the nature of the government, particularly the function of political parties and their relation to different methods of expressing the popular will, a detailed examination of the election returns should go far toward testing the truth of the assertion. It is my purpose to do so by pointing out the distribution of the vote for each of the three leading candidates and by considering salient features of the distribution that seem to throw light on the causes that brought about the result. This preliminary analysis will serve as a basis for more extended examination.

First it may be well to summarize the result by states. By pluralities Taft carried 2 states, Roosevelt 6, and Wilson 40. It was expected that pluralities would determine the result, yet in this sharply contested election Taft and Roosevelt together polled 73,000 votes less than Taft received four years before, while Wilson dropped 116,000 behind the Bryan vote of 1908.¹ Wilson's over-

¹ The Socialist and Social Labor parties increased their vote by 500,000. Except for this increase in the ultra-radical vote the election revealed a general falling off in the vote. The total vote of 1912 exceeded that of 1908 by 145,000, but within those four years Arizona and New Mexico had entered the Union, and suffrage had been

whelming lead was due to the wide distribution of the vote, for so evenly balanced were the parties, that, judged by state majorities, Taft carried no state, Roosevelt only one,¹ and Wilson 14 states in the South. While the combined vote of Taft and Roosevelt gave non-Democratic majorities in every state outside of the South, Wilson's majority vote lost Nebraska, Nevada, and Colorado, which Bryan had carried in 1908. Wilson carried only the South and in that region he polled 30,000 votes less than Bryan had obtained four years before.² Whereas the Democratic majorities were confined to this region,³ more than two-thirds of Wilson's total vote was cast in the 33 states outside of the South. An examination of the distribution of the vote by smaller units than states is obviously necessary.

There were 2,975 counties in the United States in 1912. Of these Wilson secured a plurality in 2,196 (see Map III). This appears overwhelming, for it leaves only 771 counties⁴ of which Taft carried 281 and Roosevelt 490. But again, a majority vote is the only real test of Democratic strength. On the basis of the total vote cast for Democratic, Republican, and Progressive tickets, Wilson secured a majority vote in only 1,431 counties (see Map II). Even this number would be materially reduced were it possible in the total vote to include the Socialist vote by counties.⁵ Of the 1,536 counties in which Wilson did not have a majority, Taft led Roosevelt in 648, and in 888 the Roosevelt vote exceeded the Republican vote. The distribution was sectional, Taft leading in the Northeast, Roosevelt in the Middle West, and Wilson in the

extended to women in California and Washington. Excluding the increase due to such changes the vote of 1912 was 350,000 less than that of 1908. Between the two elections 200,000 were added to the voting population. The decrease in the vote of 1912 as compared with that of 1908 may be placed safely at 500,000.

¹ South Dakota; there was no Taft ticket.

² West Virginia and Missouri are not included, and Oklahoma is added. Arizona, which gave a slight majority to Wilson, cast no presidential vote in 1908.

³ In 1904 Parker had carried the same states except Oklahoma and Arizona, which had not then been admitted to statehood.

⁴ No returns in 8 counties.

⁵ Socialists cast 900,672 votes. Compared with the vote of 1908, there was an increase in every state.

South. In 4 states, South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, and Louisiana, Wilson had a majority in every county. In the 15 states of the South¹ he carried 1,018 counties, the combined vote of Taft and Roosevelt keeping 276 from his majority column. In the 33 states outside of that area his majority carried only 413 counties out of a total of 1,681. In 9 states he had a majority in no county.²

It is possible to test the permanency of the Democratic vote by comparing this distribution with the distribution of the Bryan vote in 1908. Bryan had carried 1,360 counties (see Map I). To make possible a fair comparison between this number and the 1,431 in which Wilson had a majority certain deductions must first be made.³ The counties of California, South Dakota, and Oklahoma should not be included because in these states the three-cornered contest did not obtain in 1912, and consequently the strength of neither competing party was normal. Arizona and New Mexico cast no presidential vote in 1908. In the remaining 43 states Wilson had a majority in 1,305 counties, one less than had been carried by Bryan in that area.⁴ The general parallelism of the counties may be seen best by a comparison of Maps I and II. The differences are given in Tables I and II. Wilson gained 194 counties. Of these 14 returned no vote in 1908, 29 were new counties in 1912, and 56 were in states where either Taft or Roosevelt had no ticket in 1912. There was an actual gain of 95. On the other hand, in the same territory Wilson lost 121 counties which had been carried by Bryan in 1908.⁵

¹ Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

² New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Michigan, North Dakota, Washington, and Oregon.

³ Of 84 new counties in the returns of 1912, 29 had a majority for Wilson.

⁴ There were 765 counties in which Wilson had a plurality but not a majority. They are distributed over 17 states. It is significant that in all except two of these states, Wilson's state vote was less than Bryan's in 1908. The exceptions are Maine and Oregon; in the first Wilson received 39 per cent of the total vote, in the second 35 per cent.

⁵ This of course excludes the losses in California and Oklahoma and the counties that gave no returns in 1912.

The foregoing comparison indicates the permanent character of the greater part of the Democratic vote. In spite of the change of candidates and the split in the opposition party, the Democratic vote of 1912 was distributed on the whole as that of 1908.¹ Before considering the location of the gains and losses by counties it will be well to point out the regions of Democratic strength on the basis of both elections. As indicated by state majorities the determining Democratic vote was cast in the South.² In the 15 states of that region 1,024 counties were carried by both Bryan and Wilson. Outside of the South only 212 counties had Democratic majorities in both elections. Of these 134 are in four states: Oklahoma 45, Indiana 32, Illinois 31, and Ohio 26. These counties are quite as much a part of the Democratic South as are the counties in the first 15.³ The remaining 78 counties appear in 14 states. In 1904 Roosevelt carried 54 of them. Except for this overwhelming defeat of Parker all except 28 have been steadily Democratic since 1892.⁴

As striking is the parallelism of the Democratic vote in the 17 great cities. They cast nearly two and one-half million votes.⁵ Wilson's aggregate vote exceeded Bryan's by 38,000.⁶ Nevertheless

¹ By state votes Wilson incurred remarkable losses in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.

² It would be a great mistake to consider that the Democratic party had greatest numbers of votes in the South; Wilson received 4,483,146 votes outside of the South, more than two-thirds of his total vote.

³ (1) Of the 89 counties in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio 45 were Democratic in 1904, 80 in 1900, and 75 in 1896. For the distribution of county votes in these states in the elections of 1856, 1868, 1888, and 1900, see maps, *American Journal of Sociology*, XIII, 664-65 (Plate I); and for distribution in the elections of 1876, 1888, 1892, and 1904 (*ibid.*, Plate II, 1, 2, 3, 4).

(2) Oklahoma cast its first presidential vote in 1908. For the sectional distribution of counties, see Maps I and II.

⁴ Of the 78 all except 21 have since 1890 been increasing in population more slowly than their states. In the decade, 1900-1910, 20 decreased in population.

⁵ Total vote cast, 2,371,982 in 1908; 2,448,914 in 1912.

⁶ Democratic vote:

City	1908	1912	City	1908	1912
New York	284,569	312,386	Buffalo	45,183	33,518
Chicago	152,990	130,702	San Francisco	21,260	48,955
Philadelphia	75,310	66,308	Milwaukee	26,000	27,807
St. Louis	60,665	58,845	Cincinnati	45,429	42,909
Boston	43,773	46,059	Newark	30,101	26,250
Cleveland	39,954	43,610	New Orleans	25,678	26,453
Baltimore	49,139	48,030	Los Angeles	22,076	55,105
Pittsburgh	45,655	31,365	Minneapolis	16,169	15,530
Detroit	24,603	22,916			

in 10¹ of the 17 Wilson's vote fell below Bryan's, but he made notable gains in New York City; and in San Francisco and Los Angeles, where the extension of the suffrage must explain the greater part of the increase. The distribution of the majority vote for the two men was similar. Bryan carried New Orleans; so did Wilson, and to it he added San Francisco, where in 1912 there was no Taft ticket, and Milwaukee, where he polled 1,800 votes more than Bryan, but had 800 less than had been cast for Taft four years before. In the remaining 14 cities the combined vote of Taft and Roosevelt exceeded the Wilson vote, but in this triangular contest the victory was accorded Wilson in 11 of the 17.²

Consider now the 123 counties carried by Bryan but in which Wilson failed to gain a majority. They are distributed as shown in Table I. The Democratic vote declined in all except 20. The distribution is too scattered to make the changes significant with

TABLE I

Alabama	3	Kansas	4	North Carolina	2
Arkansas	3	Kentucky	9	Ohio	5
California	1	Maryland	3	Oklahoma	1
Colorado	12	Minnesota	1	Pennsylvania	1
Idaho	4	Missouri	5	Tennessee	5
Illinois	2	Montana	5	Texas	1
Indiana	13	Nebraska	32	West Virginia	1
Iowa	5	Nevada	4	Wisconsin	1

the possible exception of the losses in Nebraska, Colorado, and Nevada, states which had been carried by Bryan in 1908 but in which Wilson failed to gain a majority in 1912. Of the total loss of 121³ counties Roosevelt led Taft in 68 and in 53 Taft led Roosevelt.

In territory where a comparison can fairly be made Wilson gained 95 counties which Bryan had lost in 1908. They are distributed as shown in Table II. This distribution was even more

² Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Newark, Minneapolis.

² Even a plurality vote did not gain Philadelphia, where Taft led Roosevelt, and Chicago, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Newark, and Los Angeles, which were carried by Roosevelt.

³ Two counties not included.

scattered than the losses had been. Yet 56 of the counties are in the South and 38 of these in two states. Of the total 95 the Democratic vote increased in only 61.¹

TABLE II

Arkansas	7	Kentucky	3	New York	1
Colorado	1	Maine	1	North Carolina	17
Delaware	1	Maryland	1	Pennsylvania	1
Florida	1	Minnesota	1	Texas	3
Georgia	21	Missouri	4	Virginia	8
Idaho	1	Nebraska	1	West Virginia	5
Indiana	2	Nevada	2	Wisconsin	10
Kansas	2	New Jersey	1		

So identical is the basic vote with the Democratic majority counties since 1896, and so unimportant are the changes in 1912, that further examination is unnecessary for our present purpose. It is clear that the great body of voters that voted the Democratic ticket in 1908 must have done the same in 1912. The opposition parties gained Democratic votes, but it is inconceivable that there could have been any considerable number, for the distribution is essentially the same.² The losses are due on the whole to a decline in the interest of the electorate.³ If there was a wider knowledge of the issues it did not lead the Democrats to the polls and if the desire to restore the government to the people was dominant in Democratic areas it did not lead them to forsake the Democracy. Moreover, the nature of the gains made by Wilson precludes the possibility that any great number of independent voters went over to the Democracy.⁴

¹ In New England, Wilson had a majority in one county, Knox, in Maine. He gained 800 votes; the opposition 200. Of the 10 Wisconsin counties gained by Wilson in 5 his vote was less than Bryan's had been, but in all the opposition declined nearly one-half.

² Wilson gained in the lower South and lost in the border states. Likewise he gained in the Northeast and lost heavily in the Northern Ohio River Valley. He lost in certain western states, notably Nebraska and Colorado; he gained in Wisconsin and California.

³ The decrease in the total vote has been placed at 500,000. In the South, Wilson was 30,000 behind Bryan. In the North, excluding 5 states mentioned above, he was 276,000 behind Bryan.

⁴ Notable exceptions in Wisconsin and California.

Doubtless a fairer test of independent voting and its causes is to be found in an analysis of the distribution of the divided Republican vote. For it is of course apparent that Taft and Roosevelt together held the Republican vote, and that it was the evenness of the split that made possible the enormous plurality victory for Wilson at the same time that the Democracy made no appreciable gains. The division of the Republican vote was such as gave counties to both Taft and Roosevelt in every state excepting 11, 5 of them in the South.¹

Consider first the non-Democratic counties in the 15 states of the South. Wilson's plurality gained all but 116.² But the combined vote of Taft and Roosevelt kept 276 from Wilson's majority column. In 1908 Taft had carried 312 in this area. Of these 243 were identical.³ Of these identical counties 233 were Republican in 1904, 211 in 1900, and 193 in 1896. The location of these permanent non-Democratic counties is best seen in a comparison of Map II with Map I. On the other hand, 31 counties that were Democratic in 1908 were non-Democratic in 1912; in 19 of them the Republican vote led that for Roosevelt.⁴ Of the 276 counties held by the combined vote of Taft and Roosevelt the Republican vote was the greater in 150.⁵

¹ Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, South Carolina in the South; Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire in New England; California and South Dakota, where there was no Taft ticket, and Oklahoma, where there was no Roosevelt ticket.

² Alabama 4	Maryland 4	Texas 6
Arkansas 1	Missouri 21	Virginia 2
Georgia 5	North Carolina 11	West Virginia 12
Kentucky 27	Tennessee 23	(see Map III)

³ The distribution was as follows:

Alabama 6	Arkansas 4	Georgia 11
Kentucky 48	Maryland 8	Missouri 51
North Carolina 21	Tennessee 40	Texas 6
Virginia 14	West Virginia 34	

⁴ The counties lost by Wilson:

Alabama 3	Missouri 5	Tennessee 4
Maryland 3	Kentucky 9	Texas 4
Arkansas 3	North Carolina 2	West Virginia 1

⁵ Of the 126 counties in which Roosevelt led Taft, all except 12 had been carried by Taft in 1908.

Consider now the division of the Republican vote in the 33 states outside of the South. In 498 of the 1,260 counties kept from Wilson, Taft's vote exceeded that for Roosevelt. These counties were chiefly in the New England section, in New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin, and in Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, and New Mexico. All except 19 were Taft counties in 1908. In these areas then a decided majority of the Republican voters were not moved from their usual habit. It is noteworthy that in all but three¹ of the states the state party organization supported Taft before as well as after his re-nomination. A majority of the party and the party leaders were in agreement in their support of the Republican administration.

The 762 counties in which Roosevelt's vote exceeded that cast for Taft were chiefly in Maine, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, in the Middle West, and in Montana, Washington, and California. In 490 of these counties, most of them in the Middle West, Roosevelt had more votes than Wilson. These areas where a majority of the Republicans evidenced independence of party by voting for Roosevelt were those in which Roosevelt Republicans in the pre-convention contest had obtained control in the state organization,² or those in which during the greater part of the Taft administration "Insurgents" or Progressive Republicans had controlled the dominant state organizations.³ A majority of these Republicans and their accredited representatives were in agreement in their dissatisfaction with the forces long dominant in the national Republican organization.

Most remarkable then is the influence of the state political organization as revealed in this division of the Republican party. The northern tier of counties in Pennsylvania gave majorities for

¹ Ohio, Wisconsin, Idaho. In the pre-convention contest the organization in Ohio divided (see below); Wisconsin supported La Follette; in Idaho Senator Borah remained aloof from the Taft-Roosevelt contest, and, although the state delegation was pro-Roosevelt, it voted for Cummins in the convention.

² Roosevelt won Republican primaries in Illinois, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. He captured state organizations in Maine, Michigan, and Ohio.

³ Of twelve states represented by Progressive Republicans during the greater part of the Taft administration in all except three, Oregon, Idaho, and Wisconsin, the Roosevelt vote exceeded the Taft vote. The nine are North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and Minnesota in the Middle West, and Montana, Washington, and California in the Far West.

TABLE III
DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE BY COUNTIES

STATE	1908 TOTAL	MAJORITY		1912 TOTAL	PREDOMINANCE WILSON	LEAD		MAJORITY LEAD		
		Bryan	Taft			Taft	Roosevelt	Wilson	Taft	Roosevelt
Alabama.....	67	61	6	67	63	0	4	58	0	9
Arizona.....	0	0	0	14	14	0	0	8	1	5
Arkansas.....	75	64	11	75	74	1	0	68	7	0
California.....	58	60	52	58	41	0	17	38	0	20
Colorado.....	00	33	26 (1)	62	57	3	2	23	16	23
Connecticut.....	8	0	8	8	4	4	0	0	8	0
Delaware.....	3	0	3	3	3	0	0	1	2	0
Florida.....	46	45	1	48	48	0	0	48	0	0
Georgia.....	146	114	31 (1)	146	141	1	4	135	16	10
Idaho.....	23	4	19	27	14	8	5	2	16	9
Illinois.....	102	33	69	102	64	11	27	31	26	45
Indiana.....	92	45	47	92	83	3	6	34	34	24
Iowa.....	99	12	87	99	52	7	40	7	29	63
Kansas.....	105	7	98	105	75	2	28	6	16	83
Kentucky.....	110	68	51	120	93	21	6	62	36	22
Louisiana.....	59	59	0	61	61	0	0	61	0	0
Maine.....	16	16	0	16	9	0	7	1	1	14
Maryland.....	24	15	9	24	20	3	1	13	8	3
Massachusetts.....	14	0	14	14	3	7	4	0	7	7
Michigan.....	83	0	83	83	12	10	61	0	15	68
Minnesota.....	85	4	81	86	24	0	62	4	2	80
Mississippi.....	78	78	0	79	79	0	0	79	0	0
Missouri.....	115	60	55	115	94	17	4	59	50	6
Montana.....	27	7	20	31	17	4	10	2	0	20
Nebraska.....	92	44	48	92	73	1	18	13	15	64
Nevada.....	14	6	8	16	14	0	2	5	0	11
New Jersey.....	21	3	18	21	18	0	3	4	3	14
New Hampshire.....	10	0	10	10	9	1	0	0	10	0

Roosevelt, while the adjacent tier of counties in New York returned majorities for Taft. Similar divisions are shown on the boundaries between Maine and New Hampshire, Utah and Nevada, New Mexico and Arizona. The isolation of Wisconsin as a Taft state among the Insurgent Republican states is evidence of the strength of the state organization of La Follette. In addition to Wisconsin there were strong La Follette organizations in North Dakota, Oregon, and California, and these three "Insurgent" states show a correspondingly weaker support for Roosevelt. In Ohio as early as the pre-convention contest Roosevelt had obtained control of the organization in the northern districts, while the Taft leaders held their control in the southern part of the state. The division of counties in the November election outlines this earlier disagreement within the state organization.

So in agreement were county majorities and their respective state organizations that the basis for the manifestation of independent voting is not easily discerned. There are, however, certain suggestive divisions within certain states. Massachusetts had held a primary for the election of delegates to the Republican convention and Taft and Roosevelt had divided the state, the former leading in the western districts. In the November election each carried seven counties, Roosevelt carrying all the seaboard counties except Essex and Taft leading in the interior. All of the Taft counties except Essex have over 60 per cent of their area in farms; all of the Roosevelt counties except Middlesex have less than 60 per cent of their area in farms. Iowa held no primary but district conventions instructed delegations. Six districts instructed for Taft. These are grouped in the southern half of the state and comprise all but two of the counties that gave Taft a greater vote than Roosevelt in the November election. The northern districts supported Cummins in the Chicago Convention and had been represented by "Insurgents" throughout the Taft administration. All but four of these northern counties gave majorities to Roosevelt in November. They comprise 21 of the 28 counties in Iowa which showed an increase in population between 1900 and 1910. Similar to these divisions in Massachusetts and Iowa and unlike the unity of the bulk of the states, there was a fairly even division of counties

in Vermont, North Dakota, Colorado, and Oregon which offers additional material for detailed examination.

TABLE IV
INCREASE OR DECREASE BY STATES, 1908 AND 1912

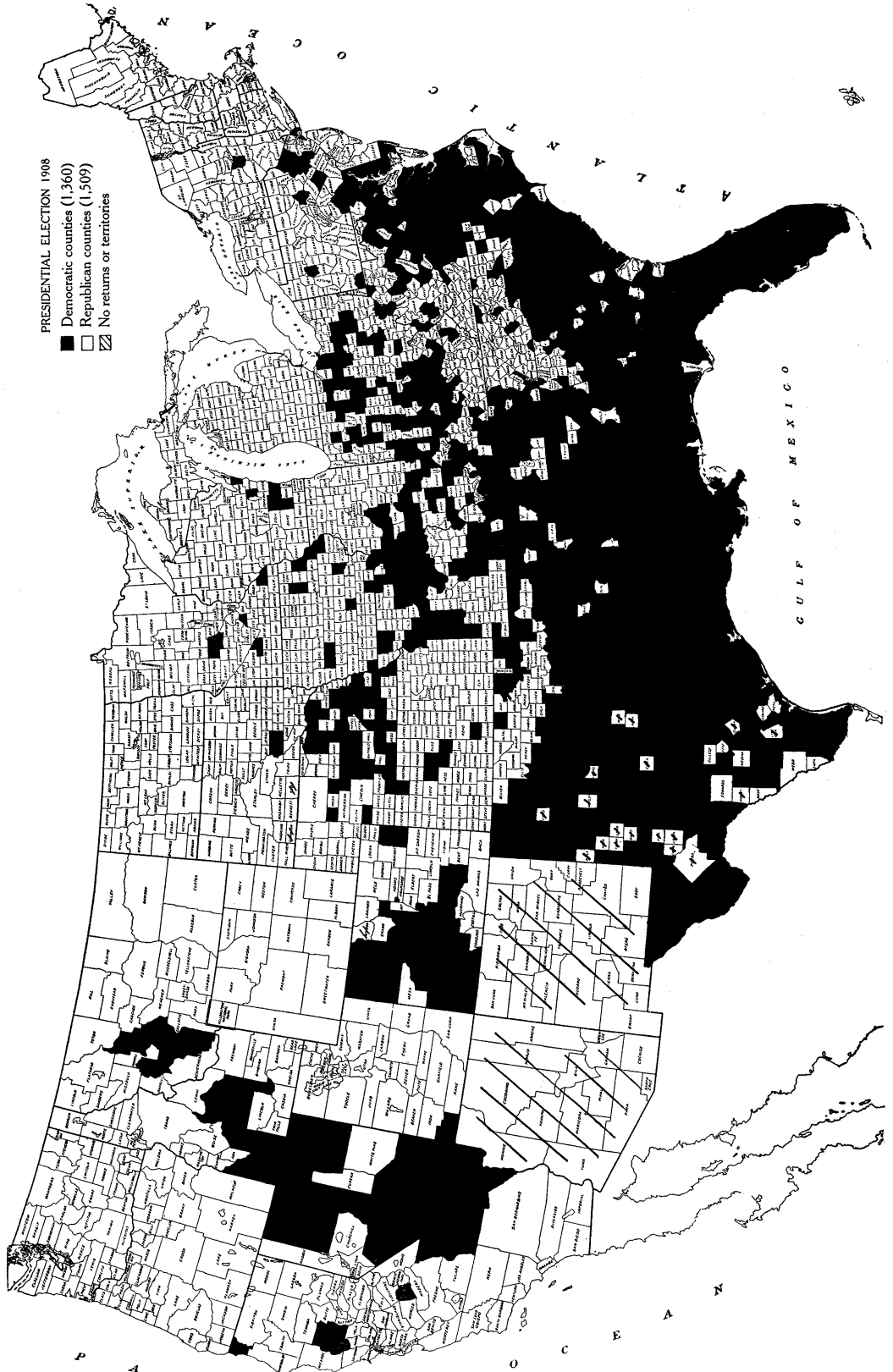
	Increase	Decrease
Alabama.....	14,079	.....
Arizona.....	(23,722)	.....
Arkansas.....	.....	28,267
California.....	(286,930)	.....
Colorado.....	2,994	.....
Connecticut.....	1,665	.....
Delaware.....	670	.....
Florida.....	2,531	.....
Georgia.....	.....	11,261
Idaho.....	6,915	.....
Illinois.....	.....	8,648
Indiana.....	.....	66,652
Iowa.....	.....	3,449
Kansas.....	.....	10,502
Kentucky.....	.....	36,989
Louisiana.....	4,163	.....
Maine.....	23,302	.....
Maryland.....	.....	6,553
Massachusetts.....	31,130	.....
Michigan.....	9,027	.....
Minnesota.....	2,915	.....
Mississippi.....	.....	2,585
Missouri.....	.....	17,312
Montana.....	9,086	.....
Nebraska.....	.....	16,938
Nevada.....	.....	4,482
New Hampshire.....	.....	1,631
New Jersey.....	.....	34,664
New Mexico.....	(49,376)	.....
New York.....	.....	50,367
North Carolina.....	.....	8,809
North Dakota.....	.....	8,002
Ohio.....	.....	88,031
Oklahoma.....	.....	839
Oregon.....	26,151	.....
Pennsylvania.....	.....	47,242
Rhode Island.....	5,577	.....
South Carolina.....	.....	16,045
South Dakota.....	1,550	.....
Tennessee.....	.....	9,694
Texas.....	11,561	.....
Utah.....	3,278	.....
Vermont.....	10,156	.....
Virginia.....	.....	90
Washington.....	(138,920)	.....
West Virginia.....	10,677	.....
Wisconsin.....	.....	57,154
Wyoming.....	4,687	.....

In the election of 1912 the electorate was not convinced that a vital issue was involved, no appreciable gains were made by the Democracy with the elimination of Bryan as a candidate, and the Progressive strength was Republicanism of a modified form. Yet, notwithstanding the decline in the total vote, the stability of the Democratic vote and the powerful influence of the Republican organizations, the distribution of the vote of 1912 does reveal the strength of the independent voter. For the greater part of the Progressive vote was won by an appeal made to the wider interest that the Middle West has been accustomed of recent years to take in matters of government.¹ Here had been a long-felt desire to break the rule of the party machine. The bolt of a former Republican leader seemed to offer a favorable opportunity.² Yet fundamentally there was even in this instance a remarkable expression of regular voting. Few voters crossed the traditional line to the Democracy. The division remained within the Republican party. Moreover this division was due primarily to the campaign of the Insurgent Republicans against the forces dominant in the Taft administration, and this fact must minimize the significance of the immediate independence apparently displayed by a great body of voters in the presidential vote of 1912. Why this section has exhibited a growing independence is not within the scope of this paper.³

¹ Yet the total vote in this region was less in 1912 than in 1908; Taft and Roosevelt polled 100,000 votes less than Taft received in 1908.

² The bulk of the Progressive Republicans in Congress had not supported Roosevelt in his candidacy for the Republican nomination.

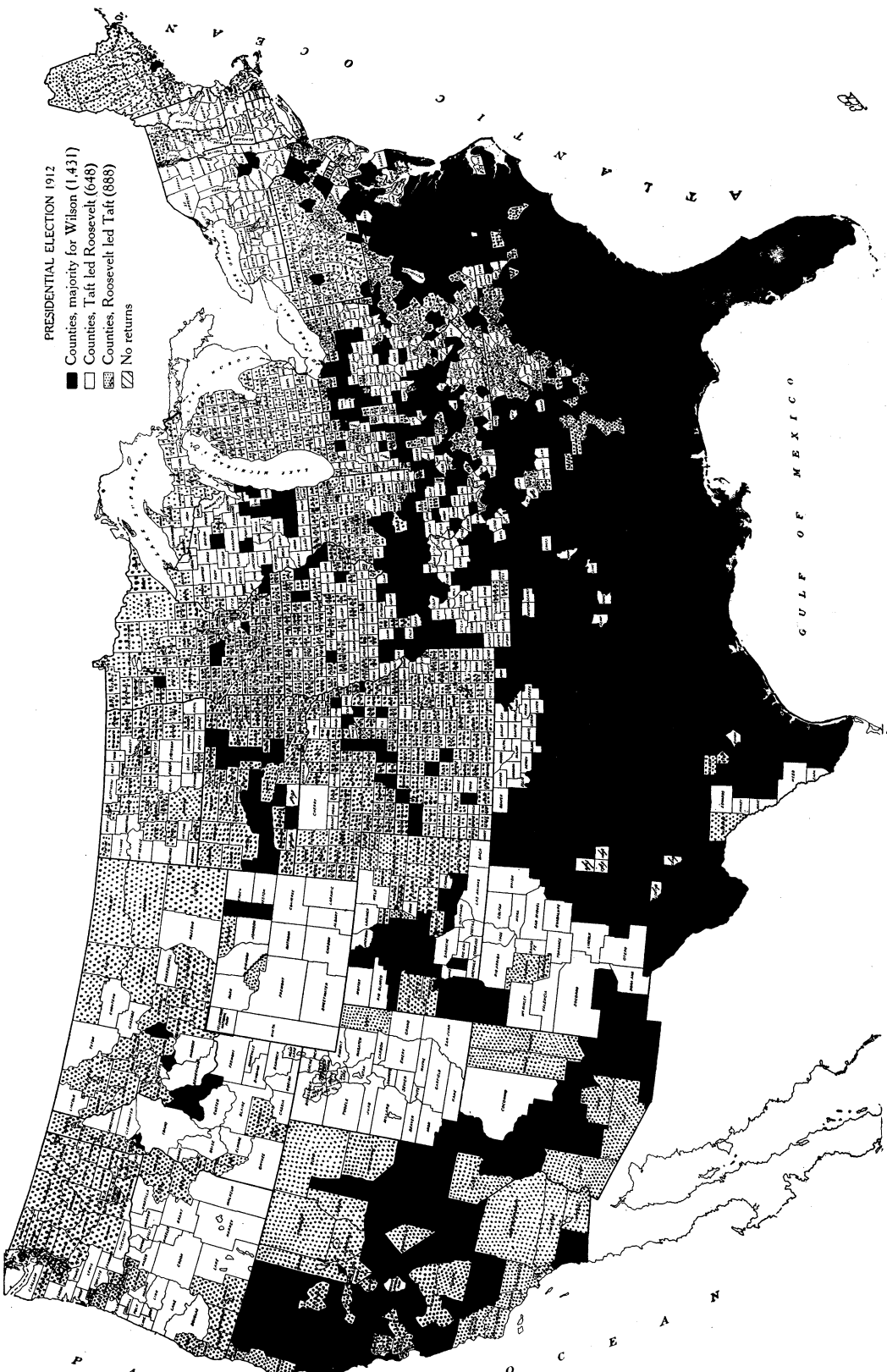
³ See E. E. Robinson, "Recent Manifestations of Sectionalism" in *American Journal of Sociology*, XIX, 446-67 (January, 1914).



PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 1906

- Democratic counties (1,360)
- Republican counties (1,509)
- ▨ No returns or territories

MAP I



PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 1912
 ■ Counties, majority for Wilson (1,431)
 □ Counties, Taft led Roosevelt (646)
 ▨ Counties, Roosevelt led Taft (888)
 ▩ No returns

MAP II

