

AN EXPLANATION OF DECLINING VOTER TURNOUT:
THE CASE OF RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, 1880-1913

by

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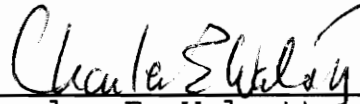
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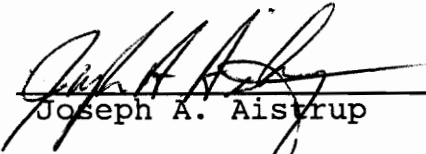
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(ABSTRACT)

Voter turnout in the United States began to decline at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, and since then, turnout has not returned to the high percentages that were commonplace in the 1860s and 1870s.

Numerous scholars point to the late 1800s and early 1900s as the era when significant changes in voting, turnout, and political party competition took place. Many of these same scholars contend that the consequences of these changes, such as continuing low voter turnout, can be seen today. Yet, scholars have made very few efforts to connect what happened in the past to what is happening today.

In this thesis I attempt to examine the root causes of declining voter turnout in the United States at the turn of the 20th century. The significance of this examination rests with the thought that if we can understand why voter turnout began to fall we may then have a clearer sense of why low voter turnout persists today.

Specifically, this study tests two competing theoretical models, one by V.O. Key and Walter Dean Burnham and the other by Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, that claim to

explain how and why turnout began to fall in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Both models use the same variables -- voting statutes, political party competition, and voter turnout -- to explain this fall, but the models place these variables in different time sequences.

This thesis tests the models by examining dynamics found in a single city -- Richmond, Virginia. Richmond affords an opportunity to inspect dynamics of voter turnout at the turn of the 20th century in a geographic area of the country that neither model used as a basis for its theoretical propositions.

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1.0 Introduction

For years some political scientists and commentators have, like parents who nag their children to do household chores or their homework, criticized the American adult population for being irresponsible, lazy and careless because so many people do not vote. These reporters of doom remind those who are of voting age how going to the ballot box is a right that should not be taken for granted, especially when there are countless people around the world who are not allowed to vote. And if that criticism were not enough, we are reminded that people in other Western democracies vote in higher percentages than do their counterparts here in the United States.

Voter turnout has not always been low in the United States, however. In the 1860s and 1870s, when many groups like women were not eligible to vote, Americans routinely turned out to vote in high percentages. In 1876, for instance, almost 82% of those eligible voted in the presidential election.¹ Yet, for whatever reason, turnout began to decline in the United States by the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries.

In the meantime, voter turnout has not returned to the

¹ "Americans Struck by Ballot-Box Blahs," Sierra, (November/December 1988): 22.

levels seen in the 1860s and 1870s. From 1972 to 1984, for example, the percentage of the voting age populace that actually voted in presidential elections has ranged from a high of 55% in 1972 to a low of 52% in 1980.² The off-year, or non-presidential year, turnout was even worse during the 1972-1984 period, with the high being 43% in 1972 and the low at 37% in 1978.³

In this thesis I attempt to examine the root causes of declining turnout in the United States at the turn of the 20th century. The significance of this examination rests with the thought that if we can understand why voter turnout began to fall we may then have a clearer sense of why low voter turnout persists today.

Numerous scholars point to the late 1800s and early 1900s as the era when significant changes in voting, turnout, and political party support took place. Many of these scholars contend that the consequences, like continuing low voter turnout, of these changes can be seen even today. Yet, scholars have made very few efforts to connect what happened in the past (declining voter turnout at the turn of the 20th century) to what is happening today.

It is important to make this connection because

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

systematic forces and processes that might have affected turnout in the past could be doing so today, only disguised in different forms. For example, presently states vary in their voter registration requirements (like in the past). Some states make it relatively easy for prospective voters, while other states make registration complicated and difficult (also similar to the past). These state differences could explain why voter turnout is higher in one state than in others and why overall turnout in the United States has been consistently low for the last 20-30 years.

I contend that what happened in the past, when voter turnout began to fall, could shed an important light on what happens today. And though I do not attempt to make that historical connection in this study, I will examine why voter turnout began its initial decline as a way to lay the foundation for discovering what the past can explain about voter turnout conditions today.

More specifically, this study will test two competing theoretical models that claim to explain how and why turnout began to fall in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Both models use the same variables to explain this fall, but they place these variables in different time sequences. I will test the models by examining dynamics found in a single city -- Richmond, Virginia. Richmond, for reasons discussed below, affords us an opportunity to inspect dynamics of

voter turnout in a setting that neither model used as a basis for its theoretical propositions.

The main body of this study begins with chapter 2. This chapter reviews previous work on voter turnout. After examining various approaches and explaining why these approaches are inadequate for addressing the question of this study, I present two theoretical models that claim to offer a full explanation for declining turnout in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

One model was constructed by Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven. These scholars theorize that voter turnout declined initially due to the passage of various voting statutes that effectively prohibited certain members of the electorate from voting. After the initial fall in turnout, Cloward and Piven argue that declining political party competition drove turnout down even further.

The other model is a combination of approaches developed by V.O. Key and Walter Dean Burnham. These scholars contend that turnout fell initially due to declining party competition. After this first fall in turnout, voting statutes were passed that pushed turnout down to even lower levels. Basically, both models use the same variables - voting statutes, political party competition, and voter turnout - but argue that these variables occurred in different time sequences to cause the

same result -- lower voter turnout.

Chapter 3 describes how I tested these competing models. Included in this chapter are discussions of the justifications for using and the limitations of case study research, the reasons for the selection of Richmond, Virginia as the case study city, operationalizations and definitions of the variables, and the use of time-series analysis as a method to examine the data.

The next chapter presents the data used to measure the variables. Included here are discussions of the various voting statutes passed in Virginia during this time, the voter turnout in Richmond and the state of Virginia for the presidential, gubernatorial, and United States House of Representatives' elections for the 1880-1913 time period, and the turnout percentages garnered by the Republican and Democratic parties in these elections.

Chapter 5 offers an analysis of the data. Here, I use the data to test each theoretical model. Though the Key/Burnham model better explained dynamics in Richmond and the Cloward/Piven model better explained dynamics statewide, neither model could fully explain the dynamics seen both statewide and in Richmond.

The sixth and final chapter presents possible explanations for the conclusions in chapter 5. It also offers suggestions for future research concerning the root

causes for declining voter turnout in the United States.

2.0 Setting the Table: Review of Voter Turnout Literature and Discussion of Competing Theoretical Models

Introduction

In this chapter I will review the existing voter turnout literature. I begin with a discussion of why many scholars consider the time period of the late 1800s and early 1900s to be essential in understanding the root causes of declining voter turnout in the United States.

Section 2.2 reviews three approaches that attempt to explain declining or low voter turnout. After reconstructing each approach's main propositions, I discuss the major criticisms of each. In this section I ultimately try to show that none of these approaches offers a full explanation of why turnout began to fall at the turn of the 20th century.

In the next section I examine two theoretical models that claim to explain the root causes of turnout decline. The one model was constructed by Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, and the other model is a combination of work done by V.O. Key and Walter Dean Burnham. Both models use the same variables -- political party competition, voting statutes, and voter turnout -- but differ on the time ordering of the variables.

2.1 Significance of Time Period

Within the study of American political science, specifically the field of voting behavior, there is debate as to why voter turnout declined in the United States at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries.¹ The importance of this time period for many voting behavior scholars is in part that the elections of 1896 are considered to be realigning or critical elections.²

Defining a realigning election is difficult, because many scholars disagree on a precise definition of the term. V.O. Key introduced the idea of critical or realigning elections in 1955. According to Key, realigning elections occur when electoral participation is high, decisive election results change the partisan ties among existing voter cleavages, and the new cleavages are durable over time.³

Using Key's definition of realigning elections, scholars like James Sundquist and Walter Dean Burnham have

¹ Richard A. Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, Why Americans Don't Vote, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p.96.

² See Cloward and Piven, p.27. See also Angus Campbell et al., The American Voter, (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1960), p.534; James Sundquist, Dynamics of the Party System, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983), p.11; and V.O. Key, Jr., "A Theory of Critical Elections," in The Journal of Politics, Vol.17, No.1, (February 1955): 3-18.

³ Key, 1955, pp.3-18.

identified the 1896 elections as realigning.⁴ The 1896 elections had relatively high participation, and the Republicans, who won the presidency that year, took control of the North electorally as did the Democrats the South. Republican dominance in the North and Democratic control in the South continued largely unchanged until the 1932 elections, when another realignment took place.^{5 6}

Though the debates over whether the 1896 elections are generally accepted by scholars as realigning (they are) and what constitutes a realignment are important (and still ongoing), the question of whether or not these elections (and the general time period surrounding them) affected voting turnout in the years afterward holds greater importance for this study. For instance, Sundquist contends that the 1896 realignment was merely a result of the early 1890s depression and that the realignment had little effect

⁴ Sundquist, chapter 7; and Walter Dean Burnham, "The System of 1896: An Analysis," in The Evolution of American Electoral Systems, Paul Kleppner ed. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), pp.164-5.

⁵ Sundquist, p.7.

⁶ Other scholars have expanded or modified Key's definition of realigning elections. For another perspective on this concept see Lawrence G. McMichael and Richard J. Trilling, "The Structure and Meaning of Critical Realignment: The Case of Pennsylvania, 1928-1932," in Realignment of American Politics: Toward a Theory, Bruce A. Campbell and Richard J. Trilling eds. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1980), p.29.

on the electoral process other than to reaffirm party competition trends already taking place before the 1890s.⁷

Burnham, however, contends that because of the 1896 realigning elections, party competition declined regionally throughout the country. The result of this decreased competition was decreased voter turnout.⁸

J. Morgan Kousser also points to the general time period around the 1896 elections as important in understanding why voter turnout, particularly in the South, began to decline in the 20th century.⁹ Kousser, like Jerrold Rusk and John Stucker, suggests that legal attempts to disenfranchise certain segments of the population (like blacks in the South) led to one-party dominance in certain geographic pockets of the country and a corresponding drop in voting turnout.¹⁰

The above discussion points to the significance of this

⁷ Sundquist, pp.168-9.

⁸ Cloward and Piven, p.97.

⁹ J. Morgan Kousser, The Shaping of Southern Politics, Suffrage Restriction, and the Establishment of the One-Party South, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 1974), p.61.

¹⁰ Jerrold G. Rusk and John J. Stucker, "The Effect of the Southern System of Election Laws on Voting Participation," in The History of American Electoral Behavior, Joel H. Silbey, Allan G. Bogue, and William H. Flanigan eds. (Princeton, New Jersey: University of Princeton, 1978), p.200.

time period in understanding why voter turnout began to decline in the United States at the turn of the 20th century. Many scholars have acknowledged that the 1896 elections were realigning elections, where partisan ties among certain groups in American society changed. These shifts may have had effects on political party competition, voting laws, and voter turnout. Scholars like Cloward and Piven also suggest that electoral changes, such as more stringent voter registration laws, that began at this time led to voting trends (like turnout hovering around 50%-60% of all registered voters) that continue today.¹¹

Voting turnout patterns that began at this time may have had a long lasting impact on voting in 20th century America. A thorough review of the conditions that led to a decline in voting turnout could cast vital light on how and in what ways voting changed in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

2.2 Literature Review of Voter Turnout Research

This study explores the question of why voter turnout declined in the United States at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Such an exploration of is necessary, because scholars still debate why such a decline

¹¹ Cloward and Piven, p.6.

occurred. Three approaches have produced the majority of the work done on the causes of turnout decline. Each approach, however, has problems that indicate a need for a theoretical model that addresses the conditions and the time order of the conditions that eventually led to a decline in voter turnout.

One explanation for why voter turnout has changed or does change in the United States is what Cloward and Piven call the social-psychological approach. This approach focuses on the characteristics and attitudes that cause people to vote, to not vote, and if they do vote, to vote the way they do. This approach examines attitudes and conditions like political efficacy, sense of civic obligation, partisanship, educational resources and the like to see what contributes to whether and how people vote.¹² Scholars like Verba, Nie, Wolfinger, Rosenstone, and Abramson have done work of this kind.¹³

This approach does have its limitations. For example, since this school of thought focuses quite heavily on

¹² Cloward and Piven, p.113.

¹³ See Paul Abramson, Political Attitudes in America: Formation and Change, (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1983); Raymond Wolfinger and Steven Rosenstone, Who Votes?, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 1980); and Sidney Verba and Norman Vie, Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

election surveys and survey techniques that were not developed prior to the 1930s, using this approach to understand historical causes of voter change in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is very difficult.

Scholars also have criticized this approach by saying that its techniques and variables do not accurately tap the root causes of why people vote or not. Specifically, psychological differences may not necessarily comprise all of the reasons why people do not vote or vote. Legal changes, like literacy tests enacted in the South at the turn of the 20th century, that cause some segment of the population to be excluded electorally could explain why some people with certain demographic characteristics, like being poor or uneducated, do not vote. Also, the appeals made by political parties and their candidates may target certain populations, like financial contributors to the parties, who then have reason to feel included and vote. In short, the social-psychological approach may give a partial picture of who votes or not. Yet, this approach does not necessarily get at what causes people to ultimately use or not use their voting rights.¹⁴

Another way of explaining voter behavior in the United

¹⁴ Cloward and Piven, p.119.

States is the institutional approach.¹⁵ There are two competing emphases within this approach. One, the political-behavioral view, is espoused by Schattschneider, Burnham, and Kleppner.¹⁶

Declining Political Party Competition ---> Lower Voter
Turnout

Figure 2.1: Political-Behavioral Model

According to this view, before the 1896 elections a high degree of political party competition led to high voter turnout in the United States. After the elections of 1896, decreased party competition in regional pockets throughout the country led to decreased turnout, since voters were not given clear partisan alternatives, either in issue stands or candidates. Thus, interest in voting declined since it was perceived to be less important.¹⁷

Essentially, Burnham, et al. argue that business elites were dissatisfied with the political parties catering to the demands of certain constituencies, mainly poor whites and

¹⁵ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁶ See Walter Dean Burnham, "The System of 1896: An Analysis," in The Evolution of American Electoral Systems, Paul Kleppner ed. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981); and Paul Kleppner, "Critical Realignments and Electoral Systems," in The Evolution of American Electoral Systems (Ibid).

¹⁷ Cloward and Piven, p.97.

blacks, instead of paying attention to the requests of the elites. Primarily with the Republican party in the Northeast and the Democratic party in the South, these elites took control of the parties' machinery to guarantee their interests were given full attention. With the parties focusing their energies towards meeting elite demands, non-elites became disgruntled with and alienated from the parties. Burnham contends that as the non-elites recognized how meaningless their votes were, they stopped voting.¹⁸

A second theory within the institutional approach -- the legalist view -- is offered by scholars like Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, and Rusk and Stucker.¹⁹

Voter Statute Changes ---> Lower Voter Turnout

Figure 2.2: Legalist Model

This legal explanation attributes changing voter turnout to

¹⁸ Richard Niemi and Herbert F. Weisberg, "What Determines Turnout?" in Controversies in Voting Behavior, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1984), p.28.

¹⁹ See Angus Campbell et al., The American Voter, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960); and Jerrold Rusk and John Stucker, "The Effect of the Southern System of Election Laws on Voter Participation, in The History of American Electoral Behavior, Joel H. Silbey, Allan G. Bogue, and William H. Flanigan eds. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978).

changes in voter registration and ballot laws that occurred late in the 19th century. These scholars argue that the implementation of the Australian ballot and various voter registration changes decreased voter turnout by curbing the voter fraud that was commonplace during this time. They point out that before the reforms (statute changes) voting turnouts were artificially high, because vote fraud gave the impression that more Americans were voting than actually were. Once the reforms took hold, vote totals became more accurate, and turnout seemed to decline.²⁰

For scholars in the legalist camp, the motivation of the reformers responsible for the voting changes was to "clean up" the fraudulent practices of political party machines, especially those in the Northeast. By eliminating activities like repeat or "coffin voting," a more accurate representation of turnout became available. These scholars recognize that tighter regulations on voting also made it costlier for those eligible to vote (voter registration became a more difficult and uniform process).²¹ The end result of these legal changes was lower turnout.

Like the social-psychological approach, each view within the institutional approach has its weaknesses. For

²⁰ Cloward and Piven, p.99.

²¹ Niemi and Weisberg, p.24.

example, one of the main criticisms of the behavioral camp lies with its claim that changes in political party competition at this time were caused solely by the efforts of business elites who were concerned with who was garnering the attention of the parties. This means that the business elites were not satisfied with the parties catering to the needs of non-elites, like immigrants and blacks, who benefitted greatly from the largesse of the party machines.²²

It is difficult to ascertain whether the parties focused their issue appeals on business elites because the elites controlled the parties or whether the legal responses to alleged voting fraud caused the clients of the parties to shift from the poor (the past machine beneficiaries) to the elites. This predicament leads one to wonder which came first -- the decline of party competition due to parties being increasingly controlled by business elites or the creation of legal barriers that had the effect of attacking the recipients of the party machines. If the latter was the case, then the poor and the uneducated would have been less likely to vote, thus allowing the parties to be more responsive to the elites' demands.

Rusk also attacks the behavioral theory of voter

²² Cloward and Piven, p.100.

decline on the grounds that it is so broad and vague that alternative factors, like voting reforms, may easily be consumed by the model without acknowledging that these other factors were caused by or were causing different phenomena.²³ For instance, Burnham is able to include the effects of voting statute changes advocated by the legalist camp into his model by suggesting that these changes were further attempts by elites to weaken the natural opposition to their actions, the machine beneficiaries. By including the legal reforms in his model, Burnham appropriates the effects these reforms had on voting turnout, but rejects the legalists' suggestion that the motives behind the reforms were to clean up the fraud of the machines.²⁴

The legalist camp's explanation for voting behavior during this time also has problems. Converse and Rusk, for example, maintain that voting reforms in the late 19th century occurred because of the voting fraud prevalent in the party machines. The reforms led to the appearance of falling turnout, for the artificial highness of the turnouts was eliminated.

²³ Jerrold G. Rusk, "Comment: The American Electoral Universe: Speculation and Evidence," The American Political Science Review, Vol. LVIII, (September, 1974), p.1031.

²⁴ Ibid.

Yet, two problems exist with this camp's theory. One problem is how one measures voting fraud without assuming that the accounts of such illegal activity are true. The behavioralists have often called into question this view's primary data source, observers of the time who could have been biased, and thus, the legalists' conclusions are often deemed potentially inaccurate.²⁵

A second criticism of the legalist explanation is based on the argument that voting fraud was only episodic in nature and could not alone have been responsible for the high turnout commonplace in America for most of the 19th century. Furthermore, many scholars discount the effect reforms had on continuing lower turnout, since supposed voter fraud was not as rampant as suggested by the legalist model (recall the first criticism of the legalist model).²⁶

Thus, each of the three approaches mentioned above has problems that point to the need for a model that encompasses the conditions that led to decline in turnout during this time. The social-psychological approach cannot tap the conditions that frequently led people to vote or not vote prior to the 1930s. Both camps within the institutional

²⁵ Cloward and Piven, p.100.

²⁶ Niemi and Weisberg, p.29.

approach suggest that voter turnout most definitely declined during this period, but the explanations for why turnout changed differ. It would appear, then, that a model that details the conditions that led to declining voter turnout in a more complete fashion, that synthesizes the approaches just examined, needs to be identified and tested.

2.3.A Discussion of Cloward and Piven Model

Two models that attempt to address the conditions that led to changing voter turnout in the late 19th century already exist. Cloward and Piven in Why Americans Don't Vote provide such a model. Cloward and Piven's fundamental assumption is that economic elites in both the North and South were concerned with the political parties appealing to certain clienteles (constituencies, who were often poor, attracted to the parties via political machines).²⁷ The elites were concerned that the parties had shown an unwillingness to cater to their specific interests. So, the elites set out to destroy party competition by lobbying for voting reforms that would curb voter fraud (and thus,

²⁷ Cloward and Piven, p.110. Note, too, that Burnham et al. argue that economic elites were dissatisfied with the political parties catering to other constituents' demands. Yet, Burnham also contends that the elites sought to remedy this condition by first taking control of the parties (not through voting reforms, however) to guarantee their demands were met.

certain political party clienteles) associated with machine politics.

Cloward and Piven's basic model is that the state legislative battles over voter registration laws in the mid to late 1800s were motivated by party concerns: Republicans were interested in protecting the residents of rural areas and Democrats in protecting urban residents.²⁸ First, legal barriers restricted voting, especially for the "have-nots" (turnout declined overall), which, in turn, affected the parties. The parties, then, became increasingly interested in appealing to those members of the electorate who could vote, the "haves." So, the poor and uneducated -- for example blacks, poor whites, and immigrants -- began to be passed over by the political parties.²⁹ With the constituents of the opposition parties for the Republicans and Democrats in different areas of the country eliminated, two party competition declined in regional pockets throughout the country.

With the weakening of party competition after the 1896 election, the little remaining political party resistance to voter registration laws declined even further. The parties began to see that the voter registration laws, often passed

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

into law years earlier in other regions of the country and which discriminated against certain groups within society, could provide party stability and electoral success, situations both the elites and the parties desired.³⁰

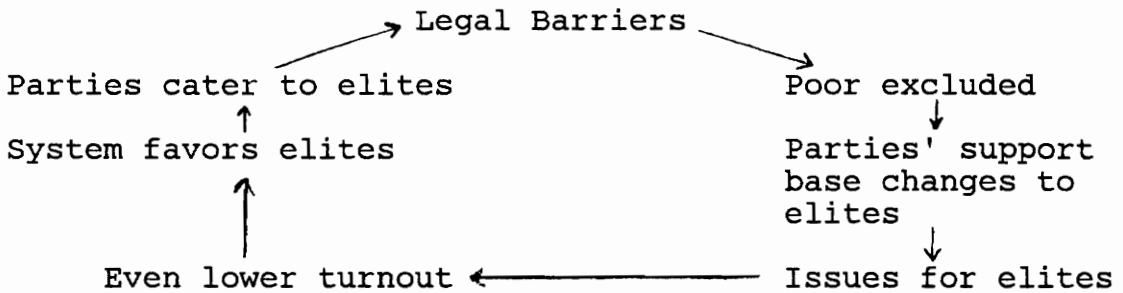


Figure 2.3: Cloward and Piven Model

2.3.B Discussion of Key Model

V.O. Key, in Southern Politics in State and Nation, provides a different model to explain why voter turnout began to change at this time. Key, unlike Cloward and Piven, focuses his attention on one part of the country, the South. Key argues that before legal barriers were erected to formally restrict suffrage for certain groups in society, two party competition had already declined.³¹

Key establishes a pattern of disenfranchisement that

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ V.O. Key, Jr, Southern Politics in State and Nation, (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee, 1984), p.533.

occurred in the South. Immediately after the Civil War, blacks, finally given the right to vote, were exploited by the Republicans, who rode the black vote to success in various elections. By the 1870s, Southern whites, mainly Democrats, began to win elections, gain control of elected state positions, and force the Republicans out of the South. With blacks afraid of the potential of physical force by whites, Democrats regained control of the South electorally. Two party competition in the South was on the wane.³²

Still, with the threat of the black vote possibly determining election outcomes, legal barriers, often paralleling various economic and social sanctions, were constructed to disenfranchise blacks.³³ For Key, the legal barriers came after the decline in two party competition in the South. These institutional barriers were created to discredit any attempts by forces outside the South, like Congress or the Northern media, to show that the South was not complying with the 15th Amendment. Once these legal barriers were in place, low voter turnout for the have-nots (poor whites and blacks) in Southern society was guaranteed for years to come.³⁴

³² Ibid, p.536.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. pp.536-7.

Decreased Party Competition ---> Lower Voter Turnout ---> Legal Barriers ---> Even Lower Turnout

Figure 2.4: Key Model

2.3.C Discussion of Competing Models

Key derived his model from conditions that existed solely in a few Southern states, like Texas and Louisiana. He did not apply this model to other areas of the country. Cloward and Piven's model has some of the same factors included in Key's model, but the timing of when these factors actually occurred differs. For the purposes of this study, the Cloward and Piven model will be simplified, so that the two primary conditions that led to changing voter turnout will be changes in party competition and legal barriers. This simplification of the Cloward and Piven model could then lend itself to a direct comparison to the Key model (same variables, but different time order).

Legal Barriers ---> Declining Turnout ---> Declining Party Competition ---> Even Lower Turnout

Figure 2.5: Simplified Cloward and Piven Model

Obviously, removing party competition and voting statutes from the rather detailed model established by Cloward and Piven eliminates the broad context within which the authors place both political party competition and legal

barriers. However, this study's primary goal is not to examine the motivations behind the creation of voting statutes or to explain all the reasons why party competition changed during this time period. Rather, its purpose is to test two models that seemingly identify the conditions that led to voting turnout declining during this time.

Thus, this study aims to examine two models, Cloward and Piven's and Key's, that identify the conditions that led to changing voter turnout in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The difference between the models lies with the order of when these conditions actually occurred in time.

A consideration to be accounted for is the close association the Key model has with the political-behavioral approach advocated by Burnham, et al. Recall that the political-behavioral approach contends that declining party competition due to decreased political party alternatives led to decreased turnout. Key also argues that declining party competition led to an initial decrease in voter turnout.

Whereas Key focused his study of declining voter turnout in the South, Burnham extends his thesis to the entire country. In large part, Burnham stresses how elites (primarily business) took control of the parties' machinery in an attempt to guarantee that their particular wishes were met politically. The effect of this takeover, according to

Burnham, was the decline in the importance of voting for the non-elites.³⁵

For Key, the motives for why Southern whites (primarily elites) took control of the Democratic party and forced the Republicans from the South had less to do with business reasons and more to do with a simple electoral calculus and racism.³⁶ If the Republicans, who rode the black vote to success after the Civil War, were eliminated, then who would represent the blacks politically? Furthermore, without the Republicans present to offer meaningful competition (and scrutiny of the electoral process), it would be easier for the Democrats to eliminate the threat of black votes deciding elections (thus, providing party stability).³⁷

Though Key and Burnham, et al. offer slightly different reasons for why party competition began to decline, they do agree on the effect declining party competition had on voting turnout during this time. For both, decreasing party competition began the process that ultimately led to lower turnout and to segments of the population being disenfranchised.

The association between the Key and Burnham approaches

³⁵ Niemi and Weisberg, p.28.

³⁶ Key, p.536.

³⁷ Ibid.

is in sharp contrast to Cloward and Piven model, which argues that the establishment of legal barriers led to an initial decline in voter turnout. In fact, the Cloward and Piven model adopts much of its event sequence from the legalist approach. The legalist approach contends that changes in voting statutes led to a decline in turnout. However, Cloward and Piven reject the legalist camp's contention that legal changes arose from the Progressives' concern with extensive voter fraud. Cloward and Piven argue instead that legal barriers were erected as political parties fought to maintain a voter calculus that promoted party stability (economic elites would vote and the poor would not).

Thus, for the purposes of this study, the two models to be examined are Key/Burnham and Cloward/Piven. For the reasons given above, the Cloward/Piven model will not be associated with legalist approach. However, the connections between Burnham and Key are obvious. These connections lead to the referral to the Key/Burnham model.

2.4 Conclusion

Three approaches -- the social-psychological, the political-behavioral, and the legalist -- have dominated the voter turnout literature. However, none of these approaches seems to offer a complete explanation of why voter turnout

began to decline in the late 1800s and early 1900s. There are two theoretical models, however, that evidently explain declining voter turnout. The Cloward/Piven and Key/Burnham models claim to explain the dynamics of falling turnout through use of the same variables, but the models differ on the precise time ordering of these factors. In the next chapter, I will discuss how these competing models will be tested.

3. Method of Study: How Competing Models Will Be Tested

Introduction

Chapter 2 described two models that offer competing explanations for why voting declined in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In this chapter I will discuss how these models will be tested to see which one better captures the conditions and time sequence of those conditions that led to declining voter turnout.

I begin section 1 with a discussion of why the case study approach was selected for use in this study. Next, I will describe why Richmond, Virginia was selected as the city to be examined.

Section 3 will provide definitions and operationalizations of the variables found in the models. Included in this section's discussion will be the difficulty encountered in finding indicators that could adequately tap the variables.

The last section of this chapter will offer an overview of how the data collected were used to test each model. Specifically, an explanation of time-series analysis and how it was used in this study will be reviewed.

3.1 Selection of Case Study Approach

I chose to test the competing models discussed in

chapter 2 using the case study approach, for several reasons.

The single case method often allows for greater exploration of theoretical propositions that is not offered by other research designs. If multiple cases were being used given the limited time and resources of this study, understanding the full interplay of the factors specified in the models could have been very difficult. Additionally, the single case approach was favored, because it could lend itself to expansion into a multiple case examination of the competing models at a later date, if there were some critical findings in the original study.

There are other reasons why the case study approach was selected for this study. One is that most of the examinations of the competing models in this study have been largely general, which can be seen in Key's studies of turnout decline in Texas and Louisiana in Southern Politics in State and Nation and Cloward and Piven's review of dynamics in the Northeast in Why Americans Don't Vote. Focusing on a single case is another way of trying to disentangle each model's dynamics.

Another reason to use the case study approach deals with the nature of previous work in the voter turnout field. As discussed in chapter 2, approaches like the social-psychological and the political-behavioral, which constitute

the bulk of the existing literature, have not frequently used the case study research approach. With the social-psychological view, for instance, scholars have often used surveys to tap the reasons why people vote or do not vote. Getting a clearer sense of why turnout fell at the turn of the 20th century would be impossible using surveys. However, using the case study approach might allow for the kind of contextual research that gives a better understanding of certain phenomena, like the root causes of declining voter turnout, that took place at this time.

There are, however, limitations to using the case study approach for research. One such limitation that could possibly pertain to this study is the lack of generalizability. For this study, it would be inappropriate for me to generalize the results found in one city to all cities in the United States. This is so, because the conditions that existed in Richmond, Virginia at the turn of the 20th century may not have occurred throughout the country.

However, it should be noted that the lack of generalizability found with the single case study approach should not be a problem with this study, because I am more interested in exploring the theoretical propositions that support the competing models than being able to generalize from the results found in Richmond to the entire country.

3.2 Selection of Richmond, Virginia as the Case Study

The data for this study were collected and analyzed via an exploratory/explanatory case city. This city is Richmond, Virginia, which was chosen for various reasons.

One such reason pertains to the specific political subculture that has existed in the South during much of the United States' history. As indicated by Key, the South was noted for its legal attempts to restrict blacks from voting and for its lack of two party competition beginning in the late 1800s. Of Virginia specifically, Key said it was a "Political Museum Piece," where election and participatory processes were largely ignored by political leaders, so as to exclude a majority of the state's population from having a role in their government.¹

Other scholars, like Daniel Elazar, also have pointed to the traditionalistic political subculture that has existed in most Southern states, including Virginia. This subculture is characterized by a paternalistic attitude shown by societal elites toward a state's citizens. A state's citizens are not expected or encouraged to participate electorally. Competition between political parties is frequently lacking, and what competition does exist is only among the elites of one political party.

¹ Key, Southern Politics in State and Nation, p.19.

Generally, the government's purpose is to uphold the existing social conditions.²

The thoughts of scholars like Key and Elazar concerning the political subculture in the South provide reasons for selecting Richmond as the case study, because the Southern political subculture was one that encouraged people not to vote. If most members of a Southern state were not expected to vote or were discouraged from voting, as was the case with blacks in the South at this time, then voter turnout would be affected. Since both theoretical models in this study claim that political party and societal elites played essential roles in driving turnout down (by favoring and passing restrictive voting statutes, for example), then studying a city located in the South, for reasons described above, could provide the optimum conditions for examining the dynamics that led to declining turnout.

Though Key and other scholars have noted the South's traditionalistic political subculture, Key did not test his model of declining voter turnout in Virginia, as he did in Louisiana and Texas.³ Richmond, as the capital of Virginia, could provide the necessary conditions to examine

² Daniel J. Elazar, American Federalism: A View from the States, 3rd ed., (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), pp.118-119.

³ See Key, chapters 8 and 12 respectively.

Key's Southern-based model.

Also, Richmond, the biggest city in Virginia, could provide insights into whether or not local conditions, in contrast to statewide factors, contributed to any of the efforts that led to declining turnout. For example, if one of the political parties in the city aimed to disenfranchise a certain group and was effective in accomplishing this goal, studying the dynamics in Richmond might show how the party was able to achieve this goal. In short, Richmond could provide insight into conditions that affected certain areas, like urban or black-populated portions, of the state that might go unnoticed if one solely focused on statewide factors.

Richmond was also selected because Cloward and Piven indicated that their model was based primarily on historical accounts of declining voter turnout found in the North. Though these scholars contend that their model could be applied throughout the entire country, it has never been tested with conditions found in any part of the country, let alone a city in a Southern state.⁴ Therefore, Richmond offers an opportunity to see if the Cloward/Piven model can be applied to conditions in the South as well as in the North.

⁴ See Cloward and Piven, chapter 4.

3.3 Variable Definitions and Operationalizations

This section discusses the three variables found in both models: legal changes in the voting process, changing party competition, and changing voter turnout. It should be noted that revisions in variable definitions and operationalizations were made as the study progressed. This was due to difficulties encountered in finding indicators to measure the variables, particularly voter turnout.

It also should be noted that I chose not to classify the variables as independent or dependent at this juncture of the thesis, because part of what this study aimed to do was to disentangle the time order of when changes in party competition, turnout, and voting statutes occurred. What this means is that once I can establish a time sequence of when these variable occurred over time I may be able to make tentative arguments about causality between the variables.

The first variable is change in voter turnout. Voter turnout is defined as total votes cast in Richmond, statewide, and in the 3rd Congressional district for presidential, gubernatorial, and United States House of Representatives' elections for the years 1880-1913. The original operationalization of this variable was the percentage of the Richmond populace that could legally vote that actually voted. However, I was unable to gather the data that would show what percentage of the Richmond

populace was legally able to vote. In an attempt to get a better sense of turnout trends taking place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Virginia, I included statewide turnout results for the elections mentioned above. The tradeoff here is that a clear sense of the effect legal barriers had on who could register and then vote was forsaken. Yet, by including statewide turnouts, I hoped to gain a perspective on whether or not turnout behavior was the same or different locally and on the state level for purposes of comparison.

I focused on the presidential, gubernatorial, and United States House of Representatives' elections for two reasons. Primarily, I envisioned that the more visible elections, like the presidential, would attract more voters than the possibly less important local elections. Looking at elections that may have attracted the most voters would be desirable to gauge any discernible turnout trends that may have occurred over time.

A more practical concern was that local election data in Richmond were often unavailable or piecemeal (especially when the source was local or state election boards). The more important elections provided more consistent data, in terms of both volume and coverage, and these data were readily available through a Richmond newspaper -- the Richmond Dispatch (which in 1904 became the Richmond Times-

Dispatch) -- and Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections.

The other variables for this study are legal changes in the voting process and change in political party competition. Changing political party competition was defined as any changing patterns within the contesting of elections by political parties (primarily the Democratic and Republican parties). For example, if both the Democratic and Republican parties ran candidates for the gubernatorial elections over a certain time period and eventually one of the parties stopped offering a candidate for this office, then political party competition declined. Changing political party competition also could be seen if the percentage of the vote one party received steadily increased or decreased over a period of elections. Data for this variable were also available from the Richmond Dispatch and Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections.

The other variable, legal changes in the voting process, was defined as any law passed on either the local or state level that caused a change in the act or process of voting (for example, voter registration laws). Numerous secondary sources presented the bulk of information chronicling all voting statutes passed in Virginia or Richmond during the time period of interest here.

3.4 Strategy for Analyzing the Data

Chapter 4 provides a complete presentation and description of the data, and chapter 5 presents the data analysis. The strategy that will be employed in analyzing the data is a simple time-series approach. According to Yin, the logic behind the time-series approach is to specify any trends found in the data within a specified time frame compared to any trends called for at the beginning of the research.⁵

In this study, both of the competing models lay out a specific time-sequence in which the variables would occur. In the Key/Burnham model declining party competition caused voter turnout to fall. After this initial fall in turnout, restrictive voting statutes were passed that caused turnout to decrease again. In the Cloward/Piven model voting statutes were the initial catalyst in driving turnout down. After turnout fell, declining party competition led to another decrease in turnout. My job in this case was to track the data over time to see if the trends in the evidence match the sequencing specified in either of the models. By using the trends in the data, I will test the models to see if either one fully taps the dynamics found in

⁵ Robert K. Yin, Case Study Research: Design and Methods, Revised, (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1989), p.116.

Richmond and in the state as a whole.

The data collected cover elections in Virginia and Richmond between 1880-1913. This period includes nine presidential and gubernatorial elections and 17 United States House of Representatives' elections. This 33 year period should offer a sufficiently large window to see any patterns that might have occurred.

Also, recall the discussion in the beginning of chapter 2 as to why this period is essential for understanding the root causes that led to declining voter turnout in the United States. Note, too, that this period (roughly) is specified by both models as the key era for understanding why turnout began to decline in the United States.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed how the competing models will be tested to see which one better captures the dynamics that led to declining voter turnout in the United States at the turn of the 20th century. The next chapter will describe the data to be used in the testing of the competing models.

4.0 Voting in Virginia, 1880-1913

Introduction

This chapter describes the data to be examined in this study. Each section of the chapter pertains to one of three common variables found in the models. As a reminder, the variables are legal changes in the voting process, changes in political party competition, and changes in voter turnout.

Section 1 deals with the specific changes in the process of voting. Included here are two components. One is the various statutes, all of which were passed at the state level, that affected the act of voting in Virginia in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The other component taps how each state voting law was applied by local election officials in Richmond.

The next section presents data concerning overall voter turnout in Richmond and statewide from the presidential, gubernatorial, and United States House of Representatives' elections for the years of 1880-1913. Finally, section 3 lays out the data used to tap political party competition for the time period.

4.1 Changes in and Applications of Voting Statutes

Both of the competing models being tested in this study

place great importance on the role voting laws played in driving turnout down in the United States at the turn of the 20th century. The difference between the models lies with when the passage of voting statutes actually occurred. For Burnham and Key, legal barriers came after declining party competition caused turnout to begin its fall. In contrast, Cloward and Piven maintain that legal barriers were the catalysts in forcing voter turnout to initially fall. It is with these theoretical frameworks in mind that changes in and applications of voting statutes will be presented in this section.

In Virginia, two types of events pertaining to voting statutes occurred. At the state level, various voting statutes, beginning with the passage of a poll tax in 1876, were enacted that effectively restricted suffrage for certain segments of the voting populace. The other dynamic took place in Richmond, where local election officials had the task of implementing the various state voting laws.

Virginia was readmitted into the Union on April 10, 1869. One of the numerous conditions the state had to accept before readmittance was the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution. The 15th Amendment stipulated that no one could be denied suffrage based on a man's race. Virginia, like other Southern states, had denied non-whites suffrage prior to the Civil War, and accepting this

readmittance condition was a significant change in the political/electoral culture of the state.

Full suffrage for all Virginia males over the age of 21 did not last long. In 1876, an amendment to the Underwood Constitution, the constitution approved so that Virginia could be readmitted to the Union, provided for a poll tax that was to be paid before voting. Supposedly passed to provide funds for school districts and to eliminate the practice of ballot box stuffing seen in the 1869 and 1873 gubernatorial elections, the Poll Tax Amendment had another key feature. Suffrage also was restricted for anyone who was convicted of petty larceny.

The poll tax and petty larceny restrictions had the greatest impact on the poor, for the poor would have had the greatest difficulty paying the tax and would have been the most likely candidates to be convicted of stealing food and other life-essential goods. Though no statistics could be found to show who was most affected by the 1876 Amendment, local accounts do provide some insight. For example, between 1876 and 1892 Richmond convicted 1000 blacks of petty larceny, thus making these individuals ineligible to vote.¹

It is interesting to note that the 1876 poll tax was

¹ Virginius Dabney, Richmond: The Story of a City, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976), p.229.

rescinded in 1882, but the petty larceny feature of the amendment was kept on the books. While the poll tax did curb the ballot box stuffing common in earlier elections, it also produced an undesirable effect -- extensive bribery. There is some evidence that both the Democratic and Republican parties circumvented the poll tax by paying the tax for blacks and poor whites in exchange for their votes. How much of this bribery actually took place is hard to ascertain, but accounts show that such actions did transpire on numerous occasions.² The act of vote fraud apparently ran headlong into the traditionalistic culture of Virginia that did not look favorably on illegal acts, even in the pursuit of a desired end - electoral success.³

The next statute that caused a change in the voting process was the Anderson-McCormick Act of 1884. This act held that the political party that had a majority of the seats in the General Assembly could appoint persons to local election boards.⁴ Passed over the objections of the Republicans in the General Assembly, this law basically gave the Democratic party the power to control local elections

² Raymond H. Pulley, Old Virginia Restored: An Interpretation of the Progressive Impulse, 1870-1930, (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia, 1968), p.32.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, p.45.

for years, since the Democrats held a majority of the seats in the Assembly constantly from the 1880s into the 1910s.⁵

The importance of the Anderson-McCormick Act can be seen in the behavior exhibited by election officials in Richmond during the 1880s. A frequent tactic employed by election officials to eliminate black and Republican voters was to delay these voters at the polls by asking them numerous questions about election laws or the state constitution, so these potential voters could not cast their ballots before the polls closed.

This particular tactic was in evidence in Richmond during the close 1888 3rd district House race.⁶ Incumbent Democrat George Wise allegedly won by 261 voters over his Republican opponent, Edmund Waddill. Waddill claimed that approximately 700 blacks, almost all of whom were Republican supporters, had been standing in line waiting to vote in Richmond when election officials began their stall tactics. Waddill later contested Wise's victory, and his appeal was granted.⁷

The Walton Act of 1894 was the next state law that

⁵ Allen W. Moger, Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925, (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia, 1968), p.56.

⁶ Dabney, p.257.

⁷ Ibid.

affected the voting process in Virginia. This statute had specific features that provided for ballots that had no political party designations, just candidate names. If a voter needed help filling out the ballot (for example, if he could not read), he could ask an election official, most of whom were Democratic party members, for assistance. This situation of illiterate voters asking for assistance led to potential voters, white and black, not voting or incorrectly marking ballots because they were afraid or embarrassed to ask for aid. Also, it was not beyond election officials to "help" a voter mark the ballot incorrectly and get it thrown out if the voter wanted to cast his ballot for a Republican candidate.⁸

The most far-reaching legal change in the voting process in terms of the conditions to be met before a person could vote was handed down in the 1901-02 Constitution. The state's voters had overwhelmingly rejected two previous calls for a constitutional convention in 1888 and 1897. Historian Allen Moger theorizes that the first two attempts failed because of the indifferent attitude most of the voting populace had towards changing the state Constitution, an attitude that was markedly different from that of the

⁸ Charles E. Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902, (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1971), p.51.

Democratic party elites.⁹

Despite the opposition to the first two attempts to call a constitutional convention, conditions gradually changed both nationally and statewide that allowed for a convention to be convened in 1901. In 1898 the United States Supreme Court upheld a provision in the Mississippi Constitution that disenfranchised poor and illiterate voters.¹⁰ With this apparent clearance from the Supreme Court, the Virginia General Assembly passed a resolution to have the electorate once again decide on a constitutional convention that would in part change the state's voting eligibility requirements.

Scholar Raymond Pulley argues that state leaders who pushed for the constitutional convention were interested in doing so for primarily two reasons. First, Democratic party leaders wanted the electoral uncertainties commonplace in the 1870s and early 1880s to be halted.¹¹ The best way to accomplish this objective would be the legal erosion of at

⁹ Moger, p.182.

¹⁰ Williams v Mississippi, (1898, 170 US 213).

¹¹ As discussed later in this chapter, the "electoral uncertainties" revolved around the Readjuster party, which had some limited electoral success in Virginia in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The limited success of the Readjuster party, which was guided by William Mahone, caused concern amongst the leadership of the Democratic party. See footnote 22 and Pulley, p.65.

least part of the Republican support base -- black votes. The second reason to call a convention was to end the fraud and corruption in elections often necessary to provide the electoral stability desired by the Democrats. If the alleged sources of electoral instability, blacks and Republicans, were rendered inconsequential by legal barriers, fraud would not be needed and traditional "political honor" would be restored to Virginia and its elected officials.¹²

Most of the opposition to the constitutional convention came from voters in the predominantly white counties of Western and Southwestern Virginia, who were concerned that suffrage restrictions designed to eliminate black voters would also affect poor, illiterate whites found in these areas of the state.¹³

Despite the opposition, the referendum for the convention passed 77,362 to 60,375, with less than 33% of all registered voters taking part.¹⁴ The convention was comprised of 100 men, one from each General Assembly district. 88 of these 100 men were Democrats, and the

¹² Pulley, p.65.

¹³ Richard L. Morton, "The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1865-1902," Unpublished dissertation, (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia, 1918), p.149.

¹⁴ Moger, pp.185-6.

remaining 12 were Republicans. The General Assembly also decided that the new Constitution, whenever it was prepared, would be ratified by popular vote.¹⁵

In April 1902, the convention passed (67-28) Article II of the new Constitution, which dealt specifically with suffrage.¹⁶ Specific provisions of Article II included:

- 1) Any male who was a United State citizen, a resident of Virginia for one year, and 21 years of age could register to vote (if they met the following conditions);
- 2) Union and Confederate soldiers and their sons were immediately qualified for voter registration;
- 3) Males who paid a property tax of \$1.00 could register;
- 4) Potential voters could be asked when waiting to vote to read and explain any section of the state Constitution, or if they could not read, interpret a part of the Constitution that was read to them;
- 5) Potential voters could be subjected when registering to questions by election officials to verify their qualifications to vote;
- 6) Anyone who did not register before 1903 was liable

¹⁵ Moger, pp.185-7.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.189.

for a poll tax of \$1.50, which had to be paid in three year increments (total of \$4.50).¹⁷

Instead of having the new Constitution voted on by the public as they were specifically charged to do by the General Assembly, convention delegates in May 1902 narrowly voted (53-44) to proclaim the document as the new state Constitution.¹⁸ Though unsuccessfully challenged in two separate court cases for being discriminatory in nature and content, the new Constitution became the law of the state.¹⁹

The effects the new Constitution had on aggregate voting may be seen in section 4.2, but some of the Constitution's isolated consequences also show its immediate impact. For example, registration of black voters in

¹⁷ Ronald E. Shibley, "Election Laws and Electoral Practices in Virginia, 1867-1902: An Administrative and Political History," Unpublished dissertation, (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia, 1972), pp.260-3.

¹⁸ Some scholars, like C. Vann Woodward, maintain that the constitution was proclaimed instead of popularly ratified because those at the convention were fearful that the document would have failed in a referendum. It is interesting to speculate whether the document would have been passed by the public, but the point is largely irrelevant due to the preemptive actions taken by a majority of the convention delegates. See C. Vann Woodward's Origins of the New South, (Louisiana State University and University of Texas, 1951), p.342.

¹⁹ Moger, pp.199-201.

Richmond's predominantly black Jackson Ward fell from 2,983 in 1896 to 33 in 1903.²⁰ Richmond in 1900 had a total of 18,675 voters registered, but by December 1903 that figure had fallen to 6,264.²¹ The new state Constitution had, as seen by some examples taken from Richmond, an immediate and obvious impact on voting.

Table 4.1: Virginia Voting Laws, 1876-1913

<u>Year</u>	<u>Statute/Constitution</u>	<u>Restrictions</u>
1876	Poll Tax & Petty Larceny	Could not vote if convicted of petty larceny or poll tax unpaid. Poll tax rescinded in 1882.
1884	Anderson-McCormick Act	Party that controlled General Assembly appointed election boards.
1894	Walton Act	Ballot changes that affected illiterate voters.
1902	New Constitution	Poll & property taxes to be paid before voting & literacy test.

4.2 Voter Turnout

The second variable to be examined is voter turnout. In the Key/Burnham model, voter turnout begins to fall in

²⁰ Dabney, p.270.

²¹ Andrew Buni, The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1902-1965, (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia, 1967), p.28.

response to party competition declining. This initial decline in turnout is followed by various legal barriers that further cemented the decline in turnout. For Cloward and Piven, turnout begins to fall after legal barriers to voting are enacted. As turnout falls, competition between political parties declines, which triggers an even greater fall in turnout.

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 contain information on presidential election turnout between 1880-1912, a total of nine elections. Figure 4.1 shows the total statewide turnout. From this graph we can see peak years for turnout occurring in 1888 (302,000 votes) and 1896. The totals then begin to fall and eventually settle in the 128,000-135,000 range by 1904. Figure 4.2 is the Richmond turnout for the 1880-1912 presidential elections. The Richmond totals roughly follow the same pattern found statewide, with the peak year being 1888 followed by a decline that levels off in the 1908 and 1912 elections.

The next pair of graphs (Figure 4.3 and 4.4) deal with the Richmond and statewide turnout for the governor's seat for the 1881-1913 time period. Figure 4.3 shows statewide turnout for nine gubernatorial elections. The peak years were 1885 and 1889, where over 280,000 voters went to the

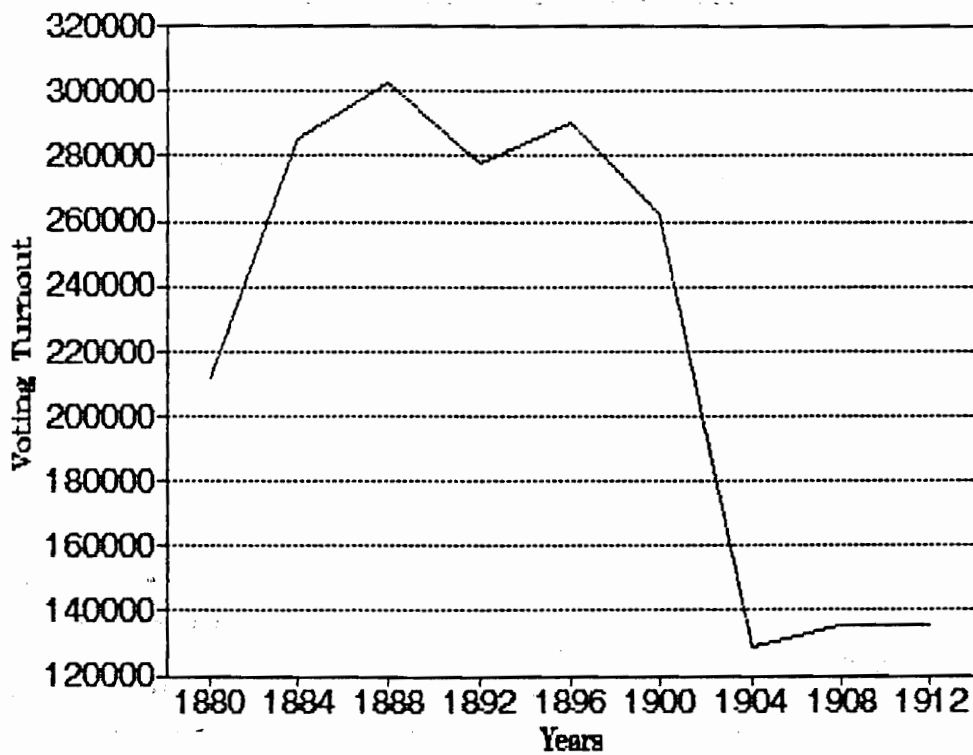


Fig. 4.1: Statewide Turnout:
 Presidential Elections, 1880-1912

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections.

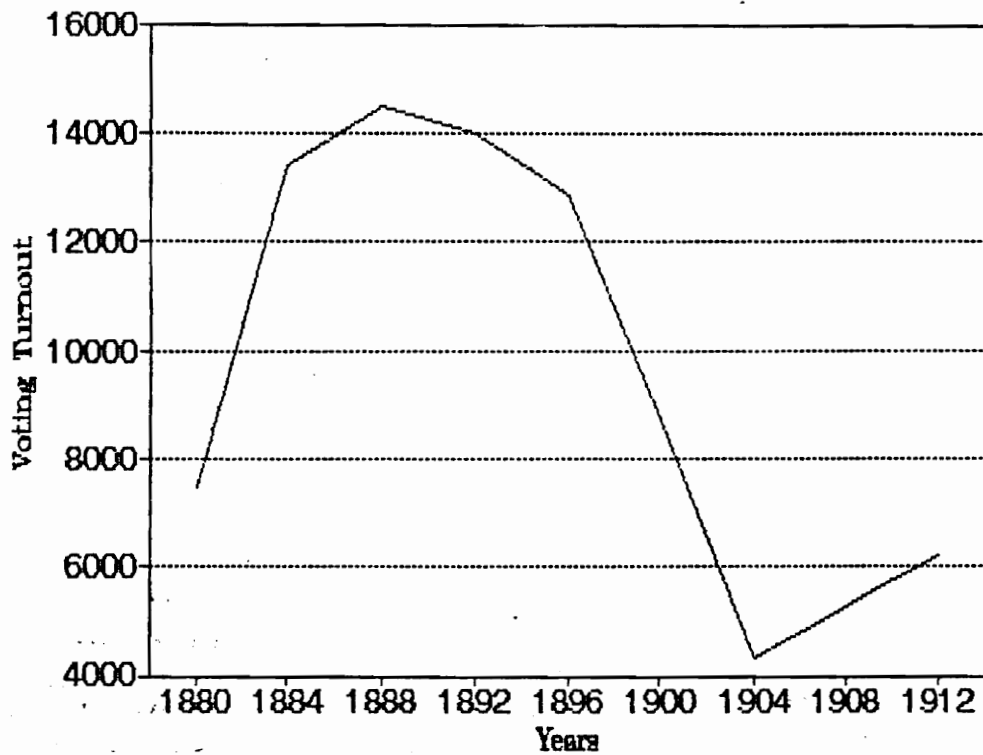


Fig. 4.2: Richmond Turnout;
Presidential Elections, 1880-1912

Source: Richmond Dispatch
Richmond Times-Dispatch

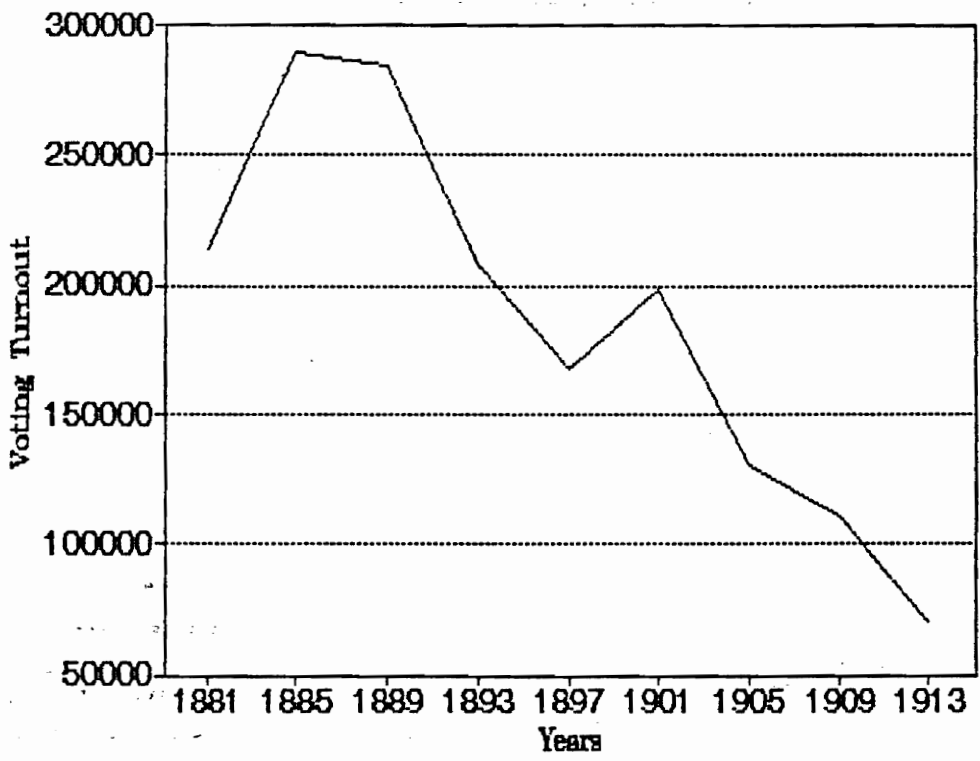


Fig. 4.3: Statewide Turnout; Gubernatorial Elections, 1881-1913

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections.

polls. With the exception of the 1901 election,²² turnout fell from the peak years at a steady rate until bottoming out in the 1913 election. Figure 4.4 is the total Richmond turnout for the gubernatorial elections. The peak year was 1889, when almost 15,000 people voted. However, turnout then fell, with the total turnout never being more than 5,800 votes between 1897-1913 (though in 1901, there was the same upswing in Richmond as in the state as a whole).

The last set of graphs in this section show the turnout in Richmond and the 3rd Congressional district (which included Richmond) for the United States House of Representatives' elections for years 1880-1912, a total of 17 elections. Figure 4.5 is the turnout for the 3rd Congressional district. Two dynamics are apparent here. First, turnout is higher in those years in which presidential elections were also occurring. The presidential years of 1884, 1888, 1892, and 1896 all had over 29,000 votes cast. However, beginning in 1900 and

²² A possible reason for the apparent anomaly in 1901 could lie with the knowledge that the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, Andrew Jackson Montague, led the independent faction of the party. Montague was able to garner the Democratic nomination even though he was not supported by the acknowledged leader of the party organization, United States Senator Thomas Martin. This conflict might have attracted voters who were discontented with the Democratic party organization or who idealistically thought Montague would offer some change to the existing political conditions in the state.

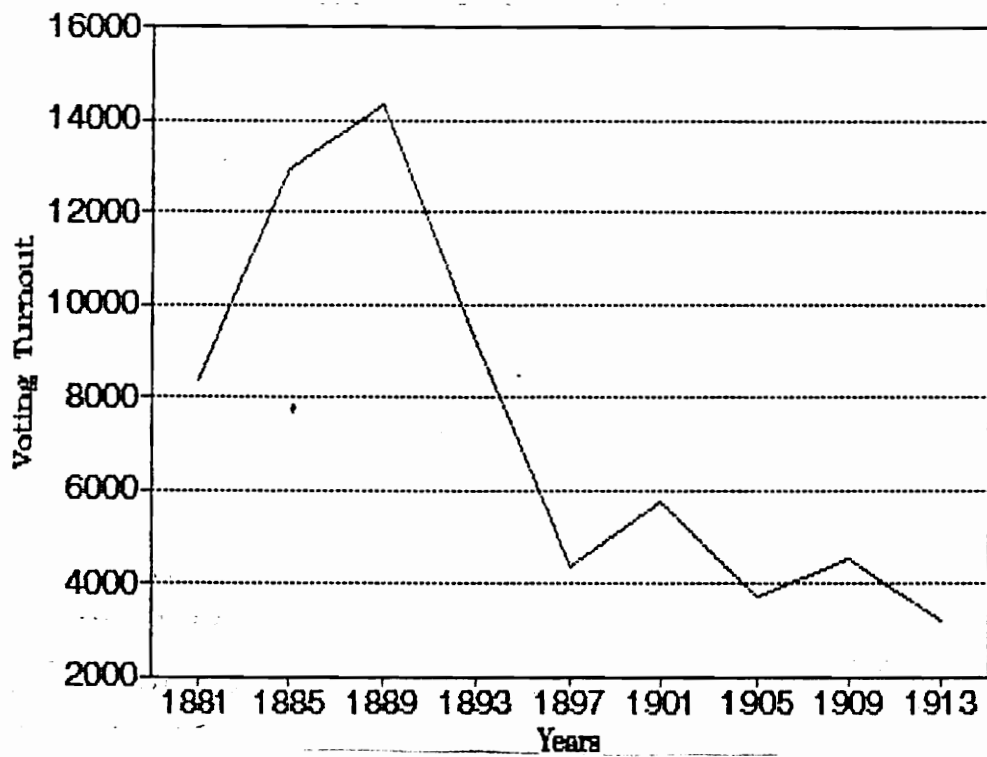
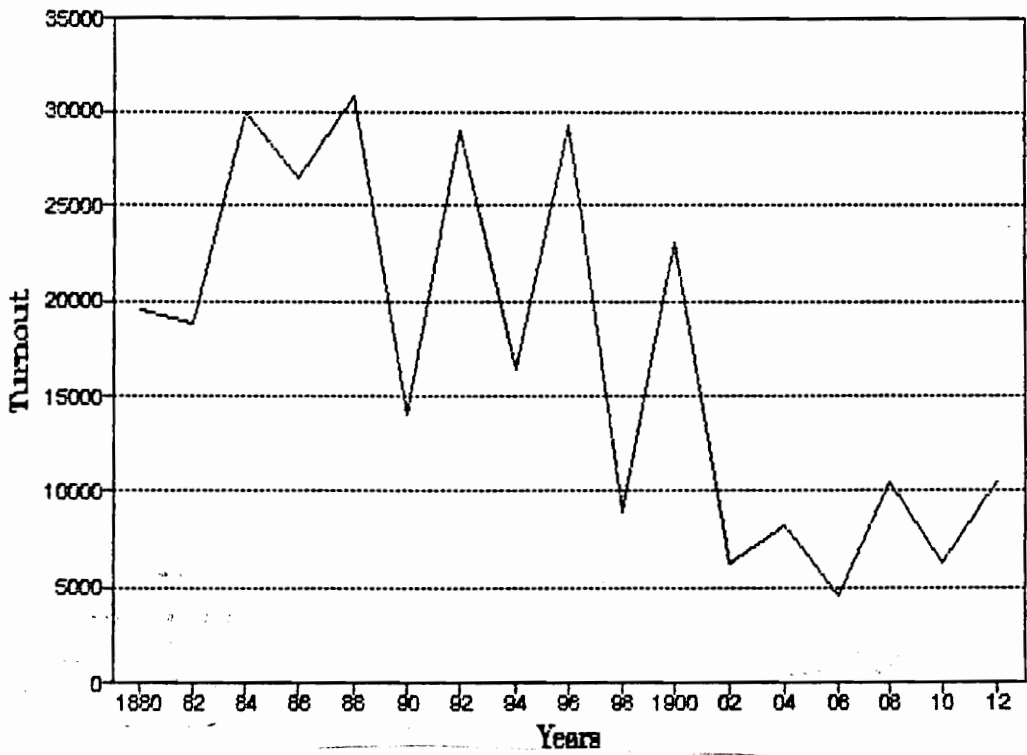


Fig. 4.4: Richmond Turnout;
Gubernatorial Elections, 1881-1913

Source: Richmond Dispatch
Richmond Times-Dispatch



**Fig. 4.5: 3rd District Turnout;
U.S. House Elections, 1880-1912**

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections.

continuing throughout the remainder of the period, turnout for the House elections in presidential years fell. Second, with the exceptions of the 1882 and 1886 elections, off-year turnout for the House elections in the 3rd district never rose above 18,000, and from 1898-1912, it never went higher than 11,000.

The graph in Figure 4.6 is the Richmond turnout for the House of Representatives' elections. The pattern here is very similar to the one in Figure 4.5, where the totals for presidential election years were consistently stable until 1900, when they fell dramatically. The off-year totals took a nosedive in 1890 and never went above 8,300 votes the rest of the period, a trend that largely mirrors what happened in the 3rd Congressional district as a whole.

Overall, we see that turnout in Richmond and statewide did decline significantly during this period. For the presidential and gubernatorial elections, turnout was beginning to fall by the early 1890s. Turnout for the United States House of Representatives' elections did not begin to fall until the late 1890s, but after that time, it decreased dramatically.

4.3 Party Competition

This section focuses on the percentage of the turnout that the Democratic and Republican political parties gained

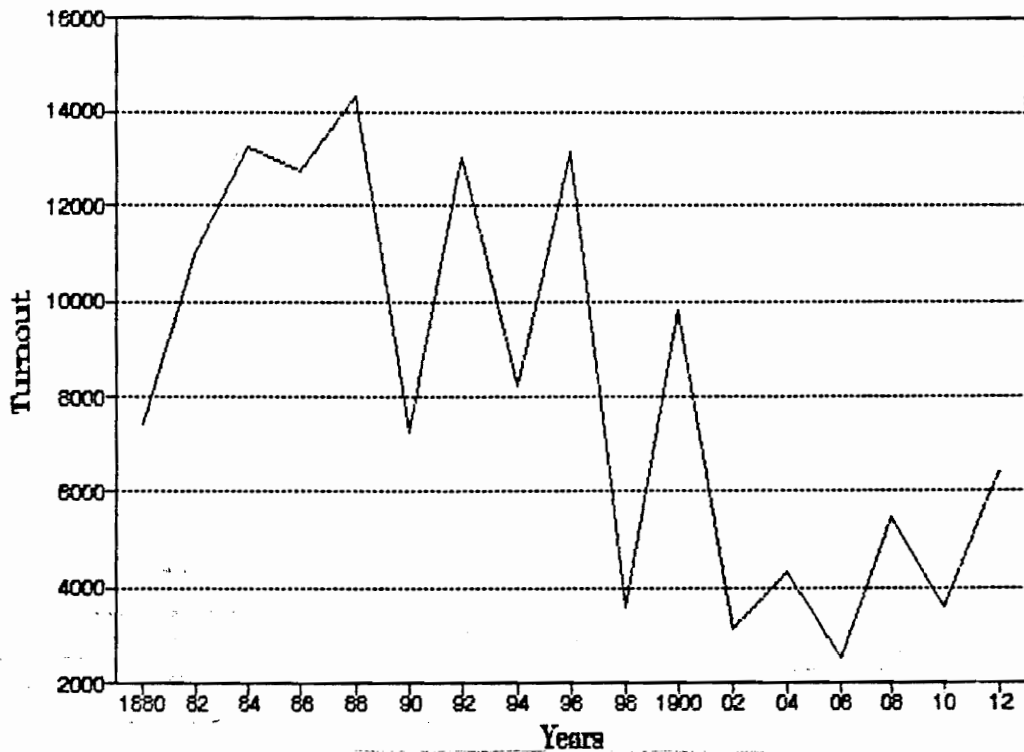


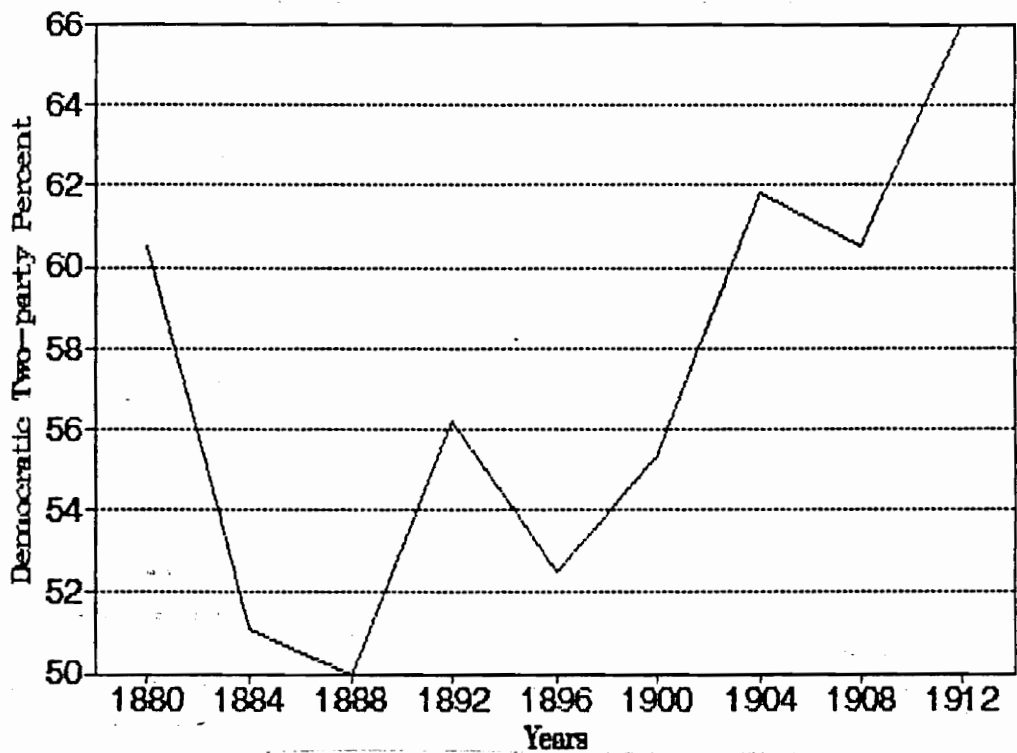
Fig. 4.8: Richmond Turnout;
U.S. House Elections, 1880-1912

Source: Richmond Dispatch
Richmond Times-Dispatch

in various elections. Both models being tested include declining political party competition as a factor that led to declining voter turnout. For Key and Burnham, declining party competition is the initial catalyst in voter turnout declining. In the Cloward/Piven model, declining party competition occurs after legal barriers forced turnout to fall.

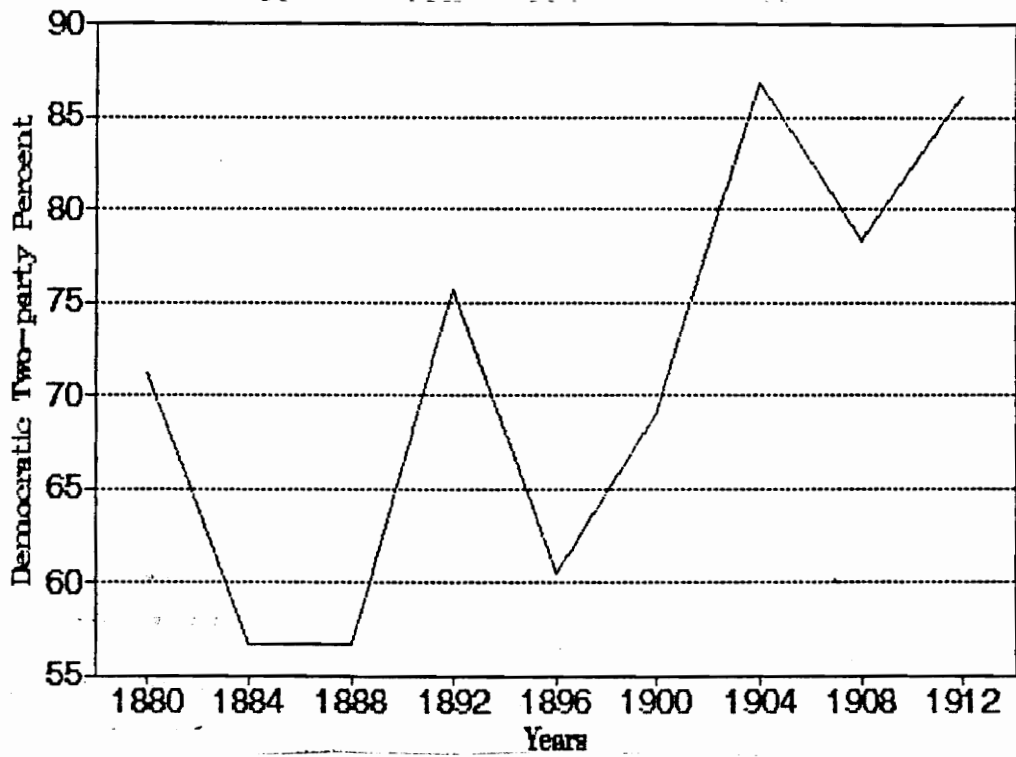
The first pair of figures (Figures 4.7 and 4.8) show the percentage of the presidential vote that was Democratic both statewide and in Richmond. Figure 4.7 gives the statewide percentages for these elections. The graph shows that the Democratic presidential candidate received a majority of the votes in every election in the period, but in 1884, 1888 and 1896 the Republican challenger was more competitive. Yet, in the three elections between 1904-1912, the Democratic candidate never received less than 60% of the vote.

Figure 4.8 gives a picture of the vote percentages gained by the Democratic party for presidential elections in Richmond. With the exceptions of 1884 and 1888 when the Republicans received 43% of the vote, every other year was marked by Democratic candidates solidly winning Richmond. In five of the nine contests, the Democratic candidate received over 70% of the vote, and in two of the other four years, Democrats gained over 60% of the votes cast.



**Fig. 4.7: Statewide Turnout Percent;
Dem. Presidential Candidates, 1880-1912**

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections.



**Fig. 4.8: Richmond Turnout Percent;
Dem. Presidential Candidates, 1880-1912**

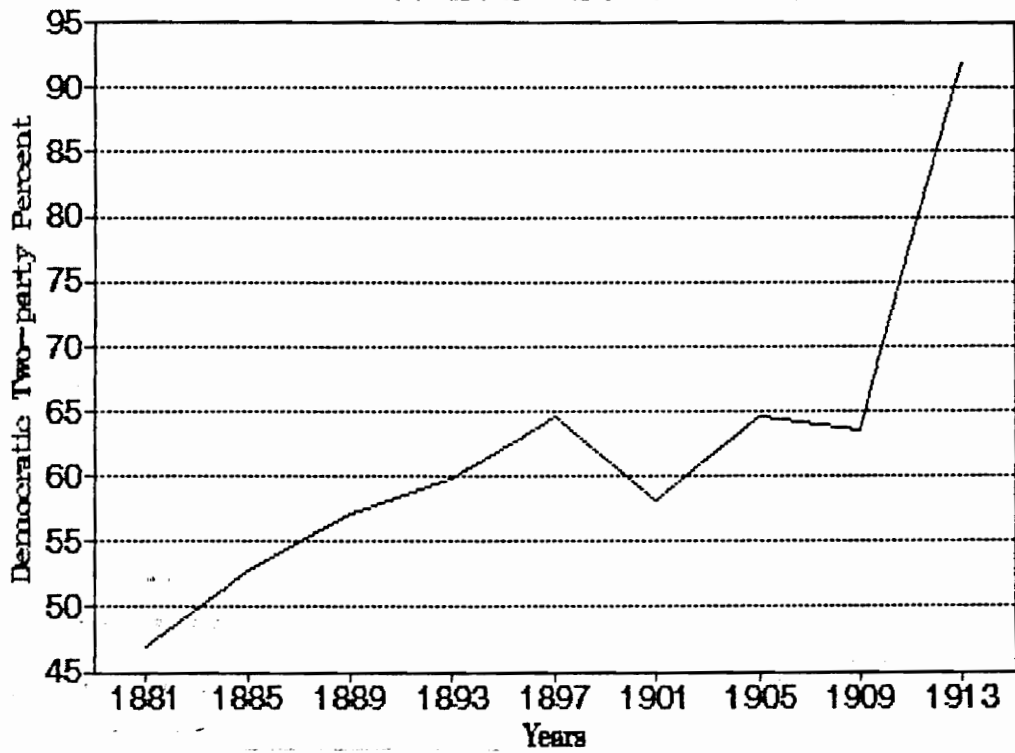
Source: Richmond Dispatch
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Figures 4.9 and 4.10 show the Democratic vote percentages statewide and in Richmond for the gubernatorial elections in the 1881-1913 time period. In 1913 the Republican party did not nominate a candidate for the governor's seat, and in 1881, the Readjuster party ran a candidate that won the position with 53% of the vote statewide.²³

Figure 4.9 shows the statewide vote percentages gained by the Democratic party for the gubernatorial elections. Save 1885 when the Republican candidate received 47% of the vote, no Republican won more than 42.5% of the voters in an election. In fact, Democratic candidates consistently received strong support (around 57%-64%) throughout the period.

Figure 4.10 gives the percentage of the turnout Democratic gubernatorial candidates received in Richmond. For this elected office, Republicans were only mildly competitive in one year (1885), and in that year's election,

²³ The Readjuster political party arose in the 1870s in Virginia in response to the passage of a state law that required a tax be placed on most workers in the Commonwealth to pay the state's Civil War debts. A mixture of hard-line Conservatives (who later became bulwarks of the Democratic party), a few Republicans, and farmers' groups, the Readjusters wanted the war debts to be "readjusted" or shifted to the federal government, because the federal government occupied the state in the immediate years after the Civil War. See Jack P. Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, 1867-1879, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina, 1970), pp.233-8.



**Fig. 4.9: Statewide Turnout Percent;
Dem. Gubernatorial Candidates, 1881-1913**

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections.

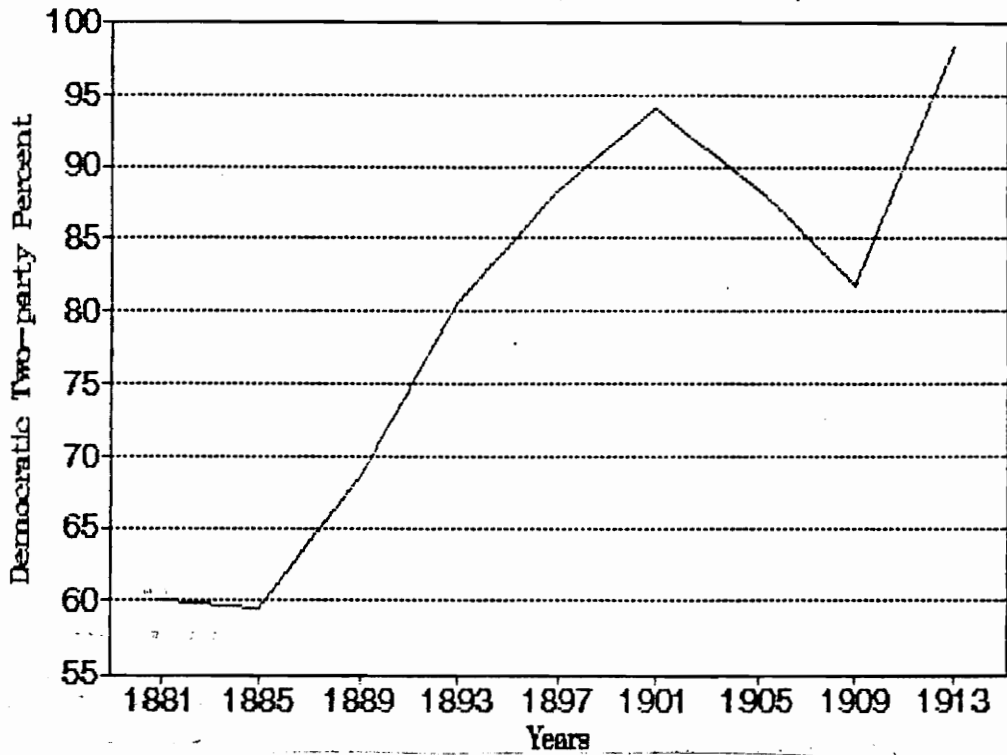


Fig. 4.10: Richmond Turnout Percent;
Dem. Gubernatorial Candidates, 1881-1913

Source: Richmond Dispatch
Richmond Times-Dispatch

the Republican candidate received only 40% of the vote. In five of the other six elections, Republicans did not receive over 20% of the vote. As with the results in Figure 4.8, these results definitely show that the Democrats controlled Richmond.

Finally, we can examine the degree of party competition in the House elections in the 3rd Congressional district and in Richmond for the 1880-1912 period. Figure 4.11 shows that between 1880-1888, the parties were somewhat competitive in the 3rd district, though the Democratic candidate won throughout the period. In 1890, however, the Democratic candidate ran unopposed, and except for the 1896 election when the Republican challenger garnered almost 43% of the vote, Democrats dominated these elections for the remainder of the period.

As Figure 4.12 suggests, the city of Richmond followed the trend seen in the 3rd district. Between 1882 and 1888, the parties were somewhat competitive. Following the 1890 election when the Republicans offered no candidate, however, the Democrats held comfortable margins over their opposition for the rest of the period.

4.4 Summary

In this chapter, the data used to test each theoretical model were presented. Between 1880 and 1913, Virginia



**Fig. 4.11: 3rd District Turnout Percent
Dem. U.S. House Candidates, 1880-1912**

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections.

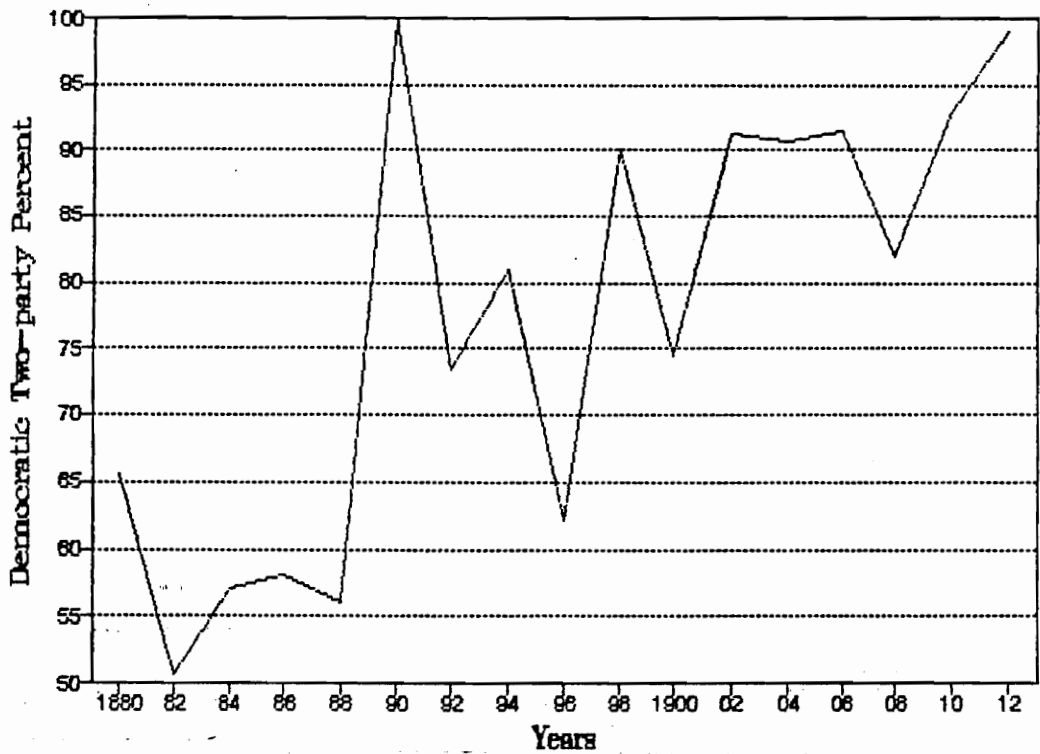


Fig. 4.12: Richmond Turnout Percent;
Dem. U.S. House Candidates, 1880-1912

Source: Richmond Dispatch
Richmond Times-Dispatch

passed four statutes that affected voting, culminating with the passage of a new Constitution in 1902. There also was evidence that showed how Richmond election officials applied the various state voting laws.

Sections 4.2 and 4.3 offered evidence on political competition and voter turnout. On the surface two dynamics became apparent. First, voter turnout both in Richmond and statewide fell dramatically. The second noticeable dynamic was that the Democratic party often had little Republican competition in Richmond and somewhat more resistance at the state level.

5.0 Testing the Models

Introduction

This chapter uses the data presented in chapter 4 to informally test the competing theoretical models. Section 5.1 presents an analysis of the data using the Key/Burnham model. After beginning with a brief reminder of the propositions set forth in the Key/Burnham model, I will attempt to match the model's event sequence with any trends found in the data. In the next section, the Cloward/Piven model drives the analysis.

Section 5.3 closes the chapter, offering conclusions based on the preceding analysis. It appears that the applicability of each theoretical model varies by the level of analysis. The Cloward/Piven model seems to be more appropriate for the state trends, while the Key/Burnham model more aptly explains the event sequence found in Richmond.

5.1 Analysis Using the Key/Burnham Model

Key and Burnham contend that political party competition declined first, which caused voter turnout to decline in the late 1800s. After an initial decline in turnout, political and business elites, who were still fearful that certain unmobilized pockets of the voting

population could determine election outcomes, pushed for and passed voting statutes that disenfranchised these voters. These statutes further cemented the declines in turnout, and in some cases, party competition.

Declining Party --> Lower Voter --> Legal --> Even Lower
Competition Turnout Barriers Turnout

Diagram 5.1: Key/Burnham Model

In Figure 5.1 we see that the Richmond turnout for Presidential elections in this period peaked in 1888 and hit its lowest point in 1904. According to the Key/Burnham model, the initial catalyst for this decline in turnout would be the decline in political party competition. In Figures 4.8 and 5.1, we see that the Democratic and Republican parties were mildly competitive in the 1884 and 1888 elections, but thereafter the Democratic candidates never received less than 60% of the Richmond vote. It would appear that party competition in the city decreased by the 1892 presidential election.¹

The other variable is voting statutes. Chapter 4 showed that four voting statutes were passed statewide in 1876 (part of which was later rescinded in 1882), 1884, 1894

¹ It should be noted for clarification purposes that it is the area between total turnout and Democratic turnout that is important for gauging political party competition for the figures in the chapter.

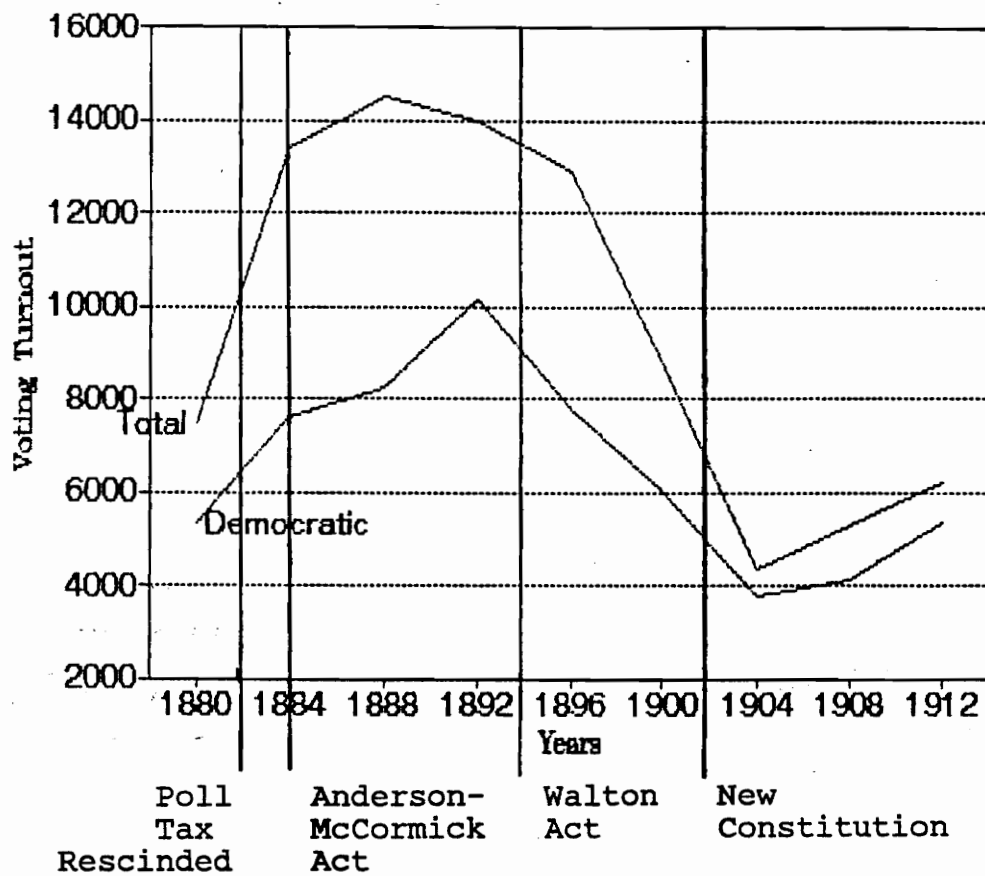


Fig 5.1: Richmond & Dem. Turnouts; Presidential Elections, 1880-1912

Source: Richmond Dispatch
Richmond Times-Dispatch

and 1902. Apparently, the most thorough in affecting members of the electorate appeared to be the 1902 changes in the state Constitution.

If turnout continued to rise in Richmond until 1888, evidently the 1876 and 1884 laws (at least immediately) had no profound effect on turnout. Turnout had already begun its decline and party competition was on the wane by the time the 1894 law was passed by the General Assembly. By 1902, when the new state Constitution was proclaimed, turnout was well on its way to bottoming out.

Thus, it appears that voting statutes had little effect on turnout in Richmond for presidential elections, while decreasing party competition seemed to have a more reciprocal relationship with turnout falling. This finding is consistent with the Key/Burnham model.

Figure 5.2 shows the statewide turnout and the Democratic portion of the turnout. This graph suggests that something different happened statewide than in Richmond. In the state as a whole, turnout rose until 1888, where it remained fairly constant until 1896. Turnout began to fall after 1896 (two years after the passage of the Walton Act), but the most severe decline transpired after the 1902 Constitution.

Figures 4.7 and 5.2 show that the Democrats did not begin to control the presidential elections until 1900.

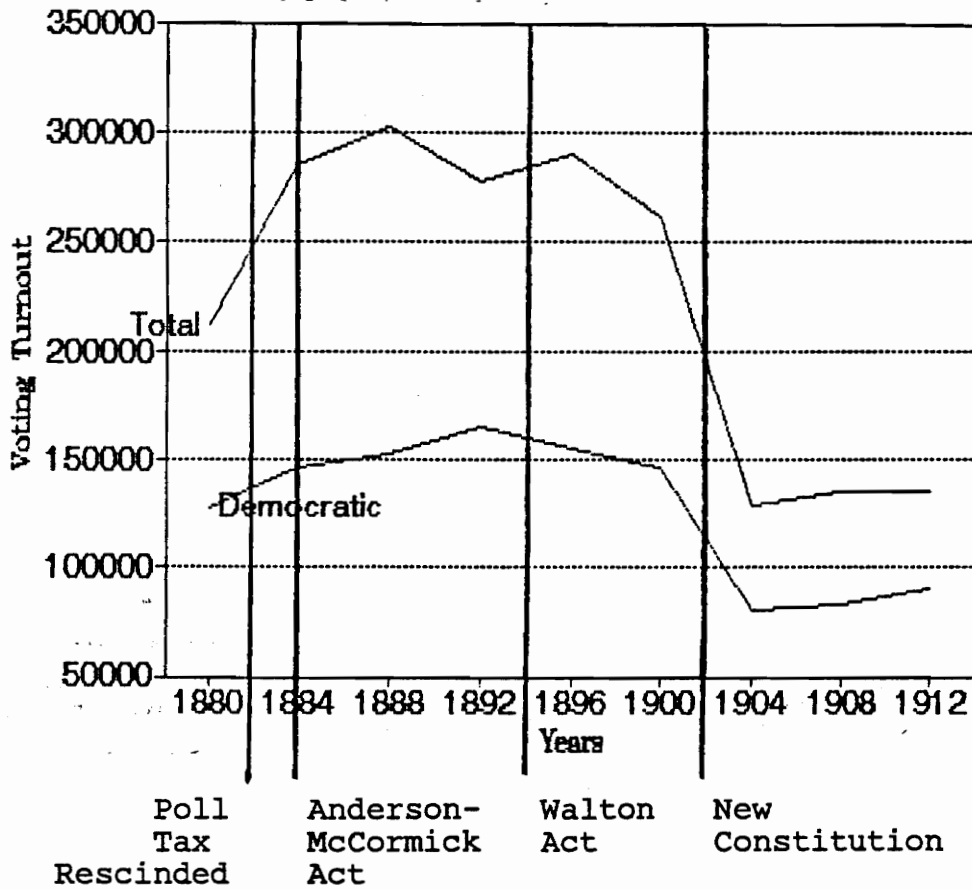


Fig. 5.2: Statewide & Dem. Turnouts; Presidential Elections, 1880-1912

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections

Party competition eroded by 1904, but not until after the new Constitution was in place. These findings suggest that, because party competition took longer to dissipate statewide than in Richmond and turnout did not dramatically decline statewide until 1904, the new Constitution may have had a greater role in pushing state voter turnout down for the presidential elections in this period than was the case in Richmond. Thus, the statewide dynamics are not consistent with Key/Burnham model, mostly because of misplaced sequencing where decreasing party competition was not the catalyst in driving voter turnout down.

Two different types of dynamics apparently occurred statewide and in Richmond. In Richmond, declining voter turnout appeared to be more directly tied to eroding party competition. Statewide, voting statutes seemed to play a larger role in affecting turnout. From these data we can see that the event sequence found in Richmond was closer than the state in exhibiting the dynamics that Key and Burnham expected.

We next use the Richmond turnout data for the 1881-1913 gubernatorial elections to test the Key/Burnham model. Again, if Key and Burnham are correct, voter turnout should have decreased shortly after political party competition began to fall. Figures 5.3 and 4.10 suggest that the Republicans were never competitive for the gubernatorial

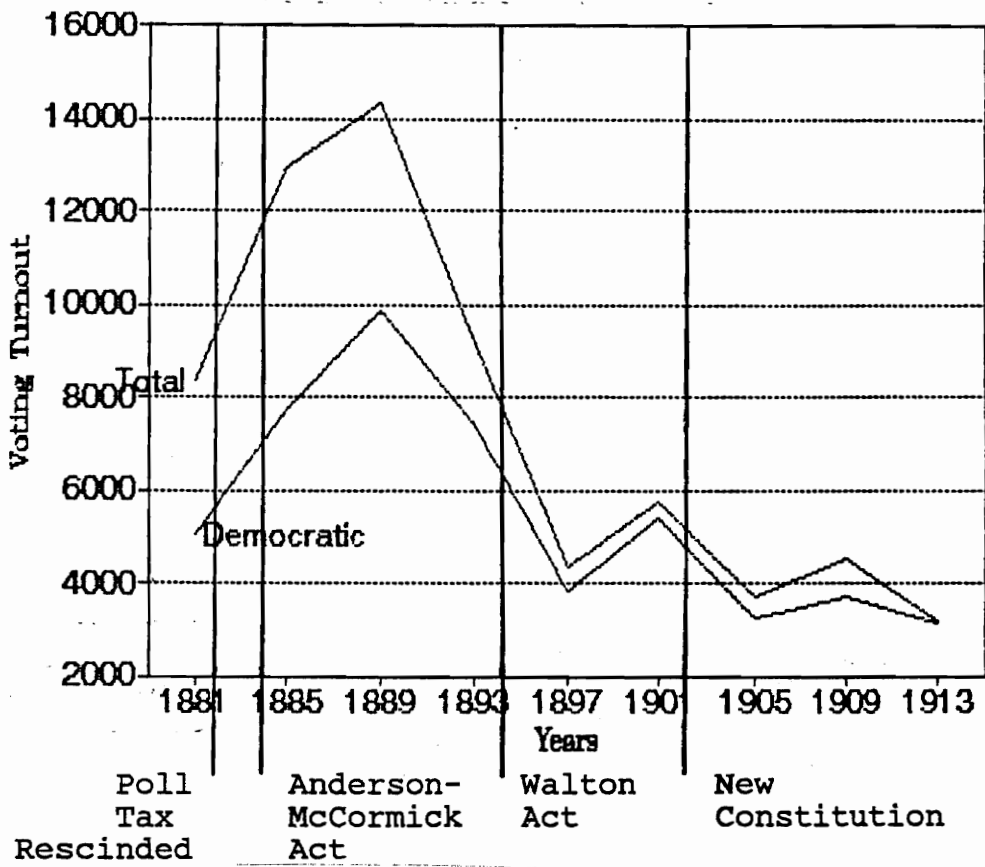


Fig. 5.3: Richmond & Dem. Turnouts, Gubernatorial Elections, 1881-1913

Source: Richmond Dispatch
Richmond Times-Dispatch

elections in Richmond. This finding leads one to wonder why voter turnout continued to rise until 1889 but then eventually fell throughout the rest of the period.

The solution to this riddle could lie with the weak party competition seen in Richmond throughout the period. Since the Democratic party faced little electoral opposition, the Richmond Democrats, as mentioned in chapter 4, could have applied the state voting laws in such a way that any natural support Republicans might have had in the city from certain groups, like blacks, was reduced. In other words, once the Democrats had the upper hand electorally in Richmond, they took those necessary steps called for in the Key/Burnham model, like applying existing voting statutes, to eliminate any potential voters who might have chosen the Republican candidate in an upcoming election.

At the state level we find a different pattern for both turnout and party competition than in Richmond. In Figure 5.4 we see that statewide turnout peaked in the 1885 and 1889 elections, fell steadily for the next two elections, but then rose in 1901.² After 1901 a steady decline in

² Recall that in the 1901 gubernatorial race an independent Democratic nominee, Andrew Jackson Montague, ran for office. This fact might explain why the 1901 turnout broke the pattern of declining statewide turnout for the gubernatorial elections.

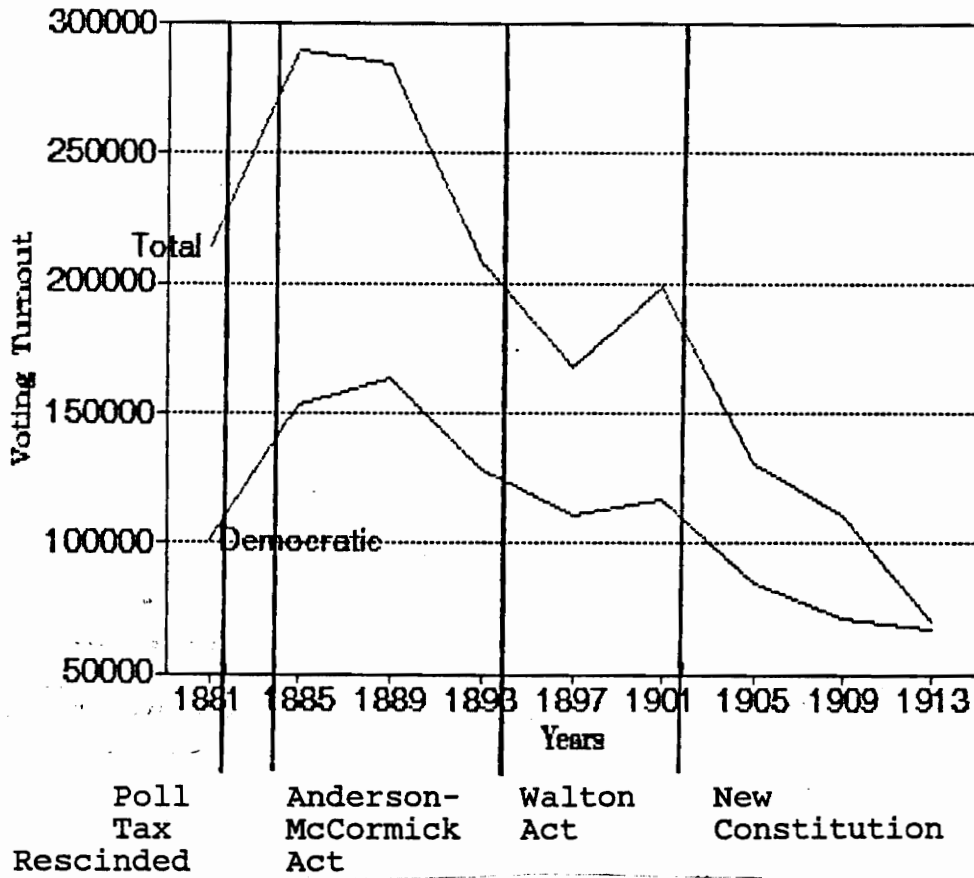


Fig. 5.4: Statewide & Dem. Turnouts, Gubernatorial Elections, 1881-1913

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections

turnout took place. Unlike Richmond, the Democratic party did not dominate statewide until 1893, when its control remained constant throughout the rest of the period.

According to the Key/Burnham model declining party competition drove turnout down, but that may not have been the case with the statewide gubernatorial turnout. Though turnout fell significantly from 1889-1897, it did increase by over 30,000 votes in 1901. After the 1902 Constitution, however, turnout began another period of continual decline. This suggests that declining party competition may not have been as important a factor in driving statewide turnout down as was the passage of the new Constitution, but this is hard to tell, especially since the 1901 gubernatorial election was arguably an anomaly.

After viewing the gubernatorial and presidential elections in this period, it appears that the Key/Burnham model has better success in describing the dynamics found in Richmond than it does statewide. This finding may be due to party competition declining much sooner in Richmond than statewide and possibly due to the effect voting statutes had on turnout for areas of the state other than Richmond.

We next look at the House elections to see if these contests showed the same patterns as the presidential and gubernatorial elections. Figure 5.5 shows the Richmond turnout and the Democratic party portion of the turnout for

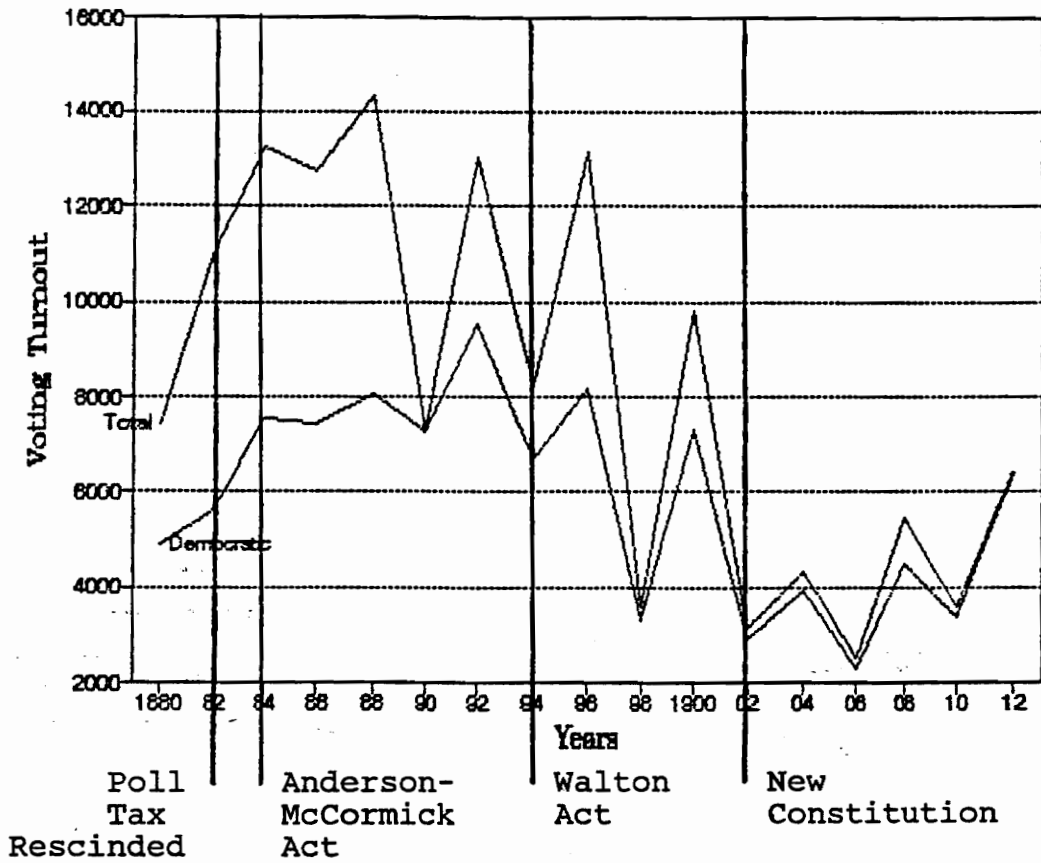


Fig. 5.5: Richmond & Dem. Turnouts;
U.S. House Elections, 1880-1912

Source: Richmond Dispatch
Richmond Times-Dispatch

the United States House of Representatives' elections for the 1880-1912 period. As noted in chapter 4 turnouts for these contests in non-presidential years are somewhat lower than in presidential elections years.

We see in Figure 5.5 that turnout peaked in 1888, stayed relatively constant till 1896, and then fell significantly until 1904. There were signs of political party competition throughout the 1880s, but from 1890-1912 the Democratic party received at least 60% of the vote for these elections.

The 1876 and 1884 voting statutes evidently had little effect on turnout. If they did have an effect, the political parties being competitive might have offset any negative influence these statutes had on people going to the polls, because competitive races might have drawn people to the polls even if voting statutes made it more difficult to participate electorally. Additionally, the 1894 law might not have had much of an impact, because by 1894 the Democratic party was controlling the House elections. The 1902 Constitution appears to have negatively affected voter turnout, but only in the sense that it was reinforcing a condition, declining turnout, that began before 1900.

Once more, it appears that Key and Burnham's theoretical model matches the trends seen in Richmond during this time. However, the pattern in the 3rd Congressional

district does not coincide with the Key/Burnham model. As seen in Figure 5.6, the peak years for 3rd district turnout in the House elections were 1884-1896, roughly the same years as in Richmond. The difference between the two areas can be seen in party competition, where Republican candidates were still able in 1896 to garner almost 45% of the vote. Beginning in 1898, though, Democrats had firm control of the 3rd district, and this condition lasted for the rest of the period.

If party competition did not solidly erode before turnout decreased, as predicted by Burnham and Key, what caused voter turnout to decline in the 3rd district? Since voter turnout did not fall in a significant way until 1898, there is little evidence that the 1876, 1884, and 1894 laws had an impact on turnout. Yet, turnout fell dramatically after the 1902 Constitution, and it appears that the combined impact of the Constitution and declining party competition worked together to drive turnout down in the 3rd district.

Overall, the Key/Burnham model's sequence of events more closely matched the dynamics seen in the Richmond elections than the dynamics found statewide or in the 3rd district. Generally, party competition declined early in the period in Richmond, and once party competition dropped, declining voter turnout usually occurred soon after. In the

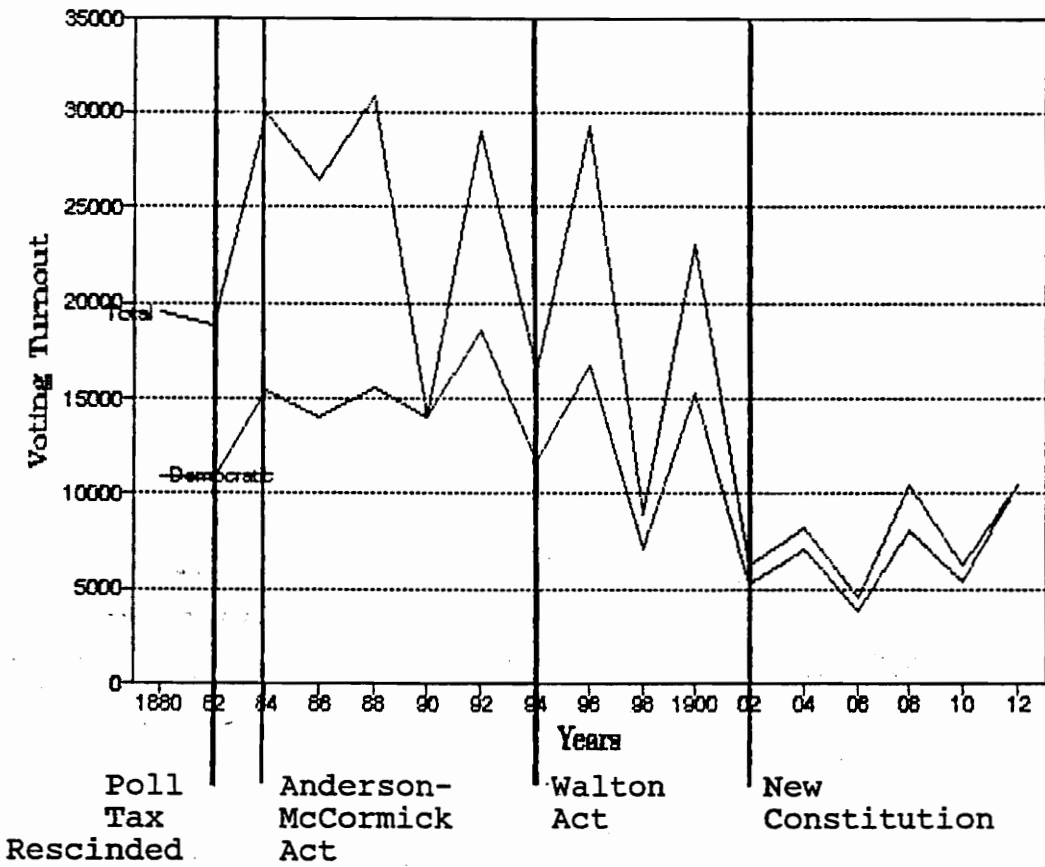


Fig. 5.8: 3rd Dist. & Dem. Turnouts for U.S. House Elections, 1880-1912

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections

3rd district and statewide, in contrast, political party competition took longer to erode than it did in Richmond, and turnout usually fell soon after the proclamation of the 1902 Constitution. Since Key and Burnham contended that declining party competition was the initial catalyst for turnout decreasing, it would appear that the Key/Burnham model better explains the dynamics seen in Richmond than those that occurred in the 3rd district or on the state level.

5.2 Analysis Using the Cloward/Piven Model

If the Key/Burnham model explains the dynamics that occurred in Richmond but did not work as well for the statewide or 3rd district conditions, does the Cloward/Piven model better explain the dynamics in the 3rd district and on the state level?

Before attempting to answer that question, a brief reminder of the basic event sequence suggested by the Cloward/Piven model is needed. Cloward and Piven contend that voter turnout initially declined due to statutes that restricted voting for certain members of the electorate. The voting statutes were passed as the parties fought to maintain a voter calculus that promoted party stability. Once turnout declined initially, party competition declined (electoral stability was achieved), which led to a further

decline in turnout.

Legal --> Declining --> Declining Party --> Even Lower
Barriers Turnout Competition Turnout

Diagram 5.2: Cloward and Piven Model

In Figure 5.1 we saw that the Richmond turnout began to fall after the 1888 presidential election, and it continued to do so until 1904. In Figures 5.1 and 4.8 we found that two party competition declined significantly after the 1888 election, and this condition continued the rest of the period. Because turnout in Richmond seemed to have a reciprocal relationship with party competition, the pattern in Richmond evidently matched the pattern set forth in the Key/Burnham model.

Yet, as seen in Figure 5.2 statewide turnout in presidential elections did not begin to fall until after the 1896 election. The most noticeable turnout decline took place between the 1900 and 1904 elections, a period that witnessed the adoption of a new state Constitution. The 1902 Constitution specifically aimed to disenfranchise blacks, voters who usually voted Republican. Also, in Figures 4.7 and 5.2 we found that the Democratic party did not control the state for presidential elections until 1900, a mere two years before the new Constitution was handed down. Thus, the pattern statewide for presidential

elections, where declining voter turnout seemed to be related to the 1902 Constitution, apparently matches the event sequence set forth in the Cloward/Piven model more than it does the pattern entailed in the Burnham/Key model.

Figure 5.3, which shows the Richmond turnout in the 1881-1913 gubernatorial races, seems to suggest dynamics that matches the sequence called for by Key and Burnham. Because the Democrats dominated these elections throughout the period and turnout fell even before the devastating 1902 Constitution, the relationship between declining party competition and decreasing voter turnout is roughly the same as that theorized by Key and Burnham.

However, in Figure 5.4 we see a different trend statewide than in Richmond, a pattern that appears to better fit the event sequence found in the Cloward/Piven model. Although turnout fell between 1889-1897, it did rise in 1901. After the new Constitution in 1902, turnout fell for the rest of the period. Though the Democrats had little Republican competition for the gubernatorial contests after 1893, lack of party competition did not stop voters from coming to polls in greater numbers in 1901 than in 1897.³

³ As discussed in chapter 4 (footnote 22), a possible reason for the high turnout in the 1901 gubernatorial election was that the Democratic party was in conflict, as independent Democrat Andrew Jackson Montague was able to win the Democratic nomination without the support of acknowledged party organization leader Senator Thomas

It would appear that, statewide, the new Constitution had the effect its supporters desired, which was fewer voters and continued electoral stability. The role the 1902 Constitution had in depressing statewide voter turnout, which could have been on an upswing based on the 1901 election turnout, seems to match roughly the pattern found in the Cloward/Piven model.

Figure 5.5 shows the Richmond turnout for the United States House of Representatives' contests for the 1880-1912 period. As discussed earlier turnout did not begin to significantly decrease until after the 1896 election. Though there was two party competition during the 1880s, from 1890-1912 the Democratic party dominated these elections in Richmond. On the surface the Richmond pattern matches the event sequence found in the Key/Burnham model.

Turnout for the House elections for the 3rd district as a whole basically mirrored what transpired in Richmond. Turnout peaked between 1884-1896 and then fell dramatically before levelling off at the end of the period. What is different between Richmond and the 3rd district is that political party competition lingered in the 3rd district until the 1896 elections when the Democratic party gained relatively unchallenged control of these elections. Though

the new Constitution seemingly affected the 3rd district and Richmond in the same manner (that is, further aiding the downturn in turnout), declining party competition did not seem to be the driving force in pushing turnout down in the 3rd district as it did in Richmond. Though the 3rd district trend does not entirely support the Cloward/Piven model, there is even less evidence to suggest that the event sequence entailed in the Key/Burnham model matches the 3rd district pattern.

5.3 Initial Conclusions

In Richmond we saw that voter turnout began to significantly decline in the late 1880s and early 1890s for presidential and gubernatorial elections. Turnout for the House elections did not begin to fall dramatically until the mid-to-late 1890s. Richmond was characterized by rapidly declining political party competition, particularly in the gubernatorial and House races. Because decreasing party competition came before declining turnout, I suggested that the Key/Burnham model apparently explained the dynamics occurring in Richmond during this time period.

Declining Party --> Lower --> Voting --> Even Lower
Competition Turnout Statutes Turnout

Diagram 5.3: Dynamics in Richmond, 1880-1913

It seemed that the voting statutes passed during this time, especially the 1902 Constitution, had a secondary effect on voter turnout. These statutes reinforced trends that were already taking place in Richmond. The reinforcing effect voting statutes had on the Richmond voter turnout is consistent with the Key/Burnham model. These scholars claim that after voter turnout began to fall voting statutes were passed, which further aided turnout falling.

On the state level and in the 3rd Congressional district, a different event sequence seems to have occurred. Party competition in presidential elections did not begin to dramatically decrease until 1900. Statewide turnout began to decline in 1896, two years after the Walton Act was passed. Turnout fell substantially in 1904, two years after the adoption of the new Constitution.

Voting --> Turnout --> Declining Party --> Even Lower
Statutes Declines Competition Turnout

Diagram 5.4: Statewide Dynamics, 1880-1913, Presidential Elections

The gubernatorial election dynamics are more difficult to understand. Turnout began to fall in 1889, but rose in 1901. As mentioned earlier, the 1901 gubernatorial race might have been an anomaly, because an independent Democrat was the party's nominee. It is hard to tell if the presence

of this independent Democratic nominee was responsible for the increased statewide turnout or if turnout was beginning an upward trend that was stunted by the effects of the 1902 Constitution.

Yet, even if the 1901 gubernatorial turnout was an anomaly, why did the statewide turnout rise but Richmond's did not? The answer to that question may be that the Democratic party officials outside of Richmond did not have the same kind of electoral control that their Richmond counterparts had. On the state level, the Republicans offered little challenge to the Democrats after the 1893 election, but by then, statewide gubernatorial turnout had already begun to decline. Although there is not much evidence to suggest that the 1901 gubernatorial turnout was anything more than anomaly, there is even less evidence to support the claim that declining party competition had more of an effect in driving turnout down than did voting statutes.

The 3rd district dynamics are also difficult to comprehend. Voter turnout began to fall after 1896, which was when party competition began to decline. This suggests that declining party competition did not directly influence falling turnout.

What may have occurred in the 3rd district was that the passage of the Walton Act in 1894 might have been

responsible for turnout beginning its fall after 1896. What also could have occurred was that voting statutes and declining party competition acted in tandem to drive turnout down. These dynamics offer little support for the Key/Burnham explanation for why turnout began to decline at this time. Although the dynamics in the 3rd district are not entirely consistent with the Cloward/Piven model, they do seem to coincide more with the Cloward/Piven explanation than the one offered by the Key/Burnham model.

What transpired on the state level and in the 3rd district raises an interesting point. It appears that different processes were occurring in Richmond and other areas of the state. After testing both theoretical models and finding that neither can fully explain the dynamics that occurred both in Richmond and in the state as a whole, it appears that a closer inspection of the different societal and systematic forces that may have been occurring throughout the state needs to be undertaken. In the next chapter, a closer inspection of these forces is offered, in the hope that a clearer explanation for why turnout began to decline in Richmond and in the state of Virginia will become more readily apparent.

6.0 Final Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

From the analysis in chapter 5 we can see that neither of the theoretical models fully explains the sequence of events that led to a decline in voter turnout in Richmond and in the state of Virginia during the period of 1880-1913. The Key/Burnham model's explanation of why voter turnout declined in the United States at this time appears to fit the dynamics found in Richmond but not on the state level. The reverse holds true for the Cloward/Piven model: the event sequence set forth in this model matches the dynamics found statewide but not the ones seen in Richmond.

In this chapter I will move from an analysis of the data to a discussion of the possible reasons why neither model adequately explained the conditions found in Richmond and statewide. In section 6.1 I will offer some hypotheses that explore the differences in electoral dynamics seen statewide and in Richmond. I close the chapter with suggestions for possible future research in this field.

6.1 Possible Explanations

Possible explanations for why neither of the competing models fully explained the events found both in Richmond and statewide rest firmly in the differences between factors

that affected the state and Richmond. This means that because the state encompassed Richmond and all other cities and towns, the dynamics that we saw statewide more than likely were the product of many forces, some of which might have been different than those found in Richmond at this time.

For example, one could make the argument that the different dynamics seen in Richmond and on the state level could have had been a result of different population trends. Yet, the different event sequences do not appear to be tied to population trends, because both the state and Richmond populations grew during the 1880-1913 period. Richmond's population doubled, and statewide the population increased by over 500,000 people.¹ Even though we do not know if the number of those eligible to vote increased as the population grew, we could assume that those eligible to vote both statewide and in Richmond increased in number, for we have no reason to assume otherwise.

One also could argue that the Democratic party gained dominance in Richmond sooner than it did statewide (which led to the initial turnout fall in the city), because Richmond had an electorate made up of people more likely to be Democratic partisans than did the state. We can test

¹ United States Census Reports, 1880,1890,1900, and 1910.

this hypothesis, at least partially, by examining the size of one group that apparently supported the Republican party throughout this period -- blacks. Both statewide and in Richmond the black population comprised roughly 35%-40% of the total population throughout the period.² Assuming that the black male population of voting age continued to rise as the total population grew, the only possible way that Democrats could restrict this solid source of Republican support from voting would be to legally prohibit them from voting or eliminate party competition (which would remove the most likely political party of choice -- the Republican -- of most black voters). What could have happened then was that the Democratic leaders in Richmond were more effective than their state counterparts in using illegal and legal means to prohibit blacks from voting, either before or after party competition declined. And as discussed in chapter 4, election and Democratic party officials, who were often one and the same, applied the various voting laws passed during this period in ways beneficial to the Democratic party.

Yet, it appears that it was more than just applying existing statutes in ways that restricted certain members of the electorate from voting that allowed the Democratic party

² Ibid.

to dominate elections and drive turnout down. In numerous elections, Democratic candidates justified the use of fraud, money and violence to disenfranchise blacks as a means to a desirable end -- white supremacy.³ And when their collective consciences began to bother them because they had to use extensive fraud to accomplish their goals, the Democrats would proclaim a Constitution that legally accomplished what the fraud and violence used to do -- eliminate blacks as voters and as threats to a white-dominated political culture. The use of fraud and violence to gain Democratic party dominance, and then, the use of legislation to further cement the control the Democrats had fits clearly with the model established by Key and Burnham.

What I am suggesting is that statewide patterns of voting turnout more than likely were a product of dynamics and systematic forces found in numerous localities. Obviously Richmond, as the most urban and most populous area of the state, contributed greatly to turnout decreasing overall statewide. Yet, other dynamics had to be taking place throughout the rest of the state to cause the event sequences to be different statewide from that in Richmond.

³ Ronald E. Shibley, "Election Laws and Electoral Practices in Virginia, 1867-1902: An Administrative and Political History," Unpublished dissertation, (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia, 1972), pp.113, 147.

It is entirely possible that Democratic leaders in the rural areas of the state had a more difficult time gaining electoral control than did their colleagues in Richmond. That may be why declining voter turnout statewide seemed to be more a result of the voting statutes that aimed to restrict voting than declining two party competition. If Democratic leaders had a tough time gaining control of the electorate in areas of the state other than Richmond, these leaders may have had to rely on the passage of the various voting statutes to drive turnout down before they could gain control of elections.

Other factors also might have played a role in producing the different dynamics found in Richmond and on the state level. For example, as seen with the motivations of the Democratic officials in Richmond, there might have been extensive social pressure in Richmond and in other areas of the state inhabited by large numbers of blacks (the so-called black belt areas) to destroy two party competition in order to reduce the role the blacks could have had in deciding elections. The desire to seriously undercut the potential of black votes determining election outcomes did lead directly to the passage of the 1902 Constitution.

What I am leading up to is that the electoral dynamics seen in Richmond and statewide during this time suggest that an alternate model, based on components found in the

Key/Burnham and Cloward/Piven models, might be more appropriate in explaining what happened regarding turnout in Richmond and Virginia overall. As shown earlier, the Democratic party in Richmond was able to remove its political party opposition first, which caused voting turnout to fall. So, Richmond and other black-belt areas of the state began the process of driving voter turnout down by eliminating two-party competition.

Because the violence and fraud necessary to force turnout to fall disturbed their sense of political honor (or just plain bothered their collective consciences), the Democratic leaders in the black-belt areas pushed successfully for statutory changes that accomplished what the violence and corruption used to -- electoral supremacy. But the statutory changes had another effect, which was the disenfranchisement of poor whites and blacks in other parts of the state.

As discussed before, Democratic party leaders in Southwestern and Western counties had a difficult time eliminating Republican opposition. It was only after various statutes, primarily the 1902 Constitution, were in force that turnout fell (as poor whites and blacks, many of whom were Republican supporters, were disenfranchised) and soon afterward, the Democratic party took control of the Western and Southwestern regions of the state electorally.

Thus, the electoral dynamics in Richmond and other black-belt areas ultimately impacted the dynamics found in other parts of the state. The relationship between the black-belt regions and other areas of the state would account for in large part why party competition was the driving force behind turnout falling in Richmond while voting statutes brought statewide turnout down. The Democratic party leaders in Richmond eliminated party competition, voting turnout began to fall, and then, voting statutes were passed that further cemented the lack of party competition and falling turnout. The voting statutes that were passed also had the effect of starting the process in Western and Southwestern Virginia that led to turnout falling.

The Key/Burnham model seemed to explain more aptly the dynamics in Richmond, while the Cloward/Piven model better matched the statewide dynamics. As discussed above, though, the Richmond electoral dynamics seemed to have had a noticeable impact on the dynamics found in the other areas of the state. Consequently, a model that takes into account the effect of the interaction between the dynamics in Richmond (and black-belt areas more generally) and other areas of the state would more than likely get at the true nature of what occurred in Richmond and the state at that time. Figure 6.1 presents such a model.

- 1) Decreased Party Competition in Black-Belt Areas
- ↓
- 2) Lower Voter Turnout in Black-Belt Areas
- ↓
- 3) Voting Statutes Passed to Cement Conditions in Black-Belt Areas
- ↓
- 4) Voting Statutes Drive Down Turnout in Non Black-Belt Areas
- ↓
- 5) Turnout Falls in Non Black-Belt Areas
- ↓
- 6) Party Competition Decreases in Non Black-Belt Areas

Figure 6.1: Aughenbaugh Model

Steps 1-3 correspond with the event sequence found in the Key/Burnham model, which seemed to have explained the dynamics found in Richmond and other black-belt areas of Virginia. Steps 4-6 match the event sequence called for in the Cloward/Piven model, which more aptly explained the electoral dynamics found statewide.

Though I am unable to claim that the Western and Southwestern regions of the state had voter turnout fall due to the passage of certain laws because I only examined Richmond and statewide data, the turnout and party competition data at the state level support the notion that the passage of voting statutes could have had an impact on turnout in the Western and Southwestern parts of the state. The electoral dynamics found statewide and in Richmond indicate that neither theoretical model being tested in this study aptly explains the event sequence seen on both levels of analysis. However, when one combines the event sequence

of the Key/Burnham model with that of the Cloward/Piven model, the resulting model does a better job of offering a plausible explanation for why voter turnout began to decline first in Richmond and then in Virginia at the turn of the 20th century.

6.2 Future Research

The different dynamics found in Richmond and statewide hint at some possible avenues that future research could take in trying to understand the root causes of declining voter turnout in the United States. Future work should go beyond inspecting solely state level data and look at the states' component parts. The differences in electoral dynamics that apparently existed between Richmond and other areas of the state suggest that all districts or counties in a state should be explored. Maybe other states, like Virginia, had systematic forces, like different economic bases, cultural norms, ethnic/racial mixes, and population concentrations, acting upon turnout that varied statewide. These distinctions could shed some light on the ultimate effect that party competition and voting statutes had on all parts of a state's voter turnout and not just the aggregate turnout found on the state level.

Future work also should compare event sequences seen in states located in different geographic areas of the country.

If urban and rural areas of one state acted electorally different ways, maybe heavily populated states had different experiences than sparsely populated, largely rural states. Also, as numerous scholars have pointed out, the political parties controlled different areas of the country, and thus, they might have used different means to restrict voting or gain electoral stability. Comparing the experiences found in different areas of the country might shed some light on how the parties dealt with the different groups that populated some areas of the country, like ethnic groups in the Northeast, and not others. Ultimately, comparing what happened in different parts of the country could paint a clearer picture of the root causes that led to declining voter turnout throughout the United States at the turn of the 20th century.

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