Indiana—Hell Bent For Election¹

Some Notes on Hoosier Politics

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My grandmother Carter was always a good talker and in her old age I was her best listener. She was a native Hoosier, born in Clinton County in 1840 when the county itself was only ten years old. She could tell some good snake stories, for snakes were plentiful in her childhood when the land was first being brought under cultivation. There were rattlers and red bellies, black snakes, and blue racers, but the most hated of all snakes was the copperhead. This has a connection with politics, because her father, John Dow, was troubled during the Civil War by neighbors who accused him of being a Copperhead, that is, a Southern sympathizer, treacherous to the Union. My grandmother always resented this accusation. Her father was a Democrat, to be sure, but a good Union man. She rather laid it up against President Lincoln in a personal way that he would allow such an injustice. She was Scotch on both sides and knew how to hold a grudge.

My grandfather, though a Virginian born, was a lifelong Republican from the foundation of that party. But my grandmother was the more intellectual of the two, in fact,

There are more suggestive ideas per square inch for historical studies to be found in the writings of Frederick J. Turner than anywhere else. It seems probable that the original impetus for studies of the sort represented by this article derives from him. For some of his reflections on the subject of mapping and analyzing the vote see Frederick J. Turner, The Significance of Sections in American History (New York, 1932), 184. This approach to American politics has been used to good advantage by Arthur N. Holcombe, The Political Parties of To-day (New York, 1924), an ambitious and realistic study now in need of being extended to date. A valuably statistical but less interpretative work is that by Cortez A. M. Ewing, Presidential Elections from Abraham Lincoln to Franklin D. Roosevelt (Norman, Oklahoma, 1940). The New York Tribune Almanacs have been used for the earlier years and the New York World Almanacs for the later years, in preparing the statistical table of elections accompanying this article. Comparative and sometimes corrective references have been made to Edgar E. Robinson, The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932 (Stanford University, California, 1934), and to Charles O. Paullin, Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States (Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1932). For the make-up of the Hoosier population reliance has been placed on Joseph E. Layton, "Soume of Population in Indiana, 1816-1850" in the Indiana State Library Bulletin, XI (1916), no. 3. Data concerning churches, size of farms, etc., were compiled by the writer from the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Statistics of Population, I, Statistics of Agriculture, II, Vital Statistics, IV.

she was what was commonly called a strong-minded woman. She was a good Methodist, an ardent temperance worker, a strong advocate of women's rights—but above all she was a loyal Democrat. If there was any inconsistency in these various beliefs, it did not bother her.

Hugh McCulloch, the Fort Wayne banker and Secretary of the Treasury under Lincoln and Johnson, made an interesting observation concerning Hoosier politics in his Men and Measures of Half a Century.² It was his belief that the Methodists of Indiana supported the Republican party more strongly, in the 1860's and after, than any other church group. He attributed this to the fact that the episcopal form of church government enabled the bishops to impose antislavery views upon the laity. An investigation, however, shows that the Methodists were only a slight Republican factor, much less strong than Quakers, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, or Presbyterians. And certain it is that, although my grandmother always made it a point to provide a visiting bishop or presiding elder with fried chicken and a feather bed, and although she welcomed an opportunity for a good theological discussion, she would have resented it if one had attempted to direct her into the Republican fold.

Likewise, she was a deadly foe of liquor, although I have heard her admit that the Democratic party was always the jug party. She proposed to fight Demon Rum from the inside of the Democratic party not from the outside. Her ideas were dominant in her family. I do not say that her descendants are all Methodists, or even that they are all good church people, but most of them are. Her temperance influence was stronger, although a good many of her more remote descendants have probably reverted to the Carter type. After all, she had a great deal to overcome in this respect. But in politics, all her children were brought up to be Democrats, and most of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be found voting that ticket today.

In 1920 she was eighty years old and women at last had the vote. She liked to talk about politics that year, and how she might vote this or that way. But the matter was never really open to question. She came back from the polls looking well pleased with herself. As she laid her black silk reticule

² Hugh McCulloch, Men and Measures of Half a Century (New York, 1888), 75.

on the table, she clicked her upper plate very audibly, and announced that she had voted the straight Democratic ticket. I don't believe the issues of 1920 were much in her mind. I think she felt that at last she had settled an old score. She had evened an ancient grudge against Abe Lincoln.

Indiana is often taken as the average state and Hoosiers are even considered to be the best candidates for that mythical conception, the average American. Thus, Mark Sullivan, sitting down to compose the first chapter of *Our Times* in 1925 says almost at once that "the typical American of 1900 had possibly more points of identity with the typical inhabitant of an Indiana community than with most other persons in other backgrounds." Apparently, the Lynds in choosing an Indiana city for their famous sociological surveys of the 1920's and 1930's felt that this was still true at those times.

It is certainly true in the realm of politics. Before the Civil War Indiana displayed a strong two-party tradition. But the Democrats generally had the edge on the Whigs. This was true of the United States as a nation in those days. Since the Civil War, Indiana has continued her two-party tradition. But the Republicans usually manage to hold a slight preponderance over the Democrats. Again this characterizes our national political behavior, as well as that of Indiana.

There are 92 counties in Indiana. In the whole period of party warfare between Democrats and Republicans, that is, the twenty-three presidential elections from 1856 to 1944, what has been the voting record of these counties? There are 32 counties that may be classed as Republican, having gone Democratic from 0 to 6 times. There are 28 that are Democratic counties, on the same basis. This leaves 32 doubtful counties of which 15 show a Republican bias, 11 lean toward the Democrats, and 6 are so uncertain as to have gone 12 times for one party and 11 times for the other.

Summing up the total Hoosier vote for president over the years 1856 to 1944, it will be found that Indiana had an excess of Republican over Democratic vote of 2.4%, having increased from 2.1% since 1936. This is a pretty tight political record. Only three other states showed a narrower margin between the parties over this period. They were West Virginia, California, and Colorado. New York stood with

³ Mark Sullivan, Our Times, The United States, 1900-1925 (6 vols., New York, 1926-1935), I, The Turn of the Century, 3.

Indiana with 2.4% Republican excess. No other state had an excess of one party over the other of less than 4%. Third-party votes were disregarded in this computation.

At the other end of the scale will be found Vermont with a Republican excess of nearly 40% and Mississippi with a Democratic excess of almost 57%. It is not surprising that Mississippi stands last in voter participation or that Vermont stands about two-thirds of the way down the list. One-party domination does not encourage voters to come out. But Indiana leads the list in voter participation over the period under consideration. Before woman suffrage her voter participation stood at about 225 per thousand of population and since women have voted, it stands at 450 per thousand. This is one respect in which Indiana is not an average state. In fact, the Hoosiers, men and women alike, are hell bent for election and always have been.

Generally speaking, northern Indiana is the more Republican and southern Indiana is the more Democratic section of the state. But just the same you will find strong Democratic counties in the north and strong Republican counties in the south. You could not walk across the state from Ohio to Illinois without getting on doubtful territory politically. On the other hand, there is one, but only one, means of traversing the state from Kentucky to Michigan and at the same time remaining on strong Republican soil. This means that the political pattern of Indiana is a very complicated thing. It was formed a long while ago, and it has persisted remarkably well.

Three counties have never gone Democratic. They are Porter, which borders Lake Michigan; Wabash, at the most northerly point of the Wabash River; and Randolph, midway up the Ohio line. Porter is most regular of all in its Republicanism because it was the only county to survive both 1912 and 1932 with its tradition unbroken. Randolph and Wabash could not be carried by the Democrats but went Progressive in 1912. Two other counties, Steuben, in the northeastern corner and Warren, a prairie country along the Illinois line, have a greater Republican excess over Democratic votes, 29.4% and 28.4% respectively, than Porter, Randolph, or Wabash, but their record for regularity was marred by their going for the New Deal in 1932. LaGrange and Elkhart went over to the Democrats only in 1932, and Hamilton and Hen-

dricks only in 1912. These are the Republican stalwarts, but a round dozen more have gone Democratic only twice in all their history.

Two counties there are that have never been Republican. Dubois, down in "the pocket of the State," and Brown, famous for its poor but picturesque hills. Wells, only a few miles south of Fort Wayne, in the northeast, went Republican for the first time in its history in 1944. Until 1940 there was another Democratic county with an unsullied record, Franklin, in the Whitewater Valley in the southeast, but Franklin was carried by Willkie in 1940 and by Dewey in 1944. Sullivan refused to accept Al Smith in 1928 but this has been its only lapse. Three others, Jackson, Washington, and Scott, all southern counties, like Franklin, have defaulted but twice. There are a larger number of moderately strong Democratic counties than there are moderates in the Republican ranks.

There are also records of instability as well as of stability. Five counties, Ripley, pulled both ways by stalwarts of opposite persuasion on all sides; Gibson, in "the pocket," always unpredictable from first to last; Pike and Daviess, old Southern Whig counties before the Civil War that could never decide whether to become Democratic or Republican after the war; and my native Clinton, centrally located at the meeting place of the tides of migration from the North and South, all have been Republican 12 times and Democratic 11 times. Clinton stood number 46 of the 92 counties, ranked by political intensity in 1944, almost a perfect pivot at dead center over the 88 years.

The Franklin (county) Repository for July 5, 1828, contains a report of a committee of Jackson men, who after a mass meeting drew up certain resolutions concerning the presidential candidates of that year, Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams, to be presented to the citizens. Against President Adams the following eleven charges were brought.

- 1. He has held many appointive offices but few elective ones.
- 2. He has received half a million dollars in public salaries.
- He will not trust the people.
- He has imbibed the ideas of his father (Federalist) and was educated abroad.
- He said the representative should not hold himself palsied by the will of his constituents.

⁴ I have condensed them to some extent.

- 6. He slandered Jefferson.
- 7. He is hostile to the West.
- 8. He wants to usurp the power of the Senate.
- 9. He threatened to use force on a sovereign state.
- 10. He sends his clerks out to deceive the people.
- 11. He has ordered our ministers abroad to wear small swords, gold laced coats, and feathered hats.

In favor of their own candidate, General Jackson, they drew up eight laudatory statements.

- 1. He is a friend of the people.
- 2. He fought while Adams danced at foreign courts.
- 3. He has never been corrupted by patronage or power.
- 4. He was a poor orphan who has risen from the ranks.
- 5. He is faithful in friendship and just to his enemies.
- 6. He would make a good constitutional President.
- He would scatter the Harpies that feed upon the Treasury.
- 8. He will not profane the temple of Freedom.

To anyone versed in the politics of that period or acquainted with the careers of Jackson or Adams these statements will be extremely interesting, all the more because of various inconsistencies. In connection with this article, however, the report merely serves the purpose of illustrating how the lines of battle were being drawn up between the two parties at this early time, lines which have been maintained with a minimum of change ever since. Jackson carried Franklin County and the Democrats carried it regularly every four years from that time till 1940.

In 1841 Andrew Kennedy, a Democrat, was elected to Congress to represent the east central Indiana district containing the counties of Wayne, Randolph, Henry, Delaware, Fayette, and Union. He boasted that "Whiggery was burnt out" in that district as badly as Pittsburgh which had recently suffered a disastrous fire. The name stuck. You will still hear this area referred to as "the burnt district," though the number of the district and some of the counties have changed. Not one of these counties has been won more than three times by a Democratic president, but only three Democrats since Kennedy have ever represented the district in Congress. Here exists Republicanism, "rock ribbed and ancient as the sun."

These instances show the steadfast character of party allegiance. They also show a continuity of political preference from before the Civil War. Of the 32 Republican counties of Indiana, 21 were steadily Whig before the Civil War, 10 were formerly Democratic, but became Republican in 1856 or 1860 and continued so, and one, Marion, containing the Hoosier capital, Indianapolis, was a doubtful county before the Civil War but has become moderately Republican since then.⁵

Taking the 28 Democratic counties, we find 21 of them have always been Democratic, 6 were Whig counties of southern Indiana that became Democratic in 1856 and one, Cass, was divided prior to the Civil War but has become moderately Democratic since, though operating on a very small margin. Of the 32 doubtful counties, 10 have always been doubtful, 16 were formerly Democratic in their trend and 6 had formerly a Whig bias. To add to the uncertainty of Hoosier politics, there are 10 counties showing an excess of votes for the party opposite to the one to which they are attached.

It takes a real earthquake to shake a Hoosier loose from his political moorings. Exactly half of Indiana's 92 counties continued their Democratic habits, on the one hand, or their Whig-Republican attachments, on the other, undisturbed or only temporarily molested by the whole slavery controversy culminating in the Civil War. Add in the 9 with whom political uncertainty was an unalterable habit and you have left only 40% of the counties of the state that revised their political preference in response to the greatest political issue ever before the American electorate.

Bryan's free silver crusade frightened a few of the Democratic counties, especially if they contained county towns with a sizeable business element. But it was a temporary Republican prosperity in the twenties pulled aberration. some of the old Democratic counties out of line but the New Deal saw most of them back in line again. The New Deal apparently cut deeply enough to render several hitherto Republican strongholds rather doubtful. In a few cases it may even have effected a permanent change, particularly in labor strongholds such as Lake County (Gary and the rest of the Calumet region) and Vigo County (Terre Haute). To a lesser extent Delaware, Howard, and Vermillion counties have been affected. This is counterbalanced by heavy losses on the part of conservative Democratic counties, especially Allen (Fort Wayne) and most of those with a largely rural population, to the Republicans in the 1940 election. This was increased

⁵ See map and chart, pages 385-387 below.

in 1944, so that it may be that the trend will acquire a permanent character. It is safe to say that some modifications of the Hoosier political pattern are in the making. Only 4 Democratic counties showed an increase of any consequence in their Democratic excess as a result of the elections of 1940 and 1944, whereas 16 Democratic counties showed sizeable losses. On the other hand, 10 Republican counties had their Republican excess notably diminished as a result of these elections, including Lake and St. Joseph which changed a Republican for a Democratic excess.

To state the facts as they appear from the political record of past elections is one thing. To explain why the record is thus and not otherwise is another matter. It can be explained but at the risk of becoming statistical in a rather alarming manner.

There is an anecdote that is told concerning a Democratic rally in Terre Haute in the 1870's. A barbecue was being planned and the day selected was Friday. But an objection arose from a red-headed member who said, "Gintlemen, I wud just be afther remindin' yez that the great heft av the Dimmycratic party don't ate mate av a Friday." The date was forthwith changed.

Statistical evidence gives the color of truth to the remark. It will be found that in 1850 immigrants from Europe formed 2.8% of the population of the 32 Republican counties, 5.3% in the 32 doubtful counties, and 7.8% in the 28 Democratic counties. Not only the Irish but the Germans, and they were the more numerous in Indiana, were a decided Democratic factor from the outset and, on the whole, have continued so. Native-born Hoosiers of 1850 are strongest in the Republican group; Ohioans are strongest in the doubtful group and after that in the Republican; the same is true for the Middle States migrants; Southerners on the other hand, are strongest in the Democratic group and weakest in the Republican. New Englanders were too few in Indiana to count for much politically, so that even northern Indiana lacked this strong Republican factor, so manifest in other mid-western states. Democratic counties like Franklin, Dearborn, Allen, Wells, and Knox show a considerable German element in the population. Dubois County, the strongest Democratic county outside the solid South was 25.35% German in 1850 and shows a Democratic excess of 37.2% over

the Republican vote from 1856 to 1944. This excess was reduced from 42.6% in 1936.

The religious statistics are equally striking. Roman Catholic churches in 1860 formed 6% of all churches in the Democratic counties and only 2.5% in the Republican group; Lutherans were more numerous in the Democratic group; so were Baptists and Campbellites. On the other hand, Presbyterians and Methodists were slightly more prevalent in the Republican group and Quakers were found to form 7.5% of the churches in the Republican counties while in the Democratic group they formed but .5%. That the Quakers were the spearhead of the antislavery movement round which the Republican party was formed is well known. Quakers were a powerful factor in such Republican counties as Wayne (Richmond), Henry, Randolph, and Hamilton. Another faction in the early Republican party was the Know-Nothings or native Americans. They were antiforeigner, especially anti-Catholic, so that it is not remarkable that foreigners generally, and Catholics in particular, affiliated with the Democratic party.

Other evidence is available to show that industrial centers tended to exert a Republican influence in the days of Republican dominance and prosperity, that the size of farms tended to be somewhat larger in the Republican counties, and that the formerly Democratic counties which became Republican at the time of the Civil War have increased more rapidly in population than any other group.

The Republican counties show an excess of 11.4% Republican over Democratic vote from 1856 to 1940; the Democratic group yields a Democratic excess of 9.6%. The doubtful group has given the Republican 50.3% of its total vote and 49.7% to the Democrats for a Republican excess of .6% over eighty-four years. The Republican percentages were undoubtedly increased slightly by the election of 1944.

All this adds up to the fact that in an election year Indiana is a mighty doubtful state. True, the Republicans have a slight edge. The Republican counties stand pat with slightly greater regularity than the Democratic counties, and they are a little more intense in their Republicanism than the Democratic counties are in their Democracy. Both parties know that Indiana can be wooed and won. The Democrats, too, know they are handicapped at the start and so they have been a little more ardent in their wooing.

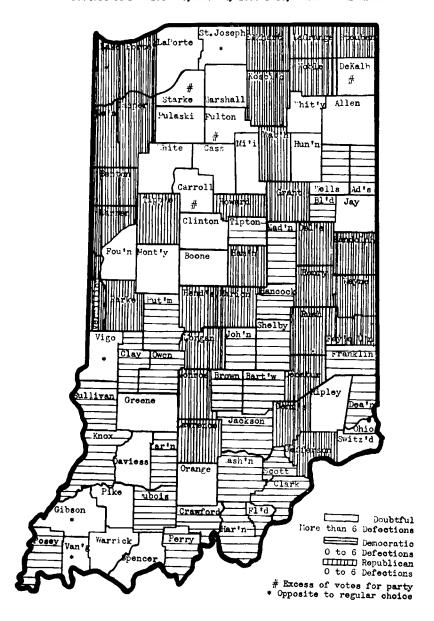
Indiana does not carry enough electoral votes to warrant first place on the ticket very often. The Republicans won and lost with Benjamin Harrison; they won and lost the state as well as the country. Wendell Willkie played up to Indiana as a native son in 1940 and carried the state.

But the Hoosier woods have yielded a lot of vice-presidential timber. Schuyler Colfax and Charles W. Fairbanks (twice) ran for the Republicans. Thomas A. Hendricks (twice), William G. English, John W. Kern, and Thomas R. Marshall (twice) made the race for the Democrats. Altogether Indiana has had a place on a major party ticket a dozen times.

The United States has elected a Republican president 14 times and 9 times has chosen a Democrat since 1856. Indiana's record over the same period is 16 times Republican to 7 times Democratic. She has not always picked a winner. Tilden got her vote in 1876, Hughes, in 1916, Willkie, in 1940, and Dewey, in 1944. Nor is there any Indiana county that has invariably been on the winning side. Nevertheless, as a political barometer the Hoosier state is about as good as any.

In any election year, come hell or high water, the Hoosiers will turn out just about 101% on election day. It is a well-established and time-honored habit. That has been about the only safe bet to make where Indiana is concerned.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, INDIANA, 1856-1944, BASED ON REGULARITY.



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*Indicates a bild in excess of votes from one party to the other. Counties are arranged according to intensity as of 1944 and location given.