

Turnout and Rural Corruption: New York as a Test Case*

Gary W. Cox, J. Morgan Kousser, *California Institute of Technology*

In 1974 Philip Converse and Jerrold Rusk offered an institutional, and Walter Dean Burnham, a behavioral explanation of the decline in voter turnout in the northern United States around the turn of the century. An examination of turnout figures for New York State from 1870 to 1916 demonstrates that election statistics lend some support to both explanations, and that the elections around 1890 provide the strongest evidence in favor of the Converse-Rusk hypothesis. A systematic analysis of election-related stories in contemporary newspapers allows a test of Converse's assertion that the introduction of the secret ballot decreased reported turnout by damping down what he alleges was widespread rural corruption. Concluding that neither previous theory stands up well when confronted with the detailed voting figures and newspaper evidence, we propose an alternative explanation which melds the institutional and behavioral hypotheses.

In a lengthy and sometimes heated exchange in the *American Political Science Review* in 1974, Walter Dean Burnham, Phillip E. Converse, and Jerrold G. Rusk clashed over two topics which have long been matters of debate among political scientists: the role of legal institutions in shaping human behavior, and the generalizability to other populations of findings based on a particular method and drawn from a specific place or era (Burnham, 1974, pp. 1002-1023, 1050-1057; Converse, 1974, pp. 1024-1027; Rusk, 1974, pp. 1028-1049). Nine years earlier, Burnham had challenged *The American Voter's* survey-based portrait of the United States electorate by compiling, from aggregate electoral data, five indexes of late nineteenth-century American voters' involvement in politics. Contending that these earlier Americans were much more interested in and seemingly informed about politics than their mid-twentieth century counterparts, Burnham asserted that the overwhelming 1896 McKinley victory and the succeeding political hegemony of major business interests had alienated previously active lower-class voters from the electoral system by robbing them of a real and effective alternative to corporate domination. Exogenous events which Burnham collected under the rubric of "behavioral" causes—the decline in the non-Southern opposition to the Republicans and a capitalist takeover of

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the GOP—had produced a shift in the pattern of electoral participation' (Burnham, 1965, pp. 7-28).

Converse and Rusk countered with the argument that different exogenous events produced legal changes which in turn caused apparent alterations in behavior. Aiming only to reduce corruption and free individuals to express their political opinions fully, Mugwumps and Progressives, according to Converse and Rusk, introduced strict registration and Australian ballot laws. Such laws decreased fraud and bribery, and raised the cost of voting above the level which many peripherally concerned citizens were willing to pay, thereby reducing reported turnout, but leaving as active electors a better informed and more involved population. Further, the secret ballot facilitated ticket splitting, which made the vote a more accurate expression of opinion, and damaged party machines, who could no longer drill electors to the polls, confident that they were marshalling reliable straight-ticket automations. Far from a golden era, fin de siècle politics was a period when fraud and unthinking passion swelled electoral totals. The changes Burnham described were either benign, intended consequences of the acts of well-meaning reformers (the reduction in fraud-inflated turnout, the increasing selectivity which the publicly printed blanket ballot allowed), or unintended consequences of the reforms (the increased difficulty of voting, which discouraged lower-class participation, for example) (Converse, 1972, pp. 263-336; Burnham, 1971, pp. 1149-1152; Rusk, 1971, pp. 1152-1157).

In the ensuing interchange, Burnham amended his position by adding changes in registration and ballot laws to the complex of causes of the dislocation of the political universe, but reserved priority in that complex for "behavioral" causes. He also separated out the voting trends in the largely rural areas not covered by personal registration laws and showed that time series for such places paralleled those in urban centers. Since the laws differed, but the patterns were similar, Burnham reasoned, many of the changes could not possibly be explained by changes in institutional rules. Converse parried by claiming that vote buying was ubiquitous, and suggested that rural corruption, and, thus, measured turnout in nonurban places, might have declined during this era either because of the direct effect of laws which extended registration and secret ballot requirements or because rural politicians damped down corruption in an effort to appear pure and thereby to avoid the imposition of such voting schemes by state legisla-

Burnham also attributes what he contends was increased voter alienation from politics to a "Progressive" assault on political parties as well as to the politicians' shift away from ethnocultural issues to questions of political and economic reform. As Rusk points out, it is difficult to determine the connections between Burnham's party-demobilization and shifting-issue cleavage notions and his elite-domination model. To keep the discussion simpler, we deal mainly with the latter in this article.

tures (Converse, 1974, pp. 1024-1026). In this note, we shall reconsider the rural corruption part of the Burnham-Converse-Rusk debate by examining a type of data never before systematically analyzed—newspaper reports of election practices. Focusing on New York State, the most populous in the nation in 1890 and one of the four states which Burnham concentrated on in his 1974 paper, we will first very briefly review the key election law changes and some aggregate data on turnout in order to choose a set of elections which will provide an appropriate confrontation between the institutional and noninstitutional hypotheses. Then we will propose a simple model of a hitherto neglected behavioral response to a legal alteration in election rules. Finally, we will test our model against quantified data drawn from the newspaper articles.

Shifts in Election Laws and Turnout

Major changes in New York State's election laws during this period occurred in 1890, 1895, 1908, and 1913. In 1890, an official party-column style Australian ballot was introduced throughout the state to replace the nonofficial ballots which had previously been distributed by the political parties. In cities, registration which necessitated personal application by the voter before each election replaced the "nonpersonal" registration system, in which anyone who voted was automatically registered for the next election. Nonpersonal registration was expanded to apply not only to large villages, which had previously been covered, but also to all other areas (small villages, towns, and rural areas), where registration had not previously been mandatory. Five years later in 1895, personal, periodic registration was extended to towns above 5,000 in population. In 1908, voters in Greater New York City were required to sign the registration list before each election and countersign when they voted. Finally, in 1913 the party-column gave way to an office-bloc ballot.²

The trends in presidential and gubernatorial turnout over a 36-year period in the state lend some support to both the institutional and noninstitutional theories.³ As Figure 1 demonstrates, the largest decline came between 1900 and 1912, when the percentages of adult males voting in presi-

²Personal registration was required in New York and Brooklyn counties after 1866 (see *Laws of the State of New York*, 1866, ch. 812; 1890, ch. 321; 1895, ch. 810; and 1908, ch. 521).

³The year 1870 was used as a starting date to avoid exogenous perturbations in both numerator and denominator resulting from the Civil War—soldiers had difficulty voting and both casualties and migration affected the number of eligibles in an unknown manner—and 1916 as a closing date because it was the last presidential year before the enfranchisement of women. The correction for aliens, of course, included only adult, male aliens. For a much more extensive look at the turnout figures, see the preliminary version of this paper, Social Science Working Paper No. 292, California Institute of Technology.

dential elections fell from 81.6 to 70.8.⁴ Since there was only one important election law passed during this period, and since that was confined to New York City, it seems difficult to attribute the post-1900 decline to institutional factors.⁵ And while it may buttress Burnham's views on the influence on turnout of the decline of party competition, this part of the graph is not very consonant with his "elite capture" theory. It is hard to believe that it would be much easier for an elite to exercise control over an electorate in which 71 percent voted than in one in which the participation rate was 82 percent, and even the lower number lends little credence to the notion of an alienated proletariat. But if the twentieth century part of the graph is not very encouraging to either side in the debate, the late nineteenth century figures offer some hope to each. There was a rather sharp drop in turnout from 1888 to 1896 (from 89.0 percent to 81.3 percent), and this decline came in a period not only of pervasive changes in the rules, but also of decreased party competition. The margin between the two major parties in presidential elections from 1880 to 1888 averaged 0.5 percent in the state, while in the next three presidential contests, the mean margin was a relatively comfortable 4.3 percent.

If we single out the 21 (of 59) counties in the state which were either wholly rural or wholly urban, and thus either minimally or maximally covered by the period's registration laws, the picture is rather similar to that drawn from the undifferentiated statewide numbers.⁶ The largest declines

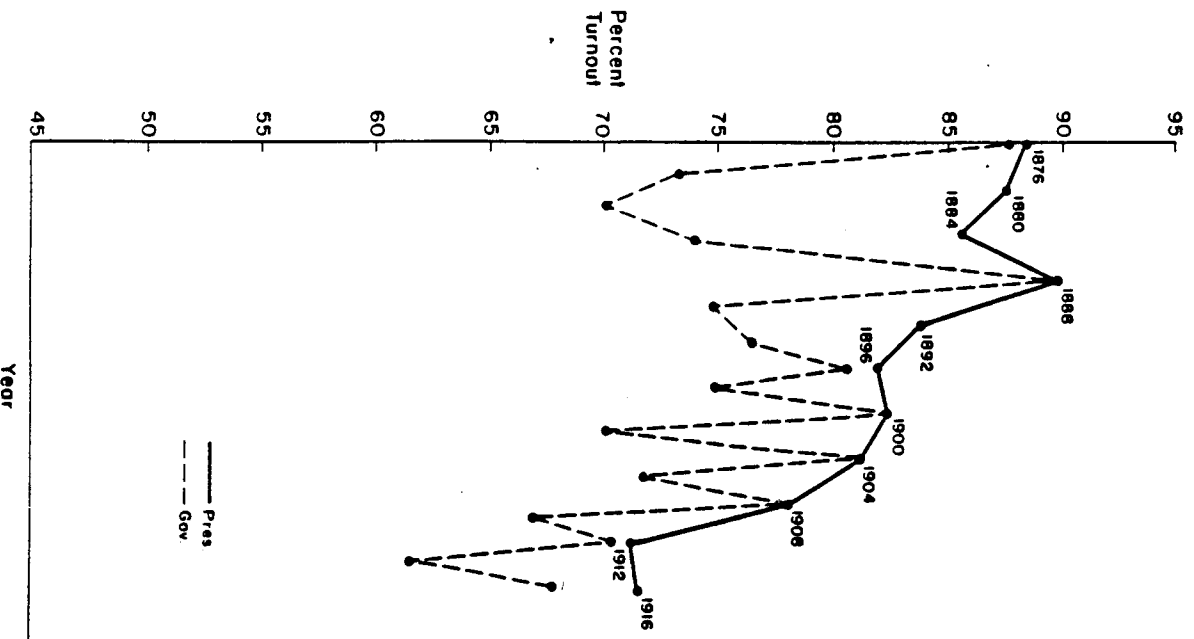
⁴Since nonnaturalized aliens were ineligible to vote, but since there are no published figures on naturalization by state, we were forced to estimate the denominator in the following fashion: the 1875 New York State census gives figures for males over 21 and "aliens." We subtracted the latter from the former. Although the 1880 United States census is silent on the status of the foreign born, and political squabbles prevented the state from conducting any more censuses, the 1890 United States census gives statewide totals of males over 21 categorized by nativity, and breaks down the foreign-born adult males into four categories: naturalized, first papers, alien, and unknown. Succeeding censuses give analogous figures aggregated at the county and state levels. To form the denominators in Figure 1, we added the naturalized to the native born, and also added a proportion of the unknowns equal to $N/(N + F + A)$, where N = naturalized, F = first papers, and A = alien. Eliminating the unknowns entirely from the denominator raises the post-1890 turnout estimates by 2-3 percent, but does not change any substantive points. We linearly interpolated the figures from census to census.

⁵For a much more detailed and extensive study of the changes in the New York political system from the 1890s through 1910, see McCormick, 1981.

⁶If we had separate electoral returns for each town, village, and rural area, we could determine the effects of the legal changes comprehensively. Since such returns are unavailable, we concentrated on the extreme cases. Regression estimates using the percentage of the population in each county covered by each registration scheme, which we ran but do not report here, produce results quite similar to those given in Figure 2. The trends in gubernatorial elections, which roughly parallel those in presidential contests, are analyzed in the working paper version of this article.

Presidential and Gubernatorial Turnout in New York State, 1876-1916

FIGURE 1



were in the post-1900 elections, especially in urban areas, and since the trend was well under way before the requirement of signature registration in New York City in 1908, it is difficult to square with the Converse-Rusk hypothesis. The correlation of these decreases with those in party competition in the state—the mean margin of the vote of the two highest candidates in the five presidential contests from 1880 to 1896 was 2.7 percent; whereas, it was 7.2 percent in the five elections from 1900 to 1916—and the fact that the declivity was steeper in the cities, where the “proletarians” concentrated, tend to corroborate both the “elite capture” and the “decline in party competition” versions of Burnham’s thesis. On the other hand, the marked, consistent differences in the urban and rural turnout, even when, after 1900, the available figures enable us to allow for the fact that there were considerably more ineligible aliens in urban than in rural areas, tend to reanimate the institutional explanation, for suffrage regulations were stiffer in town than in country throughout the period.

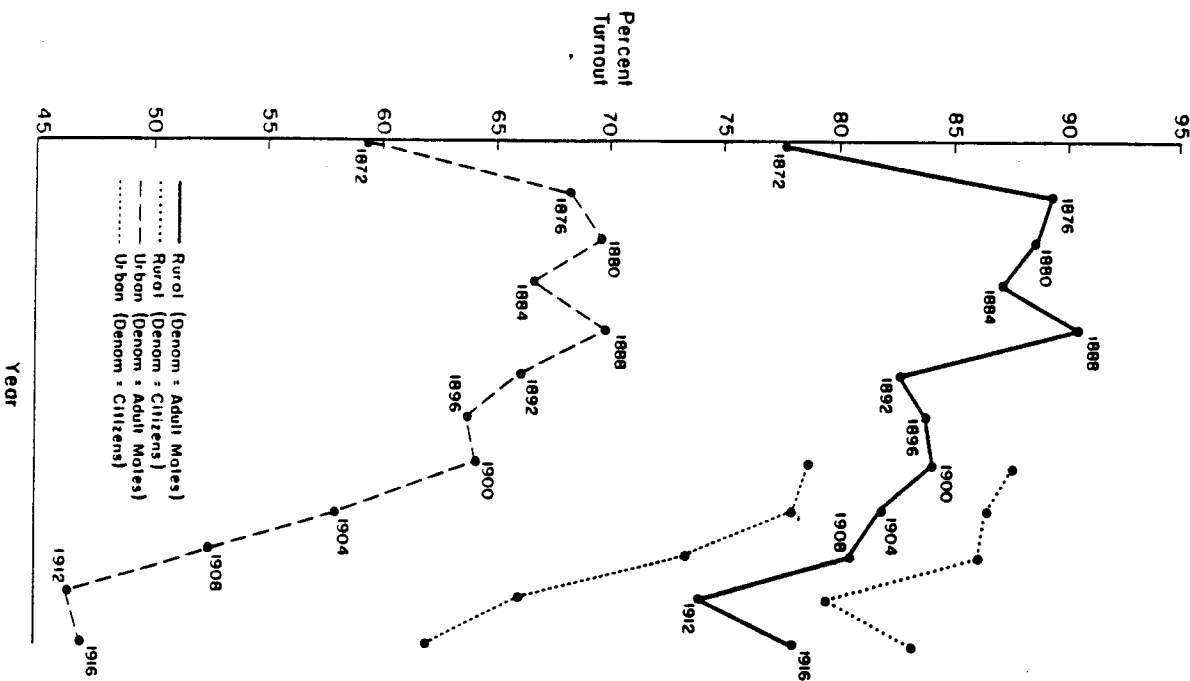
Moreover, although they were overshadowed by the 1900-1916 decline, the decreases from 1888 to 1892 were still considerable—7.9 percent in rural and 3.9 percent in urban areas—certainly large enough to require explanation. The 1888-1891 gubernatorial decline, no doubt substantially because the latter election was held in a nonpresidential year, was even more dramatic: 15.5 percent in rural and 11.2 percent in urban areas. Since the major interelection changes in these years were not in personalities or programs (Harrison and Cleveland faced each other in both 1888 and 1892), but in strengthened registration requirements and the introduction of the official ballot, the data from the elections around 1890 provided the most appropriate focus for an inquiry into the impact of institutional changes. Do the pre-1900 turnout declines, which were twice as high in rural as in urban areas, substantiate the Rusk-Converse thesis that the imposition of a secret ballot and stricter registration laws reduced turnout by decreasing rural corruption?

The Changing Shape of Electoral Corruption in New York

Corruption in the electorate is a much discussed, but rarely studied subject. Articles and parts of books written around the turn of the century were biased, unsystematic, and based largely on hearsay evidence gathered after the fact.⁷ Although contemporary legislative investigations of fraud in contested elections cases, and public hearings triggered by general allegations of vote buying were often more meticulous, they look place only sporadically, usually when the alleged frauds were large enough to overturn

⁷For a perceptive review of this literature, see Allen, 1977. For an influential piece which illustrates the failings of the earlier literature, see McCook, 1892.

FIGURE 2
 Presidential Turnout in Rural and Urban Counties
 in New York State, 1872-1916



an electoral result and were inherently biased, since the lawyers for each side were more interested in making a case for their clients than in dispassionately uncovering facts. Converse's rather offhand remarks on rural corruption are founded either on unspecified "contemporary accounts" or the views of unnamed "observers of the period," or on his own purely a priori assumption that 5-10 percent of nineteenth century rural voters were corrupt, which he claims several unnamed "historian friends" of his were "less willing to doubt" than they were to question the existence of "massive" rural frauds (Converse, 1974, pp. 288, 290-291).

As Converse notes, the "true rate of fraud" at the turn of the century "can probably never be reconstructed . . ." (Converse, 1974, p. 290). Still, it is possible to make a systematic and relatively unbiased study of trends in the level and form of rural electoral corruption, and we have attempted the task by examining references to rural electoral fraud in New York State in 48 of the state's newspapers over 10 election periods from 1879 to 1908. To overcome the sporadic and impressionistic nature of such reports we cast a wide and lengthy research net, and to counteract the bias of individual papers and reporters we tried to balance the partisan persuasions and geographical localities of the sources (see Table 1).¹

The newspaper stories on electoral corruption varied widely in tone, content, and specificity. They could be utterly vague and general, such as Democratic presidential candidate Samuel J. Tilden's 1876 statement that "The improper and illegal use of money at elections is in some portions of this state a serious and growing evil . . ." (*Albany Argus*, Nov. 3, 1876). They could be transparently partisan, such as a Republican paper's 1885 pre-election admonition to the party faithful to be vigilant because "The Democrats know they cannot carry the county except by fraud . . ." or a Democratic paper's 1892 prediction that "never in the history of the Republican party will corruption and money play its part more scandalously than in the present campaign . . ." (*Albany Evening Journal*, Nov. 2, 1885; *Corning Democrat*, Oct. 20, 1892). There were also partisan denials of fraud, such as a Democratic paper's rather half-hearted response to a

¹Nineteenth century newspapers were much more openly partisan in editorials and especially in news coverage than are today's papers. On average, we examined 32 newspapers for each year. We chose the particular years so as to give us two presidential and two nonpresidential years before and after the election law changes of 1890, and scanned a few papers in 1908 to get a feel for the comparative allegations at a later date. For each year and newspaper, we read roughly nine issues, centering on the election date for that year, since preliminary trials on larger time-spans had convinced us that there were very few stories on corruption published at other times, or that articles from other dates were very likely to be reprinted, at least in part, around election day. We concentrated on small-town newspapers because they were more likely to have first-hand reports of rural and town corruption.

TABLE I
Number, Partisan Persuasion, and Geographic Location
of Newspapers Examined for Each Year

Number of Papers Examined	1879	1880	1885	1888	1890	1891	1892	1898	1900	1908
	<i>A. Partisanship</i>									
Rep.	14	9	14	13	7	12	9	10	10	4
Dem.	13	13	15	13	3	13	13	8	7	3
Ind.	9	8	9	10	1	8	8	9	8	1
Total	36	30	38	36	11	33	30	27	25	8
	<i>B. Geographic Area</i>									
N.Y.C.	7	6	7	7	0	6	6	6	6	0
Upstate										
Cities	4	2	7	4	1	4	2	3	3	0
Upstate										
Towns	25	22	24	25	10	23	22	18	16	8

Republican charge: "The *Courier* says the defeat of the Republican ticket 'was accomplished by the open use of an unlimited corruption fund.' Nothing is easier to charge than the use of money in a campaign; but it is often very difficult to prove" (*Waterloo Observer*, Nov. 11, 1891). There were even defenses of fraud, as for example, one by Congregationalist minister Thomas K. Beecher, brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe and of the nation's most popular preacher, Henry Ward Beecher:

When a good man for a good purpose buys the vote of a fellow man, the voter—being a principal and a sovereign—is free to do as he chooses; the act is right. The buyer is no better in the court of conscience, not at the bar of God, except he have an intent to pervert the judgment. And the humble-minded voter who accepts the gift and guidance of the good man aforesaid is obeying motives manlier and more nearly safe than those which ordinarily sway our more active and enthusiastic voters (*Watkins Express*, Nov. 13, 1879).

Just as they printed market reports on the prices of hogs and corn, so the papers, from time to time, published quotations on votes. The franchise went for up to \$25 in Ulster County in 1880, for \$10 to \$27 in Elmira in 1885, for up to \$15 in Middletown in 1892 (*Elizabethtown Post*, Nov. 18, 1880; *Newburgh Daily Journal*, Nov. 5, 1885; *Elmira Daily Advertiser*, Nov. 4, 1885; *Orange County Press*, Nov. 11, 1892). Other stories discussed free transportation to the polls, the use of repeaters, the illegal naturaliza-

tion of foreigners, the election-day importation of voters from other states, the padding of registration rolls, fraudulent counting, and, most interestingly, payments to citizens not to vote. We counted and characterized all references to corruption in upstate towns and rural areas.⁹

The fundamental flaw in Converse's argument is his assumption that corruption always *inflated* turnout.¹⁰ Before the days of scientific polling, the parties took polls, especially in close states, and instead of sampling, they often questioned virtually every voter in an area. In one district in Clinton County in 1888, for instance, the Democratic canvassers went from house to house and counted 121 sure Republican, 101 sure Democrat, and 401 "doubtful" voters (*Plattsburgh Republican*, Nov. 10, 1888). In such circumstances, party managers had sufficient information to follow a policy of not only paying "floaters" to cast ballots for their parties, but also of rewarding opponents for not voting. In any system in which the practice of providing financial incentives for electoral performance was widespread, moreover, it would be rational for voters to conceal or lie about their preferences or to seek remuneration even for voting for their preferred candidates. There is evidence that late nineteenth-century New York voters played exactly this game. As one newspaper noted in 1888, "There are thousands of voters in both parties who wait in every important election to be paid, even to vote the ticket of their choice. A high Democratic authority has placed this number at one-third in each party in many sections of the State" (*New York Evening Post*, Nov. 16, 1888).¹¹

With the introduction of the secret ballot in 1890, the strategic alternatives facing the political managers suddenly shifted. No longer could a manager watch each voter openly drop his easily distinguished party ticket into a ballot box. Although curtains might thereafter shroud the bought voter's delivery on his promise, politicians could still observe the actions of an avowed or probable opponent who was paid to abstain.¹² Thus, assuming

⁹Thus, in succeeding tables, none of the material relates to New York City or to such upstate cities as Albany, Elmira, Rochester, Rome, or Utica.

¹⁰Converse, 1972, p. 286, and 1974, p. 1024. In the former, he asserts that before 1900 "the subtraction of legitimate but undesired votes from the stock cast . . . is virtually never mentioned."

¹¹If by electoral corruption we mean acts which pervert the voter's judgment, it is difficult to characterize such payments as corrupt. Moreover, if an exogenous shift brought about by, say, a corrupt-practices act decreased the general incidence of vote buying, many of those who formerly demanded payment for their franchises would vote anyway. Thus, a decrease in vote buying would not necessarily lead to as large a decline in turnout as might otherwise be expected.

¹²On two minor loopholes in the law which allowed managers to tell how someone had voted, see our working paper.

that voters and managers were rational, one would predict that the *institutional* change from an identifiable party ballot to a secret ballot would lead to a *behavioral* shift in the nature, but not necessarily in the extent, of electoral corruption.¹¹

The newspapers noticed this change, and, in fact, it was our reading of the *New York Times* for successive election periods which first suggested these models to us, and which led us to broaden our initial research in that paper to include a much larger number of journals. The *Democratic Times*' reports were quite explicit. In 1890, the paper noted that "under the old system of voting . . . the Republican Party spent money to increase the Republican vote. Now they are using their corruption fund to decrease the Democratic vote." By 1894, the practice had become institutionalized: "Politicians from some sections of the state speak of the cost of keeping people at home on election day as if it were part of the 'legitimate campaign expenses.' . . . Corruption of this sort is spoken of as if it were to be expected, and excites no more comment than would a mild epidemic of measles." Nor were the Republicans the sole practitioners of this deception, for it was a Democratic state chairman who noted in 1900 that "Under the new ballot law you cannot tell how a man votes when he goes into the booth, but if he stays at home you know that you have got the worth of your money" (*New York Times*, Oct. 18, 1890; Nov. 2, 1894; Sept. 28, 1900).

Tables 2 and 3, based on the whole sample of papers, demonstrate that the *Times* was not alone in noticing such changes, and confirm our predictions rather nicely. Table 2 presents the number of events (we have sought to eliminate duplicated reports of the same event) for each year, and Table 3 groups the events in Table 2 for the periods before and after the passage of the secret-ballot law. Rarely mentioned before 1890, explicitly deflationary fraud mushroomed to a quarter of the total after that date, and the number of events reported in which the nature of the chicanery was unspecified, a

¹¹In fact, it can be argued a priori that the number of purchased voters would rise as the proportion of contracts which were pacts to vote declined and the percentage composed of nonvoting agreements rose. First, compacts against voting would not require nonpoliticians to spend time traveling to the polls, and, therefore, a nonvoting contract would not include the value of foregone production. Second, if a politician convinced an opposition partisan to vote for him, he increased his margin by two votes, but if he persuaded an opponent not to vote, he gained only one vote. Assuming that the parties aimed at using "corruption funds" to produce the same expected vote gain in each period, and that the willingness to be corrupted remained constant across elections, then one would expect individual payoffs to decline after 1890, but the volume of payoffs to increase. On the other hand, as the value of a potential contract with an individual voter decreased, a politician might shift available funds into other channels of corruption, for instance, into buying electoral officials instead of voters, or into more legitimate forms of activity, such as providing transportation to the polls.

category which undoubtedly included instances of deflationary fraud, approximately doubled.¹² Inflationary fraud continued to be reported at about the same level, but references to it made up a strikingly smaller proportion of the total volume of events after than before 1890. Chi-square statistics for the full 3 X 2 table and for the five 2 X 2 subtables in Table 3 formed by deleting or collapsing various rows all show that the before and after patterns were very unlikely to have occurred by chance. Moreover, if the ballot reformers sought to decrease corruption, they apparently failed, for the total number of corrupt events reported was considerably higher in the four secret-ballot than in the four party-ballot elections. While it is possible that the rise from 108 to 173 events chronicled was due more to intensified reporting on the subject than to a rise in corruption, the increase at least makes it difficult to believe that the secret ballot and registration law changes immediately led to markedly cleaner elections. As long as elections were close, stakes high, and corrupters ingenious, "reforms" seem to have had more effect on the nature than the level of fraud.¹³

Although the reporting of electoral corruption was no doubt biased, our conclusions on the change in the nature of fraud at the ballot box do not appear to be an artifact of systematic vagaries in the data. Preelection stories on expected deception were probably less trustworthy than those which appeared after an election, for the former were more likely to have been prophylactic, partisan, or speculative. That is to say, such predictions may have reflected attempts by editors to inhibit fraud by advertising its possibility, efforts to rally the party faithful against the allegedly corrupt opposition, or instances of uninhibited prognostication in an era before the standards of media truthfulness were widely agreed upon. A change in the mix of preelection to postelection reports after 1890, therefore, might undercut our conclusion. But as a comparison of the "total" lines for the years before and after 1890 in Table 4 shows, there was no such statistically significant change. Moreover, if we cross-classify the nature of fraud reported by whether the report preceded or succeeded the election in each period, we can see that the reports of inflationary events seem most reliable (i.e., the proportion occurring after the election was higher) for the pre-1890 period, and the deflationary reports seem more reliable for the post-1890 period. Our confidence in the conclusions drawn from Table 3 is there-

¹²Furthermore, the reports before 1890 which we classified as deflationary concerned ballot fraud and intimidation—there were no mentions of paying people not to vote—while after 1890 most of the reports classified as deflationary concern the purchase of abstention.

¹³Political scientists have long been aware of allegations of the continuation of ballot fraud in New York after the passage of the secret-ballot law (see, e.g., Cosnell, 1923, pp. 145-147, 348).

TABLE 2
The Secret Ballot and Changes in the Nature of Rural Corruption, by Year*

	Number of Events Reported							
	1879	1880	1885	1888	1891	1892	1898	1900
Inflationary	7 (54%)**	23 (77%)	8 (47%)	38 (79%)	27 (36%)	39 (53%)	5 (36%)	4 (44%)
Deflationary	0	0	2 (12%)	1 (2%)	19 (25%)	14 (19%)	6 (43%)	2 (22%)
Uncertain	6 (46%)	7 (23%)	7 (41%)	9 (19%)	30 (39%)	21 (28%)	3 (21%)	3 (33%)

*We have tried to eliminate duplicate mentions of the same events in different newspapers. If a story mentioned both inflation and deflation, we have counted it twice, and have handled other mixes in reports similarly. If the report mentioned fraud generally or was vague as to whether the corruption inflated or deflated vote totals, we have put it in the "uncertain" category. Therefore, the number of events reported is not equal to the number of newspaper stories.

**Percentages, added by columns, may not equal 100% due to rounding errors.

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TABLE 3
Nature of Rural Corruption Before and After the Secret Ballot

Nature of Rural Corruption Before and After the Secret Ballot	I. Number of Events Reported	
	Pre-1890	Post-1890
Inflationary	76 (70.4%)	75 (43.4%)
Deflationary	3 (2.8%)	41 (23.7%)
Uncertain	29 (26.9%)	57 (32.9%)
Total	108 (100%)	173 (100%)

II. Pearson's Chi-Square Statistic for 6-fold and 4-fold tables

Variables	Chi-Square	Probability of Null Hypothesis Less Than
$I \times D \times U$	28.43	.001
$I \times D$	26.77	.001
$D \times U$	11.35	.001
$I \times U$	6.13	.02
$I \times (U + D)$	19.52	.001
$(I + U) \times D$	22.04	.001

fore strengthened, because the crucial contrasts there were produced by the "hardest" data.¹⁶

Nor do partisan biases in reporting seem to have varied between the party-ballot and secret-ballot periods in a way which would impair our conclusions. As Table 5 demonstrates, Republican newspapers rarely uncovered general election corruption in the GOP and Democrats were nearly as unlikely to broadcast allegations about tricks played by their brotherhood, while independent newspapers were more even-handed. Given these biases, the cells which do differ across the two panels of Table 5 support our

¹⁶If we subtract the entries in the pre-1890 subtable for the inflationary and deflationary rows from those for the corresponding rows in the post-1890 subtable and compute Pearson's chi-square on the resulting 2 x 2 table, we find that the probability that the differences could have occurred by chance is less than .000002. In other words, we can be very certain that the pre-1890 inflationary and the post-1890 deflationary references are more reliable than the post-1890 inflationary and pre-1890 deflationary reports. This is precisely the pattern which we would expect if there were, in fact, few instances of deflationary fraud before 1890, and if expectations of inflationary corruption were based on past as well as present experience after 1890. That is, if there were a time lag before newspapers realized that inflationary fraud was less likely than before the institution of the secret ballot, they would continue to predict the occurrence of inflationary fraud, but would find relatively less of it in postelection stories.

TABLE 4

Number of Events Cross-Classified by Pre- and Postelection Source, Nature of Corruption, and Period

Nature of Corruption	Pre-1890		Post-1890	
	Prelection	Postelection	Prelection	Postelection
I	27 (35.5%)	49 (64.5%)	36 (48.0%)	23 (56.1%)
	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.3%)	18 (43.9%)	24 (42.1%)
	17 (58.6%)	12 (41.4%)	24 (42.1%)	33 (57.9%)
U	46 (42.6%)	62 (57.4%)	81 (46.8%)	92 (53.2%)
	<i>Post-1890</i>		39 (52.0%)	18 (43.9%)
D	17 (58.6%)	12 (41.4%)	24 (42.1%)	33 (57.9%)
Total	119 (48.7%)	93 (38.1%)	114 (46.7%)	63 (25.8%)
	119 (48.7%)	93 (38.1%)	11 (4.5%)	21 (8.6%)
			244 (100.0%)	

χ^2 (pre-1890, post-1890) = .4799; $P(\chi^2)$ = .5115.

TABLE 5

Newspaper Reporting Biases (Percentages in Parentheses)*

Partisanship of Newspapers	Reports About				Total
	Rep.	Dem.	Both**	Unc.**	
<i>Panel I: Pre-1890</i>					
Republican	1 (0.7)	40 (28.2)	0	6 (4.2)	47 (33.1)
Democrat	69 (48.6)	1 (.7)	0	4 (2.8)	74 (52.1)
Independent**	3 (2.1)	1 (.7)	5 (3.5)	12 (8.5)	21 (14.8)
Total	73 (51.4)	42 (29.6)	5 (3.5)	22 (15.5)	142 (100.0)
<i>Panel II: Post-1890</i>					
Republican	0	63 (25.8)	0	4 (1.6)	67 (27.4)
Democrat	85 (34.8)	13 (5.3)	7 (2.9)	9 (3.7)	114 (46.7)
Independent	34 (13.9)	17 (7.0)	4 (1.6)	8 (3.3)	63 (25.8)
Total	119 (48.7)	93 (38.1)	11 (4.5)	21 (8.6)	244 (100.0)

*The numbers here reflect all reports, including duplicates of reports from other newspapers, for all years, including discussions of previous elections which appeared during an election year. (Eliminating such previous-year reports makes no substantive difference in the table.) The (I, 1, 1) cell means that in the election years before 1890, only one report of Republican corruption appeared in any of the Republican papers which we read. The other cells may be interpreted analogously.

**Ind. = independent, Independent Democratic, or independent Republican.

Both = allegations made explicitly about both parties.

Unc. = allegations in which no political party was specifically mentioned.

interpretation of Table 3. Since the rural areas of New York State were predominantly Republican, and since a good many farmers reportedly demanded payments for merely coming to the polls, we would expect Republicans to have engaged in relatively more vote buying and Democrats in comparatively more abstention buying. If vote buying were in fact more prevalent in the earlier period and abstention buying relatively more common in the later period, we would anticipate that charges of Republican corruption would fall somewhat relative to accusations of Democratic deceit from one era to the other. This is precisely what we find if we look at the percentages in Table 5.¹⁷

Conclusions

Although our study needs to be replicated in other states and time periods, and perhaps with other types of data before it can be generally accepted, we feel justified in drawing three tentative conclusions about the broader topic. First, as scholars have often noted, many of the most significant questions in political science can be approached most fruitfully by considering data not available from modern public opinion surveys. And the range of sources which can be systematically analyzed, as we have tried to show by considering "literary" evidence in this note, is not limited to official documents and election returns.

Second, abstract theorizing must complement, not substitute for, painstaking empirical work. Both Burnham's elite-capture/proletarian-alienation theory and Converse's decline-in-rural-corruption hypothesis represent attempts to explain the decline in turnout, but neither scholar systematically analyzes the "impressionistic" contemporary sources which are so crucial to each theory, not only in regard to rural voting patterns, but in connection with such larger questions as changes in voter consciousness, the nature and

¹⁷One may draw the same conclusion as in the text from the following table, which is based on the same data as in Table 5:

Partisanship of Newspapers	Pre-1890		Post-1890	
	Inflation	Deflation	Inflation	Uncertain
Republican	29	6	12	21
Democrat	58	1	15	31
Independent	12	0	9	21
			23	21
Republican	23	23	24	31
Democrat	59	24	9	21
Independent	33	9		

degree of elite control, and the reasons why particular institutional changes took place. Converse asserts that the level of rural vote buying was high before and low after the passage of secret ballot and registration laws and assumes that corruption always inflated turnout. An intensive analysis of newspaper evidence in New York State, however, convinces us that it is not possible to determine the level of corruption, for reports, while rarely comprehensive and never uniform from year to year, were always colored, and perhaps exaggerated, by partisan biases, as well as by journalists' realizations that stories about sensational events sold papers. Yet, since these source biases do not account for changes in the reports on the *modes* of corruption, we believe that the shift from inflationary to deflationary fraud—our central finding in this note—represents a real change in behavior. The secret-ballot law altered the incentives for political entrepreneurs. Once delivery on the sale of a ballot became nearly impossible to verify, market transactions shifted toward different goods with lower policing costs; many more people were apparently paid to stay home after than before 1890.

Finally, by melding the institutional and behavioral hypotheses, we avoid what we believe is a false choice between them both in the particular case of the rural corruption suggestion and more generally. In any era of institutional and behavioral instability, an explanation which treats as exogenous the behavioral causes of institutional changes or fails to trace the effects of such changes on the behavior of all actors—not just voters, but also politicians—cannot be comprehensive, but it is likely to be misleading. "

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- "Thus, Rusk and Stucker, seemingly ignorant of the potential disfranchising effect of the secret ballot as well as the intent of the 'reform's' southern backers, overemphasize the effect on turnout of the poll tax and other laws because they ignore that of the secret ballot, which functioned as a literacy test. Compare their 1978 article with Kousser, 1973 and 1974. We have not attempted to present here a study of the origins of the New York secret-ballot law, but for some suggestive intimations as to the purposes of northern proponents of such laws, see *Cayuga Chief*, Nov. 8, 1890; Kousser, 1974, pp. 52-53; Fredman, 1968, pp. 49-54, 85; Harris, 1929, pp. 72-78; and Reynolds, 1980.

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