

Patronage Regimes and American Party Development from 'The Age of Jackson' to the Progressive Era

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This article introduces the concept of *patronage regimes* and, through it, extends the research on American party development. No systematic empirical inquiry into the operation of American patronage practices has yet been undertaken. Its analysis investigates the strategic allocation of public jobs by party elites to enhance cadre performance in presidential elections. Utilizing a dataset of 49,000 Senate-confirmed, presidential appointments, presidential patronage removals between the years 1829 and 1917 are analysed. Two distinctive patronage regimes are identified: an antebellum regime structured by *pure-and-simple spoils politics* and a postbellum regime conforming to principles of *machine rationality*. Factors central to the process of regime transformation are pinpointed. The presence of two successive patronage regimes highlights the importance of endogenous political incentives and elite strategic choice to the emergent character of party organization, shedding new light on the historical development of these pre-eminent nineteenth-century American political institutions.

The nineteenth-century patronage party occupies an almost iconic status among students of American political history. For this reason, it has been the object of both intense scholarly veneration and vilification. On the one hand, it is shown that the patronage mechanism – with its central promise of public employment in exchange for victorious partisan labour – drew unprecedented numbers of ordinary citizens into the channels of political life, swelling the ranks of partisan organizations and institutionalizing their place in the regular machinery of democratic politics. These ordinary citizens in turn mobilized an entire country, igniting intense voter passions and stimulating historically high levels of mass participation in the rituals of republican government. The provision of public jobs to ordinary citizens had the further effect of democratizing the administration of government, radically reducing the social distance between citizens and government officials and rendering routine government decision making substantially more responsive to constituent interests.¹

On the other hand, the patronage mechanism is simultaneously indicted for fostering two venal associations of office seekers – the Democratic and Whig/Republican parties – each of whom routinely sidestepped the nation's most pressing policy issues because such controversies jeopardized an often precarious electoral status and threatened the

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¹ Arthur Schlesinger Jr, *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1945); William E. Nelson, 'Officeholding and Powerwielding: An Analysis of the Relationship between Structure and Style in American Administrative History', *Law & Society Review*, 10 (1976), 187–233; Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865–1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); of these literatures are: Joel Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838–1893* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1991); Robert Wiebe, *Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

satisfaction of parochial aspirations and acquisitive appetites. In related fashion, scholars lament the manner in which patronage parties organized voters into politics: kindling distributive interests and ethno-cultural identities and submerging more fundamental material and ideological differences. More broadly still, the patronage party has been criticized for stoking Americans' latent cultural antipathy towards government power through recurrent exposés of organizational graft, corruption and abuses of power. Finally, scholars have condemned these patronage organizations for their tenacious resistance to administrative reform and for the ways in which such rearguard actions subsequently distorted the development of a modern American bureaucratic state.²

One thing party scholars of all stripes would seem to agree on is the *non-developmental* character of American patronage parties. Whether consciously or not, the contemporary literature on political parties provides us with only a static depiction of this classic American institution. In these writings, the patronage party operates sometimes as an agent of change, sometimes as an antagonist to change. But never is it understood as *an object of change in itself*. What is offered here is a corrective to this standard frame, a dynamic analysis of the American patronage party, one sensitive to the dimension of time and to the possibility of organizational evolution. It is true that much has already been written on the subject of nineteenth-century political parties. Yet from the vantage point of modern social science, we know substantially more about these entities as *partisan* organizations than we do as *patronage* organizations. Though many fine studies of patronage practice do exist, most of these are either anecdotal in nature or narrow in their historical focus.³ To date, no temporally-broad and systematic empirical analysis exists to shed light on the routine patterns of political management exhibited by these early institutions of mass democratic politics. It is still more striking that no scholarly investigation asks whether these political organizations changed over time, adapting rationally in response to the shifting historical needs and structural incentives of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century politics.

This article takes aim at this static portrait of American patronage parties. It identifies and analyses two distinctive and stable patronage regimes in American political history,

² Theodore Lowi, 'Party, Policy, and Constitution in America', in William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham, eds, *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Mark W. Summers, *The Plundering Generation: Corruption and the Crisis of the Union, 1849–1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Richard Oestreicher, 'Urban Working-Class Political Behavior and Theories of American Electoral Politics', *Journal of American History*, 74 (1988), 1257–86; Mark W. Summers, *The Era of Good Stealings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862–1928* (Princeton, Conn.: Princeton University Press, 2001). A provocative analysis that locates patronage parties at the centre of Progressive Era party reform initiatives (at least as regards the direct primary) is in Alan Ware, *The American Direct Primary: Party Institutionalization and Transformation in the North* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³ See, for example, Carl Russell Fish, 'Lincoln and the Patronage', *American Historical Review*, 8 (1902), 54–5; Erik McKinley Eriksson, 'The Federal Civil Service under President Jackson', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 13 (1927), 517–40; Dorothy Ganfield Fowler, *The Cabinet Politician: The Postmasters General, 1829–1909* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); Joseph L. Bristow, *Fraud and Politics at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Exposition Press, 1952); Leonard D. White, *The Jacksonians: A Study in Administrative History, 1829–1861* (New York: Macmillan, 1954); Leonard D. White, *The Republican Era: A Study in Administrative History, 1869–1901* (New York: Macmillan, 1958); Harlan Hahn, 'President Taft and the Discipline of Patronage', *Journal of Politics*, 28 (1966), 368–90; Carl E. Prince, *New Jersey's Jeffersonian Republicans: Genesis of an Early Party Machine, 1789–1817* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

an antebellum regime structured by what I term *pure-and-simple spoils politics* and a post-Reconstruction Era regime conforming to textbook principles of *machine politics*. A transition period roughly coequal with the era of Civil War and Reconstruction is also examined to identify factors driving the process of regime breakdown and transformation. A regime perspective on the American patronage system stresses that system's regularized operations, along with the rules and norms around which party behaviour typically converged. Antebellum spoils politics was fundamentally distributive in nature, its purpose being to spread the fruits of party victory as widely as possible. It was animated by the need to recruit party workers and, more fundamentally, to legitimize the presence of these novel partisan organizations in a deeply antiparty political culture. Postbellum machine politics manifested a decidedly more managerial or regulatory dimension. In its operating principles, it shared more in common with the business enterprise or the military organization than with the antebellum spoils organization. While patronage remained a 'carrot' to induce labour recruits, it was also used increasingly to improve cadre discipline and enhance electoral performance in presidential elections.

To facilitate my analysis I employ an original dataset of 49,000 presidential-level patronage appointments spanning the years 1829–1917. In the main body of this article, I use this data to compare the electoral uses of federal patronage in four consecutive historical eras: the antebellum 'Age of Jackson' (1829–61), the period of Civil War and Reconstruction (1861–77), the Gilded Age (1877–97), and the Progressive Era (1897–1917). This analysis is largely an exercise in *comparative statics*, one that allows me both to identify and to contrast two relatively stable patronage regimes, each organized according to distinctive political principles and functions. Following this, I utilize the dataset to develop an analysis of regime breakdown and transformation. This is largely an exercise in *temporal dynamics*. Here I pay particular attention to the transition years 1861–77 – with special focus on the election of 1864 – and to historical forces at work in the years after Reconstruction, to account for the factors sustaining regime change over time. This section additionally serves as a check on the robustness of my previous findings.

PATRONAGE PARTIES IN THE AMERICAN PARTY LITERATURE

Patronage parties were intimately involved in the construction of the nineteenth-century American polity. More importantly for my purposes here, the regular operations of that polity also fed back upon these party organizations, altering their strategic priorities and reshaping their internal needs and practices.⁴ This reciprocal causality between polity and party has not been adequately examined in the American party literature. Otherwise separate lines of analysis converge in the neglect of the patronage party as *itself* an object of development. Instead, this political institution has been relegated to the status of an independent variable. Rarely is the American patronage party analysed as a dependent

⁴ On polity feedback and political development, see Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); Paul Pierson, *Dismantling the Welfare State? Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Retrenchment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Robert Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Jacob S. Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State: The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

variable, except of course when accounting for either the rise or demise of this particular form of partisan organization.

Why (Patronage) Parties?

This non-developmental approach to the American patronage party is apparent in the best scholarship on party development, wherein it is depicted as a relatively simple labour recruitment device and historical half-way house, linking Jeffersonian and Federalist gentry-parties – with their networks of elite obligation and deference – to a modern candidate-centred era variously characterized as ‘post-partisan’ or as heralding the rise of a ‘new American party’.⁵ To be fair, the patronage character of these parties is not the central concern of these authors (itself a suggestion of its marginalized place in the study of American party development). The patronage mechanism is handled mostly as historical backdrop, pervasive and unchanging – an analytic constant – and therefore unproblematically abstracted away from. More important for my purposes, when the patronage feature of party organization is broached, it is to offer it up as the solution to a specific collective action problem, that of motivating private citizens to become party activists and take up the arduous task of voter mobilization. The problem is reduced to this: how did early American parties obtain a cadre of workers sufficient to contest a national presidential campaign? Since party policies are ‘public goods’ – that is, once enacted, no supporter can be excluded from enjoying their benefits – labour contributions to the party campaign should have been under-supplied. The answer of course was patronage – well-paid public jobs – a selective incentive with the power to induce participation in the otherwise profitless process of electioneering.

However, recruitment is only the first use to which patronage might be put. To begin with, successful parties depend not only upon a requisite *quantity* of labour to contest elections; they also require some threshold level of job performance. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that patronage might also be used to improve the *quality* of cadre electioneering effort. Indeed, since the marginal contribution of any party worker to the presidential outcome is generally quite small, party leaders should have frequently confronted the problem of shirking, especially by party workers currently holding patronage jobs (since they had already received their payoff for past service). The reduction of shirking among party officeholders required a more efficient contract design. It could not be reached through simple admonitions to ‘work hard – because if the party loses, you’ll lose your job’. No party leader could promise an officeholder that hard work would necessarily yield party victory, since electoral fortune turned not on *individual effort*, but on *collective effort* and assorted *intangibles* (like the state of the economy) that were well beyond the control of individual party members. It was a classic collective action problem: the organizational effort required to win the presidency was so vast in scope that no party

⁵ Ronald P. Formisano, ‘Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic’s Political Culture, 1789–1840’, *American Political Science Review*, 68 (1974), 473–87; Ronald P. Formisano, ‘Federalists and Republicans: Parties, Yes – System, No’, in Paul Kleppner, ed., *The Evolution of American Party Systems* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), pp. 33–76; William Crotty, *American Parties in Decline*, 2nd edn (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1984); Joseph A. Schlesinger, *Political Parties and the Winning of Office* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); John Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origins and Transformation of American Political Parties* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

worker could reasonably link his personal effort to the outcome of the November contest. This was particularly true for the officeholding cadre. Having secured the fruits of party service, these activists had less incentive to maintain their prior level of energy, efficiency and even loyalty in the absence of a more sophisticated patronage system – one that included the threat of removal from office.

Patronage Parties in America's Party Period

A constricted representation of American patronage parties also holds sway in scholarship specifically addressing the patronage era. This work can be organized along three different lines according to how parties are seen to relate to their political environment. A first line employs 'party' as a broad periodizing scheme to delineate the normative and behavioural foundations of a historically distinctive social order. Scholars working within this framework refer alternatively to 'the shrine of party', 'the party period' or a partisan 'political nation', each referring to a stable set of characteristic historical patterns: passionate voter allegiances, high turnout rates, immersion in the symbolic rituals of public partisan life, and, of course, the spoils system. These features define the politics of the party era and distinguish it from American politics 'after the fall' – the politics of a more characteristically post-partisan or neo-partisan political order.⁶ While an important political watershed is certainly located in the contrast, this emphasis on partisan order nevertheless biases scholars towards analytic continuity in party operations, encouraging a non-developmental perspective on the patronage party itself, except as it might bear on the progressive deterioration of partisan values and their displacement by non-partisan forms and practices (e.g., the direct primary, the Australian ballot, split-ticket voting, the administrative state).

A second line of inquiry highlights the creative role historically played by American patronage parties as instruments of political change. This characterization is most readily associated with the realignment paradigm.⁷ Here, the patronage party operates as the principal engine of political change, toppling once-dominant coalitions, reorienting programmatic commitments and re-calibrating the size and functions of national governing institutions. However, although new partisan organizations certainly emerge within the realignment framework (and just as certainly expire), and while the political fortunes of parties certainly rise and fall within particular party systems, we are once again left with little direct evidence of party-organizational evolution outside the standard tripartite classification scheme previously sketched above:

⁶ Skowronek, *Building a New American State*; Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865–1928*; Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838–1893*. However, see Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000). 'After the Fall' is the title of the concluding chapter in Silbey, *The American Political Nation*.

⁷ Burnham, *Critical Elections*; William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham, *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Kleppner, ed., *The Evolution of American Electoral Systems*; James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*, 2nd edn rev. (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983); David Brady, *Critical Elections and Congressional Policy Making* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988); Jerome M. Clubb et al., *Partisan Realignment: Voters, Parties, and Government in American History* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990); Shefter, *Political Parties and the State*.

Pre-Partisan → Patronage Partisan → Post-Partisan/Neo-Partisan

A third and final body of work depicts patronage parties not as agents of change, but rather as entrenched regime defenders, with sustained collective effort necessary to ‘extort’ reform from these hopelessly bloated spoils organizations. This more critical stance towards patronage parties has been used to illuminate various facets of ‘American exceptionalism’: the absence of an American labour party; the arrested development of national administrative capacities; the laggard development of a national welfare state; and the rise of the modern institutional presidency.⁸ Patronage parties are central in this literature because they represent the political *status quo*, having ensconced themselves in the sinews of the American state. In this depiction, parties are principally reactive: they dig in their heels and resist innovation, and in so doing they set severe limits on significant political change. Once again, however, patronage parties themselves do not change. Their activities are relatively fixed and principally parasitic, content to feed off a growing stream of public offices, contracts and other assorted perks of public power.

There is much still to learn about the operations of American patronage parties. Did these institutions use public jobs simply to recruit able-bodied party workers? Or, was patronage also a more sophisticated instrument of party management? Do we exhaust our understanding of patronage parties when we place them in the political field as independent actors, creating new social systems, changing national priorities and defending their organizational welfare? Patronage parties exercised their agency in a complex and uncertain political environment, and it seems premature to conclude that these organizations remained untouched by these same environmental pressures – at least until we have systematically sifted through the available empirical evidence.

DATA AND METHOD

To address these and other questions, I use LOGIT analysis to explore patronage removal patterns in four historical periods: the Jacksonian Era (1829–61), the period of Civil War and Reconstruction (1861–77), the Gilded Age (1877–97), and the Progressive Era (1897–1917). My use of these four eras draws largely upon the longstanding periodization practices of American political historians and historically-oriented political scientists.⁹ Their utility as units of analysis is further underscored by the periodization conventions used by American party scholars, who have written extensively on the second or Jacksonian party system, the Civil War or realigning phase of the third-party system, the stable-phase of the third-party system and the so-called ‘System of 1896’.¹⁰ To avoid confusion, I should be clear at the outset that I do not intend this analysis to be either a

⁸ Skowronek, *Building a New American State*; Theodore Lowi, *The Personal President* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*; Shefter, *Parties and the State*; Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line*.

⁹ White, *The Jacksonians*; White, *The Republican Era*; Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997); Richard Franklin Bense, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1839–1877* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Bense, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Polsky, ‘Partisan Regimes’.

¹⁰ Burnham, *Critical Elections*; Chambers and Burnham, *The American Party Systems*; Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853–1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Kleppner, *The Evolution of American Electoral Systems*.

test or a defence of critical realignment theory, nor do my results depend upon the status of that much maligned construct. In fact, the patterns discussed in this article will be found not to track shifts in party system structure reliably. Rather, regime change will be shown to have emerged piecemeal over the course of the nineteenth century. The cut points I adopt here are merely part of a strategy to ground this study in units of analysis with roots in conventional practice. While no *a priori* periodization scheme is unassailable, the periods employed here provide us with analytic units that are at once internally differentiated, substantively meaningful, and reasonably non-arbitrary. Moreover, with variance over time in the electoral incentives facing party organizations, we are provided with substantive markers with which to locate shifts in the temporal pattern of patronage allocation. Later in the article, a more inductive analytic approach will substantially confirm the robustness of these findings.

Given my specific focus on the allocation of presidential patronage, I have operationalized period cut points using the opening and closing dates of appropriate presidential administrations. For example, the first president of the Jacksonian Era, Andrew Jackson, took office on 4 March 1829, while the last Jacksonian Democrat, James Buchanan, left the White House on 3 March 1861. Thus I operationalize the Jacksonian Era as being bounded by these two dates. Similarly, the Era of Civil War and Reconstruction begins with the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln on 4 March 1861 and ends with the ‘Compromise of 1877’ and the end of the second Grant Administration on 3 March of that year. The Gilded Age begins on 4 March 1877 with the inauguration of Rutherford B. Hayes and ends with the conclusion of Benjamin Harrison’s administration on 3 March 1897. Finally, the Progressive Era is bounded on the one side by William McKinley’s first administration, which begins on 4 March 1897, and on the other side by the end of the first Woodrow Wilson administration on 3 March 1917.¹¹

My dependent variable is comprised of more than 49,000 domestic, Senate-confirmed presidential appointments made between the years 1829 and 1917, as recorded in the *Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States* (volumes 4–51). The principal offices found in the dataset are postmasters, customs officials, legal officers, public land officials and assorted revenue collectors – the heart of the patronage system in American national politics. These data are used to investigate the electoral parameters of a simple binary choice, whether a sitting president should remove an incumbent official from office (coded 1) or reappoint him (coded 0).

What actions count as a removal from office? First, I code as a removal all *early terminations* (dismissals and suspensions made prior to the expiration of an incumbent’s commission) and, secondly, all *expired commissions* (instances in which an incumbent’s

¹¹ While my choice of 1897 to begin the Progressive Era might seem unconventional, it is not unreasonable. First, the origins of Western Progressivism are directly rooted in the Populist agitation of the 1880s and 1890s, a political movement that climaxed in the dramatic presidential election of 1896. Second, recent scholarship on William McKinley has recast him in many ways as ‘the first modern president’, exercising effective leadership over Congress, anticipating Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson in their use of the press and public opinion, and showing himself to be more reform minded than previously scholarship had allowed. (It was, after all, the great Progressive reformer Robert M. La Follette, himself a ‘devoted admirer’ of McKinley, who remarked that the president ‘represented “the newer view,” and “on the great questions arising was generally on the side of the public against the private interests.”’) On William McKinley’s presidency see, see Margaret Leech, *In the Days of McKinley* (New York: Harper, 1959); H. Wayne Morgan, *McKinley and His America* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1963); and, especially, Lewis L. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995). Robert La Follette is quoted in William E. Binkley, *President and Congress*, 3rd edn rev. (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 228–9.

commission has elapsed and the president has declined to reappoint). Because the *Senate Executive Journal* records instances in which incumbent officers died, voluntarily resigned their positions, or otherwise declined renomination, we can be reasonably confident that this second category identifies a universe of incumbents otherwise willing to continue in office except for a president's decision to terminate their employment. Reappointments also include a small subset of officials who either were promoted or transferred (roughly 0.2 per cent of the dataset).¹²

The independent variables used here model a president's decision to remove or reappoint a sitting administrative official.¹³ The variables of interest specify the structure of the presidential electoral environment, tapping several salient features of the partisan electioneering process. Taken together, they identify situations in which parties had strong incentives to employ patronage removals as an instrument of electoral discipline, to punish poor organizational performance in presidential elections or motivate higher levels of partisan effort in future contests. Whether or not patterns of patronage allocation were responsive to these incentives, of course, is the question my analysis seeks to answer.

State electoral vote share measures a state's relative importance in presidential competition, based on the size of its Electoral College vote share. If parties seek greater organizational efficiency in states rich in the electoral votes necessary to presidential victory, removal rates should vary positively with increases in electoral vote shares. *Statewide presidential margin of victory* focuses on the level of electoral competitiveness in state presidential races, measuring the absolute difference in popular vote shares between the two candidates with the highest levels of support. If parties seek greater organizational efficiency in hotly contested races, removal rates in a given state should vary inversely with the size of a president's electoral margin. *Statewide turnout volatility* is a proxy for patterns of temporal instability in statewide turnout rates. This measure utilizes the standard deviation of a state's mean level of voter turnout in presidential races, with each state value calculated anew for each of our four political eras. If parties seek to ensure that their supporters get to the polls on election day, removal rates should vary positively with volatility in turnout rates. Lastly, *statewide third-party voting volatility* is a proxy for the patterns of temporal instability in statewide third-party voting for presidential elections. This measure utilizes the standard deviation of a state's mean third-party presidential vote share, with each state value calculated anew for each of our four political eras. If parties seek to punish defections and reimpose partisan loyalty, removal rates in a given state should vary positively with increasing volatility in third-party voting.

Three dichotomous control variables are also used in the analysis. *Presidential party rotation* takes a value of 1 where a presidential election displaces the incumbent party from office and 0 where the incumbent party is returned. This variable takes account of systematic differences in presidential patronage practice between returning incumbent parties and parties newly out of power. *Democratic president* takes a value of 1 if the incumbent president is a member of the Democratic party and 0 if a Whig or Republican.

¹² The appendix provides a fuller discussion of the construction of my dependent variable.

¹³ Principal data sources used in the construction of my independent variables are *Guide to U.S. Elections* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press Inc., 1975); Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, *Candidate and Constituency Statistics of Elections in the United States, 1788–1990* [Computer file]. Fifth ICPSR ed. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [producer and distributor], 1994); United States. Bureau of the Census. 1976. *The Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970).

This variable isolates systematic partisan differences in patronage practices. *Southern offices* takes a value of 1 for patronage offices located in Southern states (defined here as those states that seceded to form the Confederacy during the American Civil War) and 0 otherwise. It is meant to control for systematic sectional differences in presidential patronage practice.

Finally, Beck *et al.* describe the pitfalls of assuming temporal independence in BTSCS data (time-series–cross-section data with a binary dependent variable).¹⁴ Temporally-related observations in LOGIT and PROBIT analysis can lead to incorrect estimates of standard errors. Because it was unlikely that the individual patronage appointments used in this analysis are statistically unrelated over time, I added a series of dummy variables to the base LOGIT specification (one for each year) and conducted a standard likelihood-ratio test of the hypothesis that the coefficients on each year dummy variable would be equal to 0. In this instance, the null hypothesis of temporal independence is rejected (prob. $\chi^2 \geq 0$) and the dummy variables were retained in the final multivariate analysis (though they are not reported in Table 1).

PARTY ROTATION AND THE PATRONAGE SYSTEM

Figure 1 frames my initial discussion. It tracks aggregate trends in the disposition of presidential patronage across each of our four political eras. Figure 1A depicts one of the more significant (if least surprising) patterns in the data. Party rotation in the White House was a critical factor motivating the decision to remove a federal jobholder from office. In each political era, partisan turnover precipitated a purge of sitting incumbents – this was one of the defining features of the ‘party period’. Indeed, based on Figure 1, it seems reasonable to conclude that the deepening civil service reform pressures of the post-Civil War Era placed few practical constraints on presidents seeking to replace opposition appointees with party loyalists. Removal rates were historically lowest during the Jacksonian Era, a likely barometer of the period’s still lingering discomfort with the newly deployed patronage system. However, with the coming of the Civil War and the rise to power of an electorally vulnerable Republican party, even this modest trepidation seems to evaporate, as removal rates rose sharply in this period. Removal rates in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era retreat only slightly from this Civil War high.

Perhaps a more unexpected finding is the changing character of patronage removals over time. Figure 1B reports removal rates in each political era arising from either early terminations or the expiration of incumbent commissions. The pattern is clear: From the antebellum ‘Age of Jackson’ to the close of Reconstruction (1829–77), the probability of incumbent removal by early termination was roughly four to five times more frequent than by expired commission. By the Gilded Age, however, this pattern has reversed itself, with removals through expired commissions now representing a substantially larger percentage of all removals. With the advent of the Progressive Era that reversal is complete, with removals by failure to reappoint almost six times more frequent than those by early terminations.

It is likely that we are observing here the combined effects of presidential politics and civil service norms upon the party patronage system. By the Gilded Age, the civil service

¹⁴ Nathaniel Beck, *et al.*, ‘Taking Time Seriously: Time-Series – Cross-Section Analysis with a Binary Dependent Variable’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 42 (1998), 1260–88.

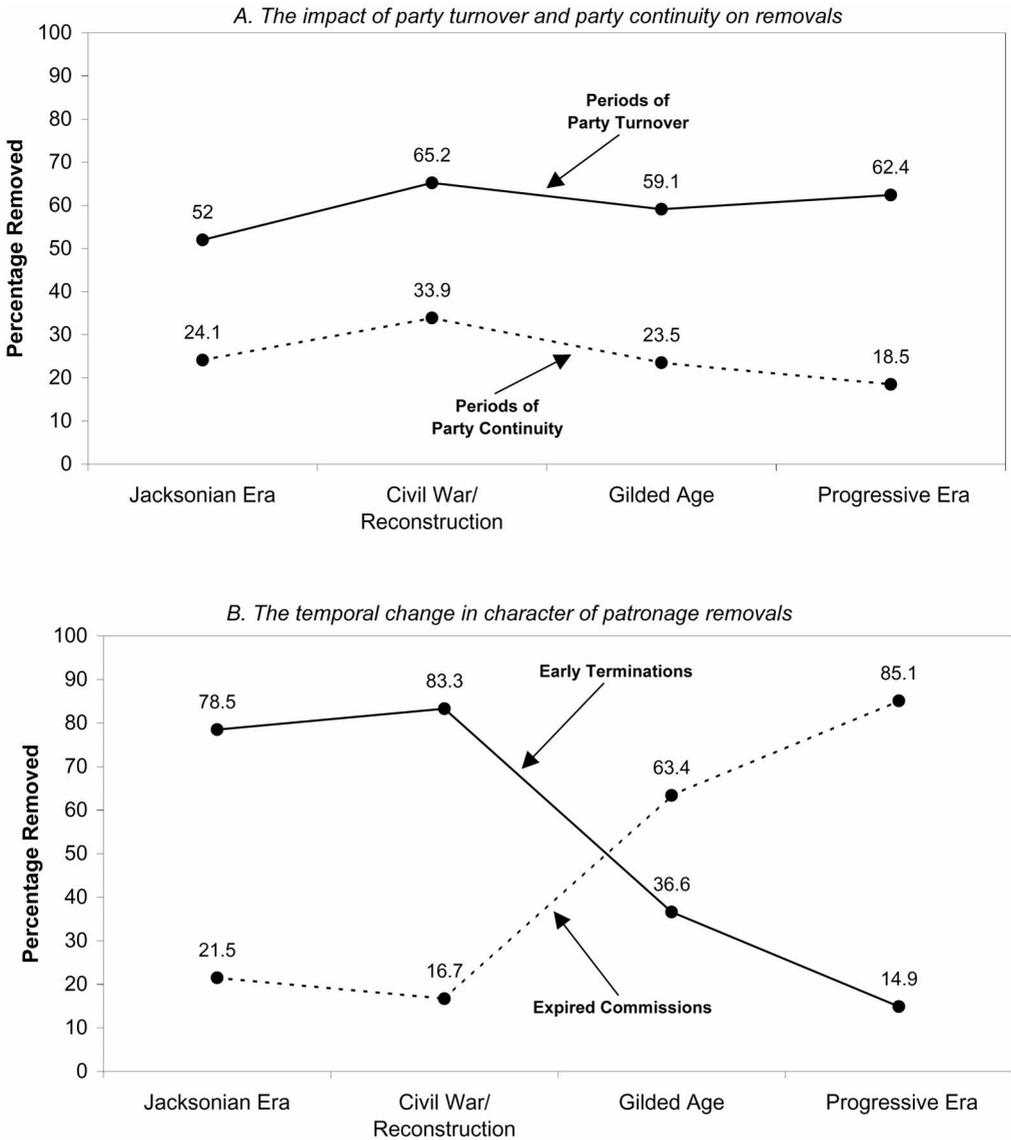


Fig. 1. Aggregate removal patterns across four regime periods

reform movement was politically influential – at least in those states that mattered most to party strategists preoccupied with winning presidential elections.¹⁵ For example, when administrative-reform advocate Grover Cleveland was elected governor of New York in 1882, that event sent shockwaves through the national Republican party because of that state’s pivotal status as a ‘swing state’ in presidential elections. Cleveland’s election and

¹⁵ Scott C. James, *Presidents, Parties, and the State: A Party System Perspective on Democratic Regulatory Choice, 1884–1936* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chap. 2.

the new found electoral clout of civil service reformers in other such battleground states were central motivations pressing the Republican-dominated 47th Congress to pass the landmark Pendleton Act of 1883. As one Republican senator remarked during a floor debate on the Pendleton Bill, ‘We are not legislating on this subject in response to our own judgment ... but in response to some sort of judgment which has been expressed outside.’¹⁶ These same political and electoral forces also made subsequent presidents more sensitive to the most blatant forms of partisan dismissal from office. As such practices grew politically untenable, presidents responded by biding their time and waiting for a commission to formally expire before appointing their partisan allies.¹⁷

This finding does not diminish remarks made previously. Early efforts to reform the civil service were at best a limited success, especially if one understands a key tenet of the merit service to be the commitment to rewarding competent officials with a long and uninterrupted tenure in office. Party rotation in office proceeded apace, albeit in somewhat altered form. Still, it seems reasonable to conclude that presidential electoral politics and civil service norms did succeed in constraining the responsiveness of the rotation system, as parties were forced to maintain at least an initial posture of political neutrality towards current officeholders until their term of office expired.

COMPARATIVE STATICS: A PORTRAIT OF PATRONAGE FUNCTIONS IN TWO REGIME PERIODS

This section reports evidence of two distinctive patronage regimes embedded within our four political eras: an antebellum patronage regime (1829–61) founded upon principles of pure-and-simple spoils politics and a redeployed post-Reconstruction patronage regime (1877–1917) exhibiting most of the hallmarks of machine rationality and patronage discipline. Table 1 reports LOGIT estimates of the probability of removal for each independent variable in each of the four periods considered. The regression constant has been suppressed to allow comparison across all four periods.

Regime Patterns in Presidential Elections

The Gilded Age and the ‘textbook’ machine. The Gilded Age offers an instructive starting point for our regime analysis. Here empirical patterns most clearly conform to textbook notions of American party organizations as ‘electoral machines’, with patronage used to exact greater loyalty, discipline and efficiency from a party cadre in an uncertain electoral marketplace. It was a military-styled system of sorts, in the words of Gilded Age party boss Thomas C. Platt of New York, who further premised his use of patronage discipline on the need to run a political party like a business enterprise:

A political organization should be conducted upon the simplest principles of business. Merit and devotion should be rewarded. Demerit and treachery should be condemned and examples made of those guilty of them ...

... In choosing my lieutenants and candidates, I invariably insisted upon the qualification that the man must know enough to ‘stand when hitched’. The list of those who have ignored or

¹⁶ Ari Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils: A History of the Civil Service Reform Movement, 1865–1883* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), p. 251.

¹⁷ Bristow, *Fraud and Politics*; William Lyne Wilson, *The Cabinet Diary of William L. Wilson, 1896–1897* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1957).

TABLE 1 *LOGIT Estimates of the Probability of Removal in Four Political Eras*

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Jacksonian Era</i>		<i>Civil War/ Reconstruction</i>		<i>Gilded Age</i>		<i>Progressive Era</i>	
	β	<i>s.e.</i>	β	<i>s.e.</i>	β	<i>s.e.</i>	β	<i>s.e.</i>
Presidential Party Rotation	1.1904	0.3328**	5.6759	1.0914**	6.2582	0.9209**	3.1172	0.4491**
State Electoral Vote Share	0.0003	0.0044	-0.0031	0.0035	0.0137	0.0035**	-0.0127	0.0012**
Statewide Presidential Margin of Victory	-0.0015	0.0029	-0.0060	0.0025*	-0.0176	0.0033**	-0.0043	0.0017**
Statewide Turnout Volatility	-0.0161	0.0118	0.0473	0.0079**	0.0198	0.0088*	0.0242	0.0045**
Statewide Third-Party Voting Volatility	-0.0142	0.0074*	0.0330	0.0184	0.0376	0.0063**	0.0278	0.0053**
Democratic President	-0.7089	0.3877	-	-	-1.8433	0.8731*	2.0029	0.4798**
Southern Offices	-1.0150	0.1136**	0.6197	0.1008**	0.6302	0.0998**	0.4691	0.0625**
Log likelihood	-19,273.73							
N	49,199							

Note: Year-effect dummy variables are included in the equation, but are not reported above. Constant suppressed to facilitate comparison across political eras. ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Table reports robust standard errors.

defined this rule would fill a large volume. And that has made it necessary for me, as an organization chief, to reluctantly and sometimes mercilessly administer punishment to a subordinate. Only in this way can the discipline of any body of men be enforced.¹⁸

As we will see, neither Platt specifically nor Gilded Age political parties generally were unique in their adherence to machine principles. Rather, it was a *regime feature* endemic to post-Reconstruction Era patronage organizations. As I will discuss more fully later in the article, electoral vulnerabilities associated with Civil War and its aftermath provided the initial catalyst for the breakdown of the antebellum patronage order, with the presidential elections of 1864–72 in particular marking a transition phase between stable regime periods. However, it is clear that political parties of the Gilded Age constituted the high-water mark for electorally-rational patronage organizations, with removal rates within a state rising (1) as its presidential vote margins becomes more competitive, (2) as both voter turnout and third-party voting grow increasingly volatile, and (3) as the number of electoral votes at stake in a given state increase in size.

Intensely competitive presidential elections fuelled the strong electoral preoccupation of Gilded Age patronage parties. National two-party victory margins averaged a mere 1.5 per cent between the years 1876 and 1892. With a fine line separating victory from defeat, Gilded Age parties sought to bring eligible voters to the polling place. The result was the most fully mobilized electorate in American political history, with presidential turnout averaging over 80 per cent. To minimize the prospect of electoral defeat, parties muted or otherwise finessed national issues with the potential to disrupt their national coalitions. Discontent with the non-responsiveness of the party system grew over the course of the Gilded Age, especially in the agrarian West, prompting a succession of third-party challenges. In 1892, the People's Party would capture 8.5 per cent of the popular vote nationwide, subsequently fusing with Democrats in 1896 behind the presidential candidacy of William Jennings Bryan.

A direct measure of the effect of electoral pressure on patronage practice is found in Table 1. Only in the Gilded Age is each electoral coefficient both statistically significant and in the expected direction. These coefficients can be used to estimate the magnitude of these electoral effects on patronage removals, calculating the probability of removal against increasing substantive values of each variable (in a percentile ranking system). When this is done, we find that electoral competitiveness was the most important determinant of removal rates, with a +0.17 differential separating the most competitive states in presidential elections from the least. However, other electoral pressures also left substantively important marks on Gilded Age removal patterns. The probability of removal was +0.16 higher in states with the most acute voter-turnout problems than it was in those with the least, though parties exhibit a substantial degree of tolerance before taking punitive action. The size of a state's electoral vote allocation also mattered, with the likelihood of removal +0.12 greater in states with the highest number of electoral votes than it was in those with the lowest count. Finally, third-party voting problems also had an effect on Gilded Age removals, with a differential of +0.06 separating states with the fewest third-party problems from those with the most.

To sort out the broader regime implications of this analysis, Figure 2 plots the probability of removal from office in each political era against a specially constructed index of presidential electoral politics. This index measures the probability of removal as a function

¹⁸ Thomas Collier Platt, *The Autobiography of Thomas Collier Platt* (New York: B. W. Dodge, 1910), pp. 501–3.

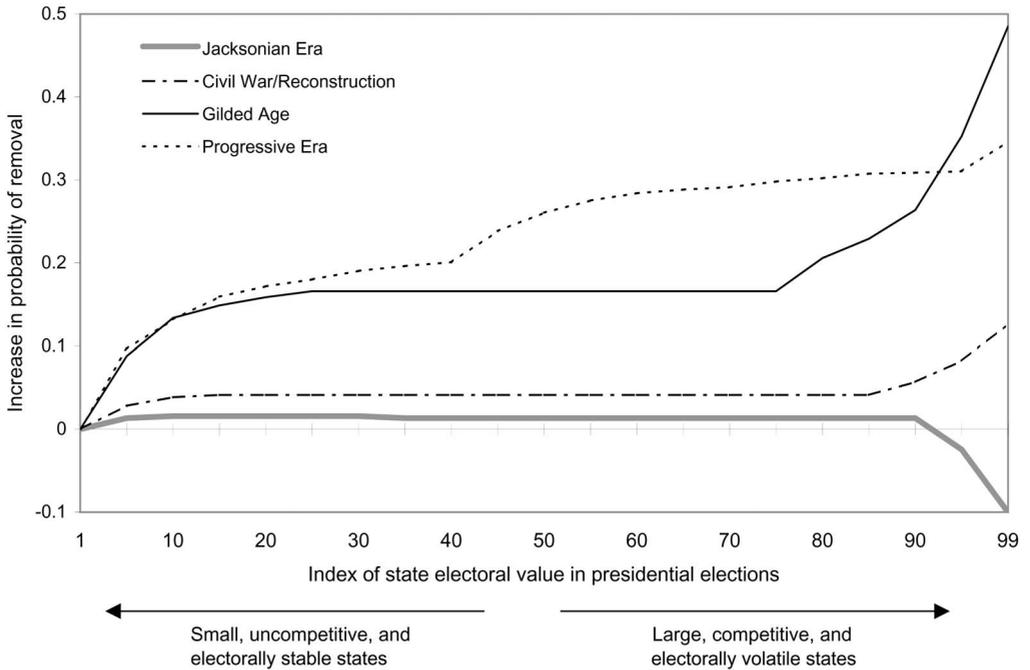


Fig. 2. Variation in the presidential electoral environment and its impact on the probability of removal

of the combined effects of all four electoral variables, providing a summary estimate of the responsiveness of removal rates to broad changes in the presidential electoral environment. The patterns in Figure 2 reinforce the claim that machine-styled rationality was not peculiar to the Gilded Age; rather, it was the defining feature of a broader post-Reconstruction patronage regime. Indeed, the aggregate effect of Progressive Era election variables on removals approximates Gilded Age patterns, with patronage effects in the former era appearing earlier but flattening out more quickly as electoral need intensified. What differentiate these two periods are variations in the magnitude of their individual effects. Progressive Era removals were driven by turnout instability, a likely manifestation of this period's 'disappearance of the American voter'.¹⁹ Indeed, almost half of the cumulative effect of Progressive Era electoral variables on removals is tied to voting turnout. By contrast, what makes the Gilded Age paradigmatic of 'machine rationality' is that party leaders applied patronage discipline in equal measure along each dimension of the presidential electoral contest.

Regime counterpoint: Jacksonian 'pure-and-simple' spoils organization. Figure 2 further shows that the relationship between Jacksonian electoral politics and patronage removals differs starkly from Gilded Age standards of machine rationality. Indeed, the slope is slightly negative, indicating that as we vary a state's presidential contests to make them more electorally valuable and competitively uncertain, the probability of removal from office eventually *declines*. At this point, therefore, it seems fair to suggest that whatever

¹⁹ Walter Dean Burnham, 'The Appearance and Disappearance of the American Voter', in Burnham, ed., *The Current Crisis in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 121–65.

motivated Jacksonian parties to remove incumbent executive officers, it was not a concern for greater efficiency and discipline in the ranks of their state-level cadre.

This finding is particularly significant because Jacksonian electoral conditions roughly approximate those of the Gilded Age. Like the Gilded Age, a staple feature of Jacksonian politics was its vigorous electoral competition. Between the years 1836 and 1852, when Democrats battled Whigs for national supremacy, the national two-party margin of victory averaged a robust 4.2 per cent. Simultaneously, effective voter mobilization was a critical feature of the Jacksonian contest, with turnout averaging an impressive 72.1 per cent over this same period. Finally, third-party challenges (both anti-slavery and nativist) posed an even greater problem for Whigs and Democrats than for Gilded Age Republicans and Democrats. From 0.3 per cent for the Liberty party in 1840, third party support climbed to 21.5 per cent for the Know-Nothings in 1856, challenging major-party attachments, upsetting the competitive two-party balance, and, in the end, eroding the integrity of the political system.²⁰

Despite these contextual similarities, the muddled relationship between patronage removals and party electoral performance confounds any expectation that the ‘machine’ metaphor so appropriate to Gilded Age/Progressive Era party organizations is fully portable across time. In almost every respect, Jacksonian electoral patterns depart from postbellum findings. In Table 1, only statewide third-party voting volatility is statistically significant. More importantly, however, this variable is *inversely* related to presidential removals. As Figure 3 details, as third-party challenges grew in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era, the probability of removal from office increased, with party leaders augmenting electoral discipline. The same is not true of the Jacksonian period. Instead, as third-party instability mounted in a given state, the probability of incumbent officeholders in a state retaining their jobs substantially increased!

What accounts for these divergent regime patterns? While a complete answer is not possible here, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the explanation lies in the pure-and-simple spoils orientation of Jacksonian patronage politics. Discussions of ‘the spoils system’ in nineteenth-century American politics typically focus on *between-party* rotation in office, a practice by which party turnover in the White House resulted in a purge of outgoing-party officeholders and their replacement with incoming-party loyalists. However, for my purposes, a more important facet of pure-and-simple spoils politics was *within-party* rotation in office – organizationally self-imposed term limits on the incumbent party’s officeholders – a practice that exerted its strongest hold on party behaviour during the Jacksonian Era.

To date, the practice of within-party rotation among elective offices has received the most attention.²¹ In those cases, rotation was prompted mostly by the need to balance geographic or interest-based party factions. A different rationale motivated within-party rotation among administrative offices. Here, Jacksonian parties simply sought to disburse the fruits of party victory widely, to as many of their party activists as possible. Why? In

²⁰ Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Wiley, 1978). Michael F. Holt, *The American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); William Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852–1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

²¹ Samuel Kernell, ‘Toward Understanding 19th Century Congressional Careers: Ambition, Competition, and Rotation’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 21 (1977), 669–93; Robert Strumbe Jr, ‘House Turnover and the Principle of Rotation’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 94 (1979–80), 649–67; H. Douglas Price, *Explorations in the Evolution of Congress* (Berkeley: The Institute of Governmental Studies Press, University of California, Berkeley, 1998).

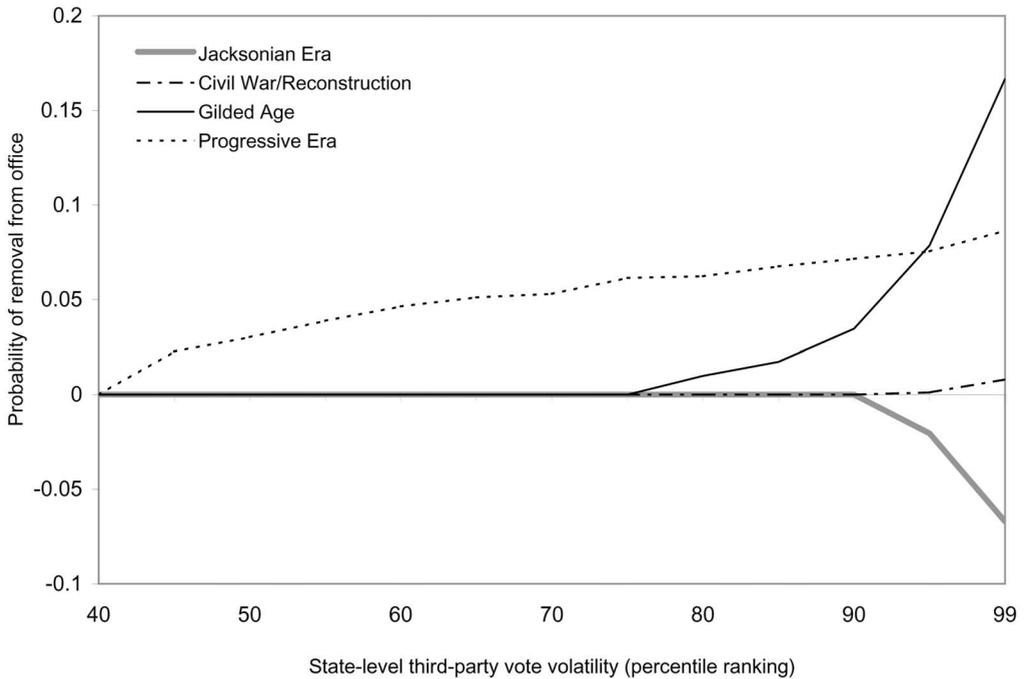


Fig. 3. *The effect of third-party vote volatility on removal rates*

the first place, party managers sought a clearly visible break with the Founding era's treatment of administrative office as a form of personal property.²² In this regard, within-party rotation was an important part of the emerging democratization of American politics, allowing more citizens to participate directly in the processes of republican self-government. But, equally importantly, within-party rotation was a solvent for the Founding generation's cultural antipathy toward party organizations themselves, legitimating these suspect 'faction'-based vehicles by extending the status, income and perks of public office to thousands of ordinary citizens whose only distinguishing characteristic was a commitment to party success.

Political scientists have largely elided the problem faced by these early party builders – the challenge of legitimating mass political parties in a distinctly anti-party, anti-power and anti-organizational political culture. How was party organization to take root and flourish as a legitimate feature of the American political landscape when the very partisanship it demanded and the power it aggressively sought so profoundly challenged Founding republican values?²³ Antebellum political parties simply did not possess the trappings of legitimacy that post-Civil War parties would acquire. Throughout the antebellum party period, '[m]any Americans continued to regard their partisan contacts

²² White, *The Jacksonians*.

²³ Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780–1840* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1969); James Sterling Young, *The Washington Community, 1800–1828* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966); Ronald P. Formisano, 'Political Character, Antipartyism and the Second Party System', *American Quarterly*, 21 (1969), 683–709.

as an embarrassment, necessary for public life but nothing to celebrate.²⁴ Indeed, it is telling that the founders of America's first mass-based party organization chose to label themselves 'the Democracy' and not 'the Democratic Party', preferring to cloak their partisan ambitions in the image of a principled political movement – a rising up of a virtuous nation against a self-serving cabal; a struggle of 'Country' against 'Court'.²⁵

How did the Jacksonians respond to the problem of party-building in an anti-party culture? In part, the challenge was conceptual and rhetorical. Party had to be rehabilitated and placed on equal footing with those other pillars of American republicanism: the public school and the popular press. Jacksonians insisted that, like the common schools and the press, political parties were critical agencies of political learning. Parties, they argued, cultivated patriotism, promoted shared values, raised awareness of public issues and promoted virtue.²⁶ In this regard, rotation in office was an integral part of republican education. Average citizens were encouraged to take part in the administration of the laws, to service their community in a public capacity and to make more tangible the principles of self-rule and popular government. But the problem involved more than ideas and language. Jacksonians also understood the relationship between material incentives and the public's acceptance of parties. The prospect of holding public office successfully harnessed private ambition to party legitimation and swelled the ranks of the partisan labour force.

The practice of within-party rotation grew in stages. In his first annual message to Congress, Andrew Jackson insisted that the limitation of executive officers to a single four-year term was 'a leading principle in the republican creed'. Administrative responsibilities were capable of being made 'so plain and simple' that any citizen of normal capacity could readily perform the public's work.²⁷ In 1836, a Democratic Congress concurred – just in time for Martin Van Buren's own presidential run – extending the Four-Year Law of 1820 to the more lucrative postmasterships in the US mail service. Thereafter, this Jacksonian practice continued to deepen – not merely in law, but also informally. As the election of 1840 approached, pressure from within the Democratic party for administrative rotation grew – even though most of the officers were already Democrats – 'in order to give others a chance to have a government job'. Within-party rotation received its most open adherence in the late-antebellum administration of Democrat James Buchanan. Here the new president informed party members 'he accepted the doctrine of "rotation", that is the removal of even Democratic officeholders to give others a federal job'.²⁸ Characterizing the broad norms of rotation at the close of the antebellum era, one noted historian has written:

These were the halcyon days of the spoils system ... The public offices constituted a fund, from which the most deserving party workers were to be paid for their service; *positions were to be held for only four years, in order that everyone might have a chance.* If this were the practice

²⁴ Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); Altschuler and Blumin, *Rude Republic*.

²⁵ Edward L. Mayo, 'Republicanism, Antipartyism, and Jacksonian Party Politics: A View from the Nation's Capitol', *American Quarterly*, 31 (1979), 3–20; Baker, *Affairs of Party*; Wilson, *Cabinet Diary*.

²⁶ Jean Baker, 'From Belief to Culture: Republicanism in the Antebellum North.' *American Quarterly*, 37 (1985), 544–6.

²⁷ James Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), vol. 2, p. 1012.

²⁸ Fowler, *The Cabinet Politician*, pp. 33, 90 (emphasis added); Summers, *The Plundering Generation*.

when a President succeeded one of his own party, how much more when he followed an opponent!²⁹

If the analysis offered here is correct, within-party rotation should have retarded the emergence of machine-rational patronage parties by interfering with efforts to reward selectively long-term party service with continuous government employment. Jacksonian *spoils politics* was manifestly more distributive in character than the *machine politics* of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era – a straightforward allocation of material rewards as payment for recent party service. By a rapid and continuous turnover in the office holding cadre, within-party rotation allowed party leaders to spread the benefits of party victory to more and more members, maximizing incentives for non-officeholders to embrace enthusiastically the party. However, while it fulfilled this crucial legitimating function, it simultaneously weakened the incentive for those with campaign experience, influence and control over government resources to remain loyal to the party and work hard on its behalf. Indeed, within-party rotation may have had the perverse effect of encouraging defections within the party's office holding cadre, as the only avenue open to these members was to offer their services up to the other major party, or perhaps to third parties, in exchange for the promise of future office.

TEMPORAL DYNAMICS: EXPLAINING REGIME BREAKDOWN AND TRANSFORMATION IN THE AMERICAN PATRONAGE SYSTEM

The previous analysis has offered a static comparison of two differently ordered patronage regimes. In this section I analyse the process of regime change. It is possible to pinpoint with still greater temporal precision the demise of the antebellum patronage system and its gradual replacement by a system of patronage discipline in American national elections. I investigate this possibility using 'moving-window estimation', a method that measures change over time in the parameter of each of our electoral variables. The moving-window technique (also called moving regression) is a mode of regression analysis that provides estimates of continuous parameter shift based on analyses of contiguous and overlapping subsets of the data. As Nathaniel Beck explains, 'These subsets are ... moved along the time axis, to give plots of the moving coefficients against time'.³⁰ Breaks in the trend of the patronage coefficient, as well as the general temporal structure of parameter drift, are therefore readily visible to the eye. One advantage of moving window estimation is its inductive character, as it imposes no *a priori* constraint on the structure of parameter drift. It thus provides a useful check on results previously obtained using externally-imposed cut points. The number of time points to include in a subset is somewhat arbitrary. If the number is too small, estimates will be unstable; if too large, 'the moving parameters will

²⁹ Fish, 'Lincoln and the Patronage', pp. 54–5 (emphasis added).

³⁰ Nathaniel Beck, 'Time-Varying Parameter Regression Models', *American Journal of Political Science*, 27 (1983), 557–600, p. 568; Put simply, estimates for each coefficient are based on sub-periods, for example periods 1 through 8, 2 through 9, 3 through 10, etc. For other applications of moving regression, see Larry W. Isaacs and Larry J. Griffin, 'Ahistoricism in Time-Series Analyses of Historical Process: Critique, Redirection, and Illustrations from U.S. Labor History', *American Sociological Review*, 54 (1989), 873–900; and John T. Woolley, 'Partisan Manipulation of the Economy: Another Look at Monetary Policy with Moving Regression', *Journal of Politics*, 50 (1988), 335–60. The seminal article is R. L. Brown, J. Durbin, and J. M. Evans, 'Techniques for Testing the Constancy of Regression Relationships over Time', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society (Series B)*, 37 (1975), 149–63.

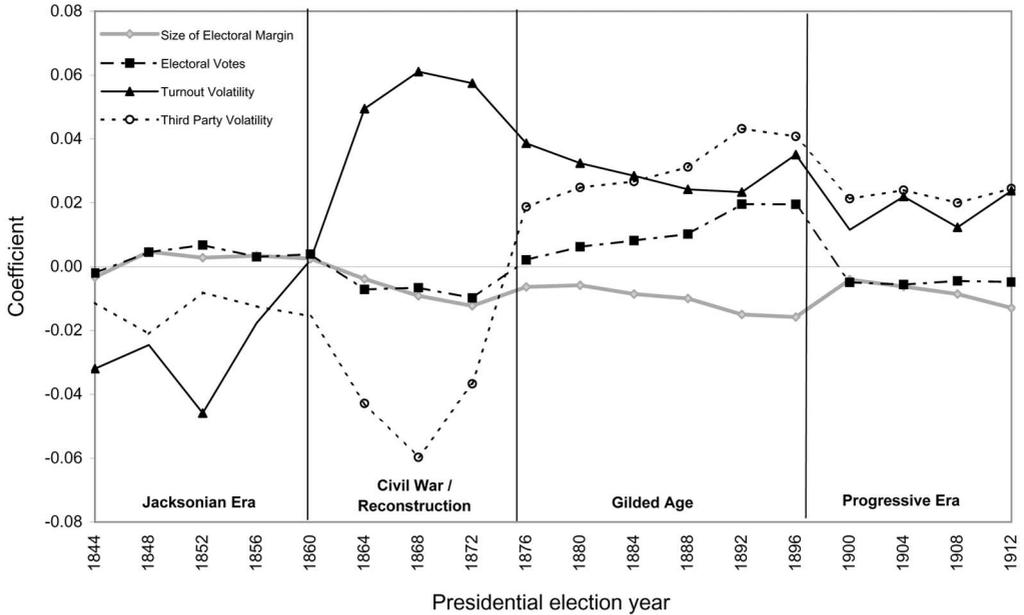


Fig. 4. *The transformation of party patronage regimes in American electoral politics*

not be very sensitive to parameter shift in any given period'.³¹ In the analysis that follows, subsets are made up of data from four contiguous presidential administrations.³²

Figure 4 presents the results of this analysis. Negative coefficients (those located below the line intersecting zero on the Y-axis), indicate an inverse relationship between electoral variables and patronage removals; positive coefficients indicate a positive relationship. The presence of a negative coefficient is evidence *against* the use of patronage as a form of electoral discipline, except in the case of size of electoral margin, where the expected relationship is negative if party discipline is being imposed. Year markers on the plot lines indicate statistically significant coefficients.

The temporal patterns reported in Figure 4 comport well with our earlier period analysis. As expected, patterns of Jacksonian Era patronage allocation consistently run counter to a regime of organizational discipline. Only turnout volatility is ever statistically significant, but its sign regularly points in the wrong substantive direction. Perhaps the most significant difference with our previous findings is that the first major rupture to the antebellum patronage system occurs not in 1860, as critical realignment theory might suggest, but in 1864. It is thus tempting to attribute regime change directly to the forces of civil war and occupation. And while war was indeed an important factor in the narrative of regime *breakdown* – especially the war-era election of 1864 – neither the Civil War itself nor Southern occupation *per se* were long-term, causal factors sustaining regime *transformation*. Indeed, it was more precisely the *end* of war and the *end* of occupation that more than anything else drove the process of regime change. The reorientation of the patronage

³¹ Beck, 'Time-Varying Parameter Regression Models', p. 568.

³² I have also run the analysis using subsets of three and five administrations with no substantive change in my conclusions.

fundamental electoral insecurity that had enveloped the Republican party from the moment it took the reins of power, an insecurity inextricably tied to the more subtle political ramifications of Southern secession and national reunification. In a very real sense, that is to say, the achievement of the party's central war aim – restoration of the Union – threatened to undercut the very electoral bases of its own political power.

The unshakeable political fact is that the Republican party in the age of Civil War and Reconstruction was a minority party in power. The Republicans directly owed their initial political ascendancy in 1860 to divisions within the opposition Democratic party. Those divisions ran so deep that its Northern and Southern wings ultimately nominated separate candidates for president (respectively, Stephan A. Douglas and John C. Breckinridge). In the four-way presidential contest of 1860,³³ the victorious candidate, Abraham Lincoln, received a mere 39.8 per cent of the popular vote nationally. While this was sufficient to win in the fractious environment of 1860, it nonetheless left the Republican party acutely vulnerable to a return to minority status in the wake of a Southern military defeat and reunification. Complicating matters in the short term, waning Northern support for the war effort in 1864 put the Republican party in a tense electoral struggle to retain control of the presidency and, with it, control over the conduct of the war. Indeed, until late in the electoral campaign season, many interested observers – including Lincoln himself – believed it unlikely that the Republican party would emerge victorious in November.³⁴ With Republican support softening, and with many of its strongest supporters away on the battlefield, active voter mobilization efforts became critical, and the evidence in Figure 4 suggests that in 1864 Republicans put particular pressure on party activists to ensure a high voter turnout on election day.

Lincoln's 1864 re-election bid was ultimately successful, as was the Republican war effort, but party concerns regarding voter turnout only deepened in 1868 and 1872. The reason for this seems clear: As early as 1865, Republicans governed in full knowledge that Southern Democrats would quickly re-enter national political life, and by late 1868, only three of eleven ex-Confederate states remained under the control of Union military governors.³⁵ Complicating matters further, many former Democrats who had joined the Republican party in opposition to slavery drifted back to their former party as the slavery issue was quickly removed from the national agenda. In such an environment, a preoccupation with consolidating national power was only natural and would only intensify in the hyper-competitive electoral climate of the Gilded Age. Underscoring this point is the fact that in 1868 Republican patronage allocations manifest a new-found preoccupation with organizational performance in the more competitive state presidential races, as size of electoral margin achieves statistical significance for the first time in that election year (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 also indicates that incentives emanating from Gilded Age electoral politics complete the transformation in national party patronage practices, ushering in a stable 'golden age' of machine-styled patronage politics (with each of our four indicators of patronage discipline both statistically significant and pointing in the right substantive direction). As Figure 4 shows, in 1876 a sharp upturn occurred in the use of patronage discipline in those states with strong third-party pressures, gaining in strength throughout the Gilded Age. This pattern finds strong support in the historical record. In 1876,

³³ John Bell ran as the presidential candidate of the Constitutional Union party.

³⁴ David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

³⁵ Those three states were Mississippi, Texas and Virginia.

third-party politics in the United States took a significant upturn with the emergence of the National Greenback party. The Greenback presence was only the first manifestation of deepening agrarian discontent in American national politics, a discontent that culminated with the People's party, which had its greatest party showing in 1892 before fusing with the Democratic party around the issue of free silver in 1896. Finally, removal patterns also begin to manifest a growing sensitivity to the size of a state's Electoral College vote share, as party cadres located in states rich with electoral votes faced heightened expectations for electoral performance.

In all, Figure 4 lends strong support for earlier findings that the Gilded Age represented the apex of machine discipline in national politics, as only in this period do all four indicators of electoral performance articulate with patronage activity in a manner consistent with the concepts of machine rationality and patronage discipline developed in this article. With the emergence of Republican electoral security after 1896, one of our four indicators of patronage discipline (size of electoral vote) loses its relationship to patronage activity. However, overall the patterns exhibited here retain a much greater conformity to those of the Gilded Age machine years than to those of the antebellum spoils era.

CONCLUSION: REPERIODIZING THE PARTY PERIOD

This article has sought to extend scholarly understanding of American party development by unpacking the changing historical operations of its national patronage organizations. I have identified the presence of two reasonably coherent patronage regimes, each with its own patterned, stable and distinctive use of the president's appointment power. I have also sought to account for the factors sustaining of regime breakdown and transformation.

Based on the findings presented here, the antebellum patronage regime is best characterized by its *spoils-orientation*. In the electoral realm, Jacksonian allocation practices are consistent with traditional descriptions of patronage as a simple labour recruitment device. Very little evidence has been found that the president's appointment power was used to enhance organizational efficiency or punish cadre disloyalty. Antebellum patronage practice is also consistent with the institution of within-party rotation that thrived in Jacksonian America, as parties sought to justify their permanent political presence to citizens steeped in the anti-party ideals of the Founding.

Against this Jacksonian standard, the post-Reconstruction patronage regime is best characterized by its *machine-orientation*, with patronage discipline systematically applied to service the electoral welfare of the president's party. Most impressively, Gilded-Age patronage parties helped to support a complex of election-related activities that centred on the maintenance of discipline, loyalty and competitive efficiency in party performance. Removal activity articulates almost perfectly with the dynamics of presidential elections and the substantive effects are generally large. As the data show, where the electoral stakes were large, competition close and cadre effort weak or inconsistent, party leaders insisted on greater organizational effort and removals increased correspondingly.

This explanation is necessarily preliminary, but it is rooted in the historical record. With more confidence, we may conclude that American party development has always been contingent on a complex of contextual factors, ebbing and flowing within the broader political environment, and mostly beyond the managerial control of the parties themselves. If we wish to understand the full range of developmental possibilities (and limits) that adhered to American patronage parties, we must take seriously the study of these parties as objects of political development in themselves, and not merely as agents or opponents

of that development. We need to scrutinize in much greater detail the organizational choices that were both made or not made as these parties acted to reduce the uncertainties of the electoral marketplace, satisfy the needs and aspirations of their partisan supporters, and bring order and purpose to the processes of national governance.

APPENDIX: CONSTRUCTING THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

The dataset from which the dependent variable is constructed comprises all the incumbent federal officers seeking reappointment to an administrative position located in one of the several states of the Union (a total of 80,587 presidential appointment actions spanning the years 1829–1917). The most important of these offices were postmasters, customs officials, US Attorneys and US Marshals, land officers and various revenue collection agents. In the subjective assessments of party members, these jobs formed the lifeblood of nineteenth-century party organization (see, for example, the debate on legislation ‘to prevent the interference by certain federal officers in elections’, which can be found in the *Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 3rd session, February, 1839. The bill’s provisions are reprinted on p. 160 of the appendix to the *Globe*). Included in the analysis are all appointments resulting in either the reappointment or involuntary removal of a sitting incumbent (see pp. XXXXX for a full discussion of the way I operationalize removals). Excluded are all first-time appointments to new offices (because they lacked an incumbent); postmaster reappointments initiated solely because of the position’s reclassification from fourth-class to presidential-level appointment (which occurred automatically when the income generated by the position exceeded \$1,000); nominations made because a previous nomination was rejected by the Senate or was otherwise withdrawn; and all manner of ‘voluntary’ terminations, including those who completed their term in office and declined reappointment, those who resigned their commission; those who died in office or otherwise left as a result of sickness or incapacity; and those who, for one reason or another, ran into technical or other complications associated with their initial appointment (for example, a failure to post bond; a name change regarding the nominee, the office held, or the location of the office; or, more vaguely, to ‘correct [an] error’, ‘fill a vacancy’, or because otherwise ‘not qualified’). Finally, in roughly 3 per cent of the cases the reason for replacing an incumbent is not stated. These cases are also excluded.