

*WISCONSIN:
McCARTHY AND THE
PROGRESSIVE TRADITION*

It is possible in Wisconsin to test two propositions by which the pluralists seek to connect McCarthyism to agrarian radicalism. Both propositions interpret McCarthyism as a mass phenomenon. But the evidence from county voting behavior suggests that McCarthyism was not a radical movement outside of normal American political processes.

The first proposition is that both La Follette and McCarthy mobilized a similar lower-middle-class stratum of the population, particularly sensitive to irrational appeals. Here we must find a relationship between the support obtained by the two political leaders. Pluralists charge that a common ethnic base produced a common concern with status grievances. The evidence points to different ethnic bases and to progressive economic preoccupations contrasting with McCarthy's foreign policy concerns and traditional conservative appeals. Pluralists find McCarthyite roots in the economically dispossessed classes that supported agrarian radicalism. The evidence points to largely contrasting economic bases for La Follette and McCarthy.

The pluralists' second assertion is that both McCarthy and La Follette split apart existing coalitions and upset the group basis of politics. Here we must find that McCarthy and La

Follette mobilized a grass roots support not characteristic of Republican candidates who had run before them. In fact, like La Follette, McCarthy had roots in the traditional Republican vote. Like La Follette, he also mobilized new support. But whereas McCarthy's new support was marginal and short-lived, La Follette's reoriented Wisconsin politics for decades.

Seeking to discover agrarian radical roots for McCarthy, Peter Viereck notes that McCarthy began his career in the Democratic Party and then became a Republican. According to Viereck, this duplicates the experience of Wisconsin's "populist" masses, who were Democratic and authoritarian while they were poor and have become Republican with affluence.¹ Actually, in stressing McCarthy's Democratic beginnings, Viereck fails to support his own interpretation. For the prewar Democratic Party was not the liberal party in Wisconsin but the conservative party, and while the liberal masses became Democratic, McCarthy and his German environment became Republican. Since McCarthy went in one direction while progressivism was moving in the opposite direction, he cannot be the end result of progressivism.

Social Bases

My effort in this chapter and the two following is to uncover the social support for McCarthyism and agrarian radicalism. Toward that end, an analysis was made of the county voting returns in each state in approximately seventy elections between 1886 and 1960. To understand the electoral data it is necessary to know the demographic background of the states. Wisconsin was settled in the nineteenth century by Americans moving west and by Germans and Scandinavians. In 1910, Germans and their children made up 30 percent of the population, while Scandinavians accounted for another 9 percent. The Germans settled mainly in the rich farming country of eastern Wisconsin and in such nascent

industrial centers as Milwaukee and Kenosha. Their descendants populate the numerous small cities and prosperous farms in eastern Wisconsin. The Scandinavians, mainly Norwegian, settled in the poorer areas of northwestern Wisconsin (see Figure 3.1). In the twentieth century, a number of Polish and Czechoslovakian immigrants came to the state. They settled on the farms of central Wisconsin; the Poles also joined the working class in Milwaukee and other cities (see Figure 3.2). Because so many of its inhabitants are of German and east-European descent, Wisconsin has a large Catholic population.

The early settlers in Wisconsin grew mainly wheat and other grains. In the north, there was an extensive lumbering industry. By the end of the nineteenth century, the trees and the wheat had largely disappeared, and Wisconsin farmers turned to dairying and diversified farming. More corn was grown in the southwest; there was more subsistence farming in the north. But throughout the state dairying was the major agricultural activity, as it remains today. The principal economic change of the past half century has been the industrialization of the state. By 1930, Wisconsin was in the top quarter of states in the percentage of its population engaged in manufacturing.²

Since there have been substantial changes in population and demography in every county in Wisconsin (as in the Dakotas), it is pertinent to ask whether we are justified in comparing county behavior over the course of decades. Indeed, often we will not seek to compare the vote of a single county for two candidates widely separated in time; instead we will relate urbanization, acreage in wheat, the percentage of foreign stock, and so on, to the political behavior of the counties. (The same areas may not be urban in 1890 and 1936, but one can still measure the extent to which urbanism is related to support of Populism and the New Deal.)

Moreover, this study and others indicate the persistence of county and ethnic voting traditions over the space of many

CHAPTER THREE

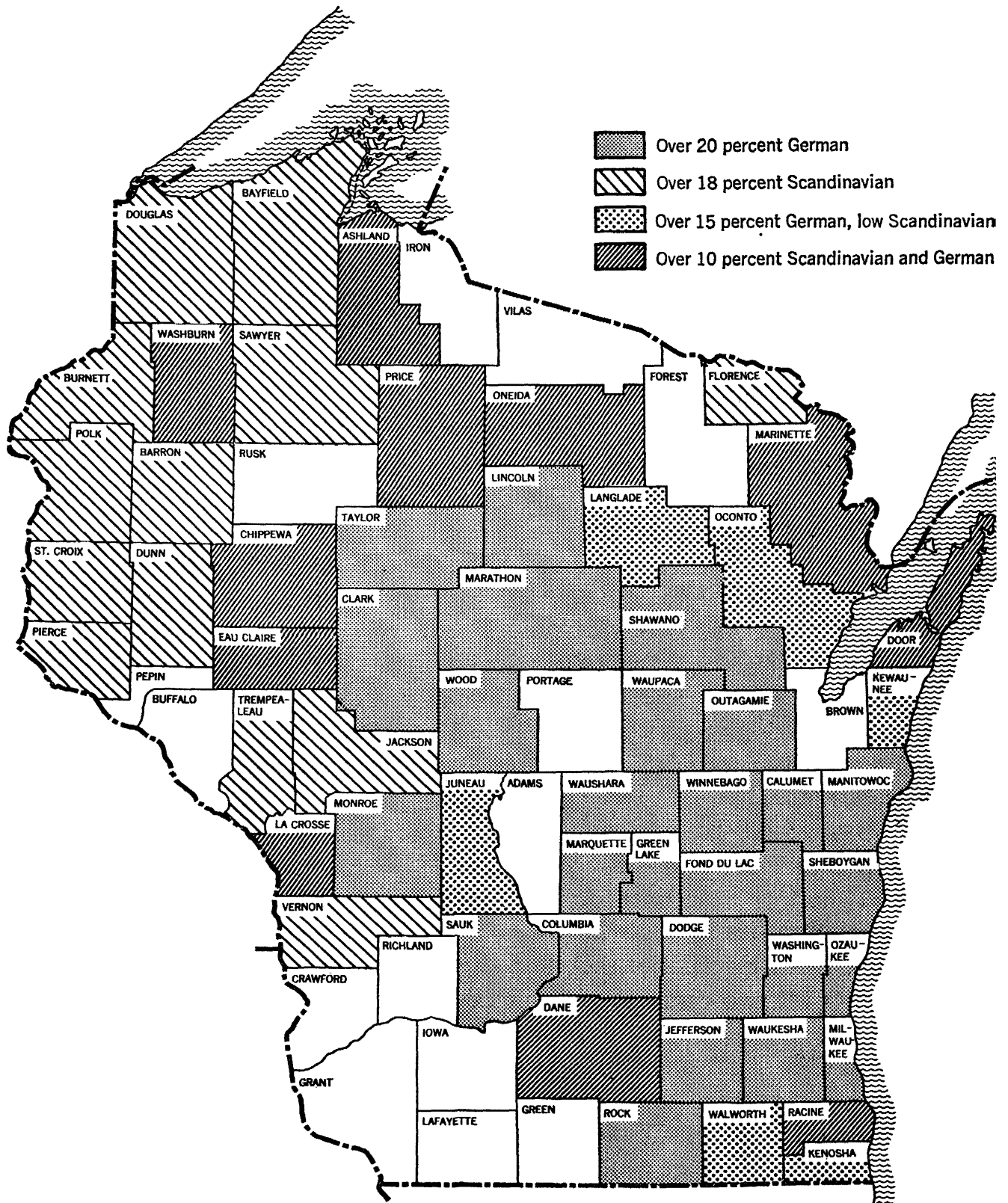


Figure 3.1. The distribution of the Scandinavian and German population in Wisconsin, 1930.

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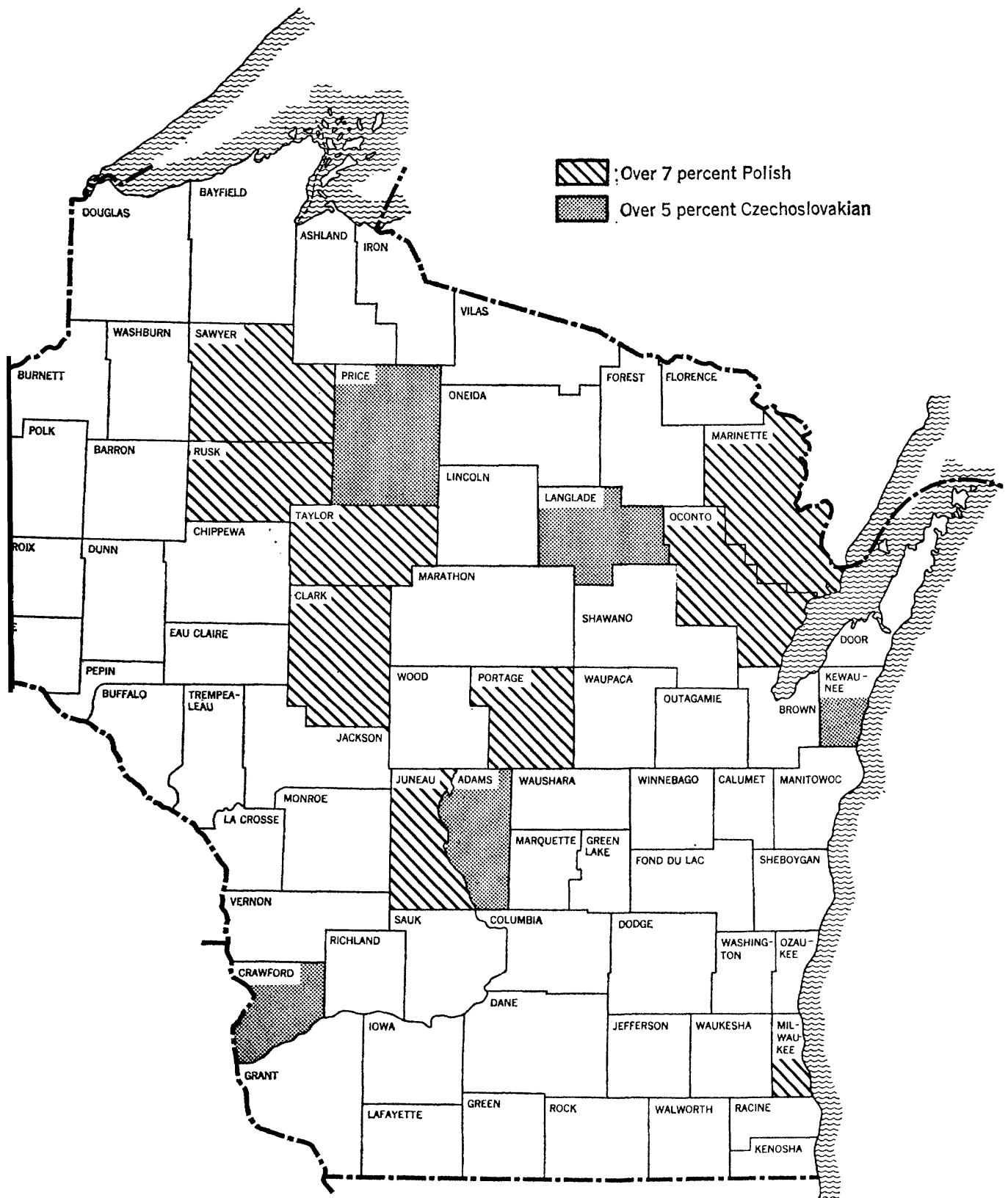


Figure 3.2. The distribution of the Polish and Czechoslovakian population in Wisconsin, 1930.

years. In most states, party traditions maintain their impact within the counties even while the social characteristics of those counties change significantly. There is evidence that ethnic voting patterns continue to assert themselves even when foreign language newspapers have gone the way of those who speak the foreign language.³ One would not claim reliability of the highest order for interpretations presented on the basis of county data ranging over half a century. All that is claimed is that historical analysis made with the aid of county statistics is significantly more plausible than analysis that ignores county voting patterns.*

Populism and Progressivism

Both the sources of support for the major parties and the weakness of the Democrats significantly influenced Wisconsin agrarian radicalism. The salient features of Populism and progressivism in the state can be briefly summarized: First,

* There remains the problem of utilizing statistical techniques that will digest and make sense of the mass of quantitative information. The techniques employed here were primarily the correlation coefficient, the partial correlation, the scatter diagram, and the county map.⁴

The correlation coefficient, running on a scale from +1.00 to -1.00, measures the relation between two variables such as the state-wide vote by counties in two elections. The higher the numerical value of the correlation, the further one variable will go toward explaining the other. A partial correlation measures the relation between two variables with the influence of a third eliminated — for example the relationship between Truman's and Kennedy's vote with the Catholic population held constant. A scatter diagram represents graphically what is expressed numerically by a correlation. Each county's score on the two variables (e.g., the percentage of Catholics and the percentage for Kennedy) is entered on the graph. The scatter diagram may reveal interesting county variations from the total state picture that are submerged when the relation over the state as a whole is summarized by the correlation. County maps reveal the geographic concentration of particular political movements, ethnic groups, etc. (The statistical techniques are discussed more fully in Appendix A.)

both Populism and progressivism were movements of the poor. Second, as economic movements Populism and progressivism concerned themselves with class demands rather than with status grievances. Third, the La Follette coalition grew out of the traditional Republican vote but differed from the party vote in having an economic base. It also had antecedents in Wisconsin Populism and the Bryan Democracy of 1896 and 1898. Fourth, as Table 3.1 shows, the

TABLE 3.1

LA FOLLETTE'S IMPACT ON WISCONSIN HISTORY

	1904 La Follette	1904 Roosevelt	1910 Republican Governor
1904 T. Roosevelt	83		
1910 Republican Governor	80	91	
1904 Primary	88	70	66
1916 La Follette	60	44	43
1916 Wilson	—24	—49	—38
1924 La Follette	—01	28	00
1934 Progressive Governor	49	37	34
1936 Progressive Governor	54	46	39
1938 Progressive Governor	61	60	52
1940 Progressive Senator	47	38	34
1948 Truman	34	22	17
1952 McCarthy	—10	—03	04

particular support La Follette mobilized at the turn of the century was a cohesive force in Wisconsin politics until World War I, was the major element in the Wisconsin Progressive Party of 1934–1940, and then evolved into Democratic Party support. The support for La Follette in 1904 is closer to the modern Democratic Party than the regular Republican vote of that period. The coalition mobilized by La Follette progressivism thus continued to influence Wisconsin politics through the depression decade and down to the present day.

In his evolution to progressivism after and indeed against

Bryan, La Follette paralleled the careers of Norris in Nebraska, Crawford in South Dakota, Cummins in Iowa, and other progressive leaders. Their opposition to Bryan and Populism raises doubts about the commonly held belief in the continuity of Populism and progressivism. It supports the newer interpretations of such historians as Hofstadter and Mowry, who believe that there was a radical break between Populism and progressivism. But voting patterns in Wisconsin, unlike those in the Dakotas, do not demonstrate this discontinuity.

The Populists were weak in Wisconsin, which had passed beyond the wheat frontier by 1890. In 1894, the Populists, at the peak of their Wisconsin strength, polled only 7 percent of the state vote. Several of the newly settled counties of northern and northwestern Wisconsin, suffering for many years from the collapse of the lumbering boom, gave the Populists more than 10 percent of their vote. The party was also strong in the German urban areas, where it received 20 percent of the vote in Milwaukee, 18 percent in La Crosse and Racine, 12 percent in Sheboygan, and 9 percent in Winnebago (Oshkosh). Much of this German working-class vote was later to become socialist. In its combination of German workers and poor Scandinavian farmers, Wisconsin Populism prefigured the modern Democratic Party. In its northern support, Populism was a prelude to progressivism.

La Follette captured the machinery of the regular Republican Party in 1900, and it is difficult to disentangle his support from the normal Republican vote (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4). It is not simply that La Follette tended to receive a regular Republican vote; his presence on the ticket from 1900 on may have had an important impact on the nature of regular Republicanism. For example, although La Follette opposed Bryan in 1896, he attracted a pro-Bryan, northern Wisconsin following in 1900.⁵ La Follette's influence may have returned pro-Bryan Republicans to the Republican Party and sent anti-Bryan Democrats away. But this is

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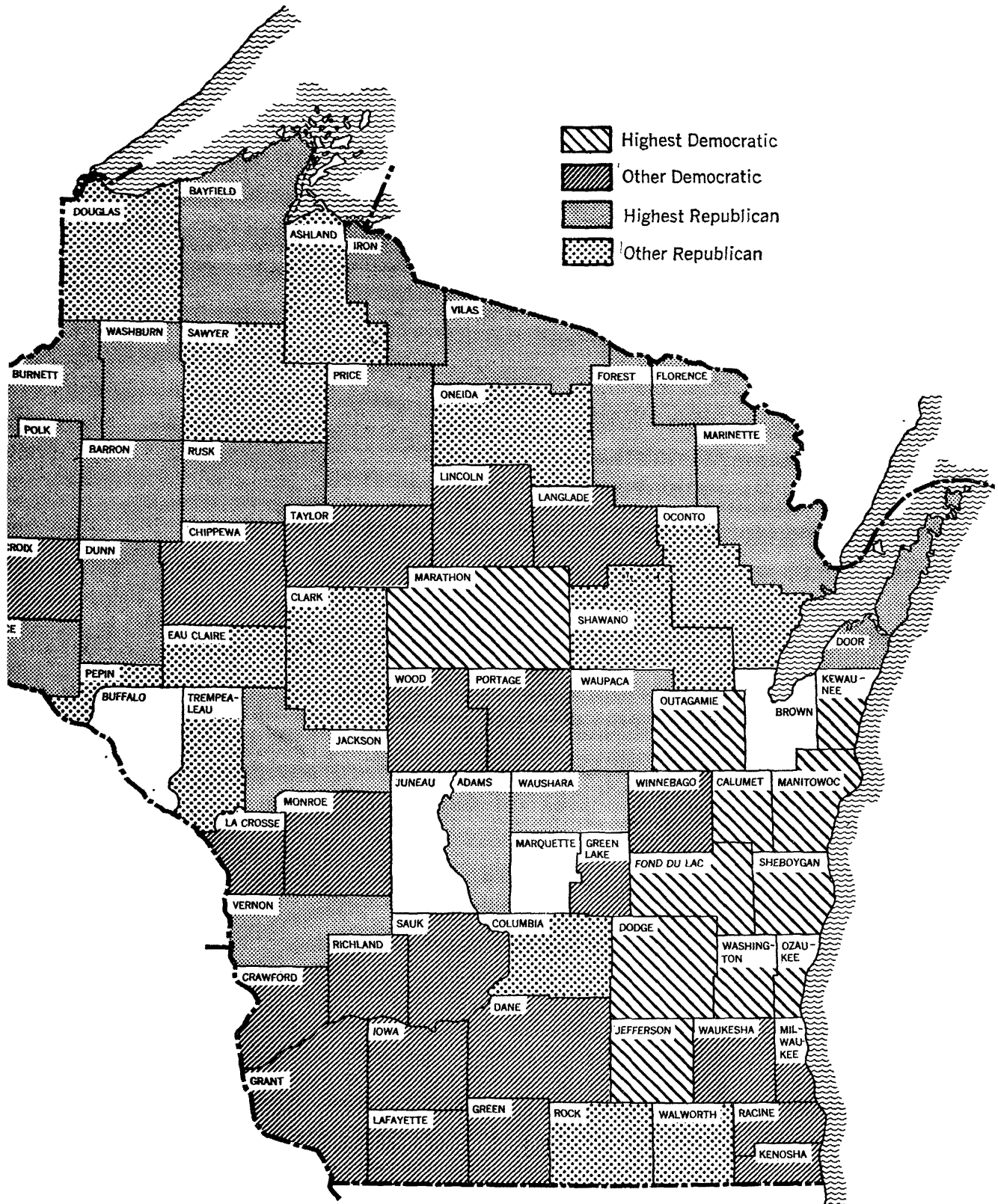


Figure 3.3. The party vote in Wisconsin, 1900–1910.

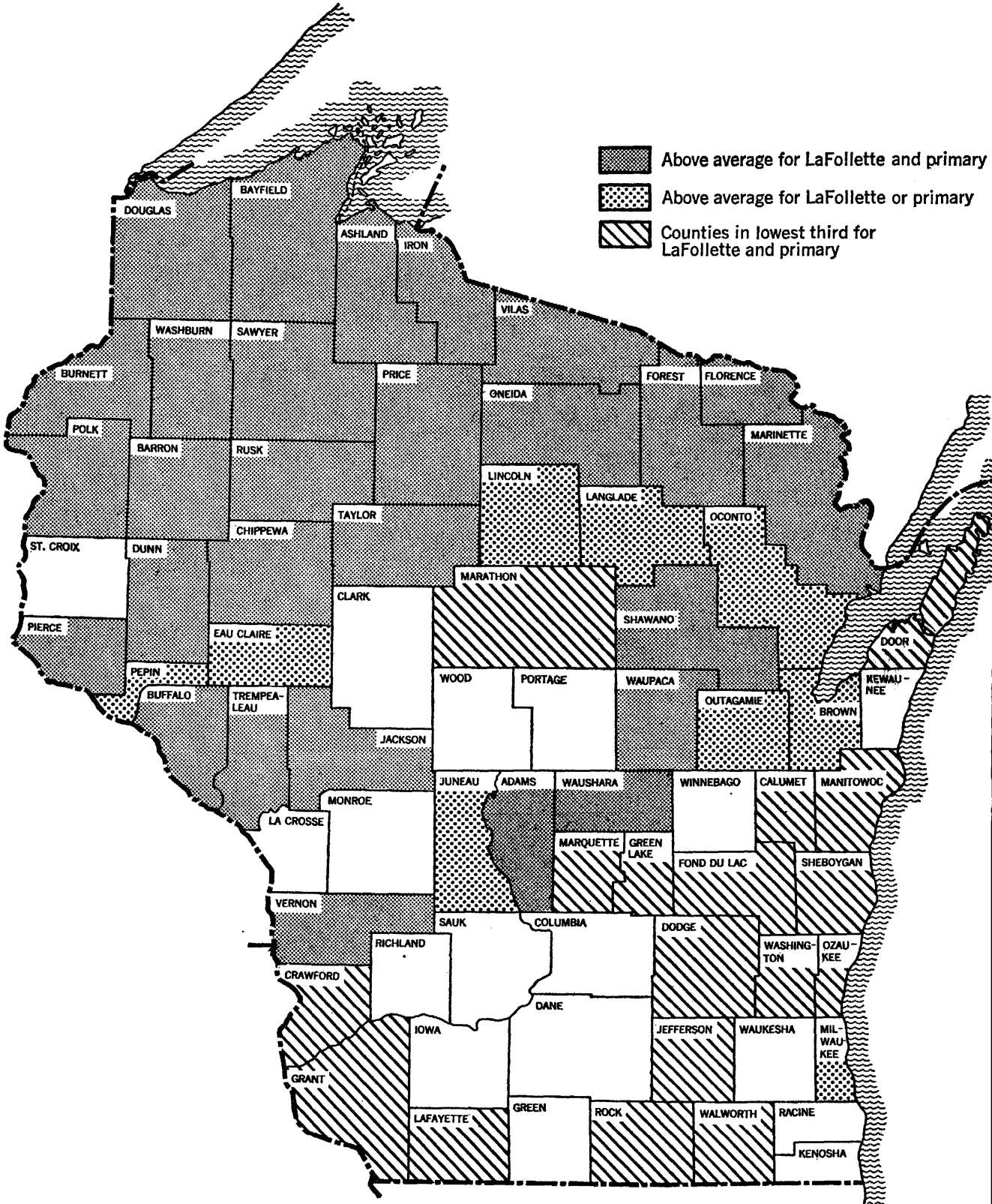


Figure 3.4. La Follette's strength in 1904.

Rogin, Michael Paul. *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: the Radical Specter*. E-book, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1967, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb00303.0001.001>. Downloaded on behalf of 3.141.28.107

speculative; it is necessary to uncover the uniquely progressive support for La Follette.

In 1904, after voting for La Follette in two general elections, the conservative stalwarts made an all-out attempt to defeat him.*⁶ That same year the Progressives sponsored a referendum to obtain voter support for a direct primary law. Support for this referendum correlated .88 with La Follette's 1904 vote, more than twenty points higher than it correlated with other Republican elections. The 1904 elections, then, provide us with an index of progressive support.†

Progressive correlations with the Republican vote between 1900 and 1910 were generally about .6. However, the differences between progressivism and regular Republicanism are important.

The regular Republican and Democratic party votes had a more distinctive ethnic composition than did progressivism. For instance, although German counties opposed progressivism, the German population was a more significant factor in accounting for opposition to regular Republicanism. Scandinavians supported the La Follette movement, but no more than they supported other Republicans. Unlike the regular Republican vote, the progressive vote was not distinctively Protestant, for a number of poor Catholic counties in northern Wisconsin supported La Follette offsetting an anti-La Follette Catholic vote farther south.**

* This differentiated the 1904 election from that of other years, giving it a distinctively progressive coloration. It was correlated ten to twenty points lower with other Republican elections than these elections were with one another.

† There was substantial continuity between progressive strength in 1904 and progressive support ten years later. Both La Follette's 1916 senatorial primary vote and the progressive gubernatorial primary strength of 1914 correlated .5+ with the 1904 progressive elections.

** Regular Republicanism was correlated .6+ with the percentage of Scandinavians and -.6+ with the percentage of Germans. La Follette's Scandinavian correlation was similar; his German correlation was somewhat lower, as several native-stock counties joined German counties in opposing him. Regular Republicanism was cor-

On the other hand, progressive support had a significant economic component. The poorer the county (measured in value of land per acre), the higher the progressive vote (see Figure 3.5).⁷ This was in direct contrast to the progressive

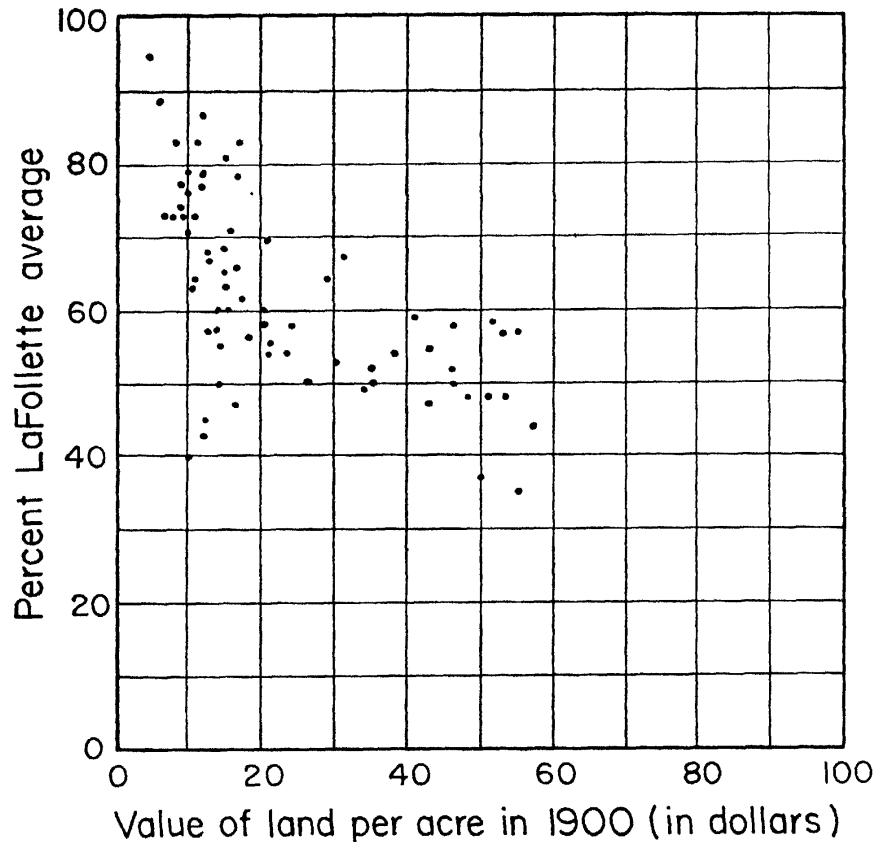


Figure 3.5. *La Follette and agricultural wealth in 1904* (dots represent counties).

vote in South Dakota, which increased with an *increase* in wealth.

Analysis of South Dakota progressivism confirms the Hofstadter-Mowry view that progressivism was a movement of the rich. Whereas the poor Wisconsin counties supported La Follette, the South Dakota progressive vote increased in the richer counties. The differing bases of progressivism in

related about $-.5$ with the percentage of Catholics, far higher than the La Follette relationship.

South Dakota and Wisconsin are related to the differing natures of the two movements. While La Follette in 1912 tacitly supported Woodrow Wilson for President, the South Dakota progressives, in control of the GOP state organization, united behind Theodore Roosevelt. There was obviously a personal reason for La Follette's decision — anger at Roosevelt for sabotaging his own campaign for the Republican nomination. Yet the different actions of the progressive leaders in the two states are symbolic of the contrast between the two movements.*

Often the difference between La Follette and Wilson on the one hand and Roosevelt on the other is identified with their own catchwords: Wilson's New Freedom versus Roosevelt's New Nationalism. Because of its stress on economic competition among equals, the New Freedom is said to have a reactionary cast. The New Nationalism, with its acceptance of bigness, regulated competition, and monopoly, is said to be more in touch with the modern world and the pragmatic New Deal. Clearly this interpretation of history fits the pluralist picture. Progressives are divided into two groups. One opposed big government and big business, looked backward to a rural world of small entrepreneurs, and was, in short, anti-industrial. The other was willing to accept industrialization and work for reforms within an industrial capitalist order.

The character of La Follette progressivism undermines this interpretation. It is more fruitful to look at American history not in terms of attitudes toward industrialization in the abstract but in terms of the particular demands made by particular groups and classes on the evolving industrial system. The economic classes supporting progressivism in

* The elections to which La Follette's 1904 support was more similar than was regular Republican support include the two Wilson votes but not the Progressive Party campaign of 1912. La Follette supported Wilson tacitly in 1912 and openly in 1916, but more than the personal factor was at work here. Wilson and not Roosevelt received a progressive vote in the Dakotas as well.

Wisconsin differed from these in South Dakota. In part because of his base among the poor farmers, La Follette sponsored more radical social legislation than his counterparts in South Dakota. This radicalism did not make La Follette anti-industrial as the pluralist interpretation implies; on the contrary, it enabled him to press for reforms relevant to the conditions of the poor in an industrializing country. Thus the Wisconsin industrial commissions were precursors of the New Deal; the blue laws of South Dakota's Coe Crawford were not. Moreover, the South Dakota counties that supported progressivism before World War I opposed the New Deal and tend to be Republican today. The more "reactionary" Wisconsin progressive counties supported the New Deal and give disproportionate support to the contemporary Democratic Party. Wisconsin progressives did not react to industrialization in the abstract but to the particular industrial capitalist constellations of power.

From World War I to World War II

During World War I, La Follette progressivism received disproportionate German support. McCarthy, like other post-World War II Republicans, was also to obtain German backing. But to connect progressivism with McCarthyism because of that fact is to misread Wisconsin history. Pluralists relate the progressive's ethnic appeal created by foreign policy to McCarthy's foreign-policy-based ethnic appeal. But one should not overestimate the importance of progressive ethnicity. First, the progressives' German support violated the past economic appeal of the movement; it does not reveal an underlying ethnic or "status" approach to politics. Second, analysis of progressivism from World War I to World War II demonstrates the fleeting character of its ethnic component. Third, the more durable progressive economic base did not provide the underpinnings for McCarthy's electoral victories.

By 1916, in part because of his progressive strength, Woodrow Wilson had a base of support that differed markedly from that given to previous Democratic candidates. Northern Wisconsin residents disproportionately supported Wilson and Germans disproportionately opposed him. But the war interrupted any incipient party realignment. The realignment that did occur was in the progressive base. Most Wisconsin progressive leaders followed La Follette in opposing American entry into the war. Germans, who had disproportionately opposed progressivism, now as overwhelmingly supported it. The progressive movement emerged from the war with a following far different from that of previous years.

Thus La Follette received more than 70 percent of the 1922 Republican primary vote because he ran well both in German and in progressive counties.* He had not lost his old base; he had rather gained a new one. But other pro-La Follette progressives were not so fortunate. Running in the 1918 Republican primary, progressive James Thompson narrowly lost his bid for the senate because he could not defeat Irving Lenroot in the old progressive counties.

Lenroot, Thompson's opponent, had been a La Follette protégé and was a prowar congressman from northern Wisconsin. Better known among progressives than Thompson, Lenroot swamped him in the traditionally progressive northern counties. As a result, Thompson polled a vote related .60 to the percentage of Germans. (Thompson's vote was actually negatively related to La Follette's primary vote only two years earlier; see Table 3.2.) In 1920, Thompson ran as an independent for the senate against Lenroot. Compared to 1918, Thompson did better in the old progressive counties and worse in the German counties, but his vote was still

* But just as in the Dakotas the Germans by 1922 were deserting the Non-Partisan League, so in Wisconsin some German counties were actually among the lowest for La Follette. However, more German counties were still strongly for him.

TABLE 3.2
PROGRESSIVISM IN WISCONSIN IN THE 1920's*

	1904 La Follette	1904 Direct Primary	1916 La Follette	1918 Thompson	1920 Thompson	1922 La Follette	1924 La Follette	1926 Blaine	1928 B. La Follette, Jr.
1904 La Follette	88								
1904 Direct Primary	60	48							
1916 La Follette	—54	—48	—14						
1918 Thompson	—24	—13	12	77					
1920 Thompson	05	18	16	34	59				
1922 La Follette	19	28	34	36	71	75			
1924 La Follette	—21	—10	06	53	63	57	61		
1926 Blaine									
1928 B. La Follette, Jr.	12	11	28	30	50	72	70	42	
1930 P. La Follette	16	06	36	17	41	47	63	36	61

* All elections reported in this table are primaries except those of 1904 and 1924.

disproportionately German, and he lost another close election.

In the elections between 1918 and 1928, postwar progressivism moved gradually closer to its prewar base (see Table 3.2).⁸ Germans were slowly returning to their conservative voting habits.

The progressivism of the 1920's then was a coalition of Germans and poorer Scandinavians. This coalition was split apart by the depression, which realigned progressive support in an economic direction. The progressive movement of the 1930's was in large part a return to pre-World War I progressive politics (see Table 3.3). Progressivism was again strong in the north and west and weak in the richer, German southeast. Gosnell has shown that Progressive Party support was concentrated in the poorer, Scandinavian parts of Wisconsin,⁹ a fact clear also from a map of progressive strength in the 1930's (see Figure 3.6).

The cohesive Progressive Party of the 1930's, and with it the modern Democratic Party, began to take shape in Phil La Follette's 1930 gubernatorial victory (compare Tables 3.2 and 3.3). Those who voted for Phil La Follette in November 1930 and for John Blaine in the spring of 1932 went into the Progressive Party of 1934. Progressive Party support itself differed from earlier progressive strength chiefly because it centered more in the urban working class.¹⁰ The major shift came in 1936; the working-class counties of Milwaukee, Kenosha, Racine, and Eau Claire were clearly more progressive from 1936 to 1940 than they had been earlier (see Figure 3.7).*

Progressivism in the 1930's, then, had lost its war-born German support and was economically based. Samuel Lubell, however, asserts that the Progressive Party was a coalition of those voting progressive for economic and ethnic reasons and that World War II split apart the two groups.

* The progressive vote was rural in the 1920's, but neither disproportionately rural nor disproportionately urban after 1934.

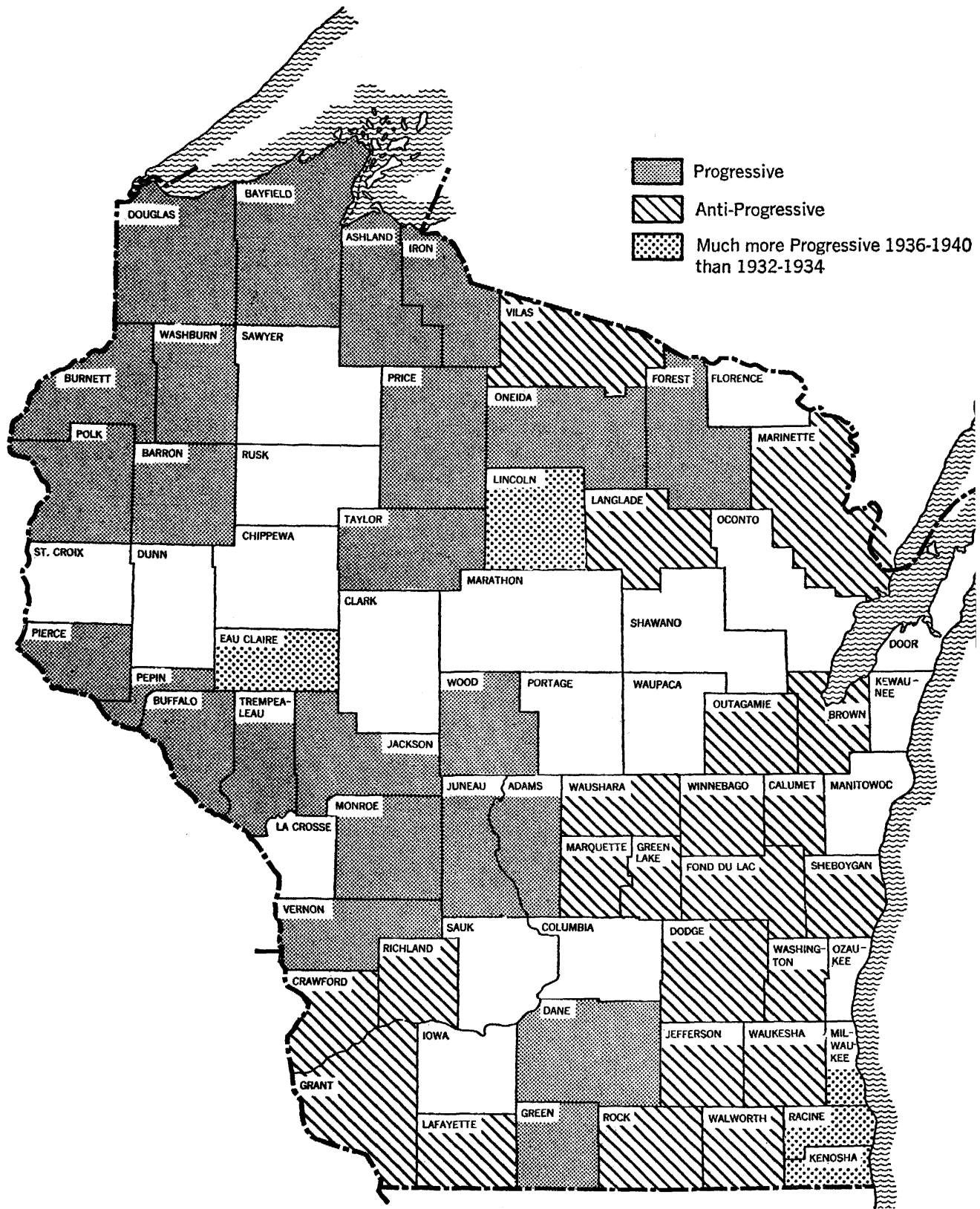


Figure 3.6. Progressivism in Wisconsin, 1932-1940.

TABLE 3.3
COHESIVE PROGRESSIVISM: THE 1930'S

	1904 La Follette	1930 P. La Follette Primary	1930 P. La Follette November	1932 Blaine	1934 Prog. Governor	1936 Prog. Governor	1938 Prog. Governor	1940 Prog. Senator	1942 Prog. Governor	1946 La Follette
1904 La Follette										
1930 P. La Follette Primary	16									
1930 P. La Follette November	61	60								
1932 Blaine Primary	48	75	79							
1934 Progressive Governor	49	57	61	80						
1936 Progressive Governor	54	46	65	78	80					
1938 Progressive Governor	61	30	67	70	57	84				
1940 Progressive Senator	47	38	61	71	68	86	86			
1942 Progressive Governor	40	44	54	56	62	68	59	75		
1946 La Follette Primary	27	43	61	67	49	66	72	71	53	
1948 Truman	34	10	32	43	31	61	68	71	36	58

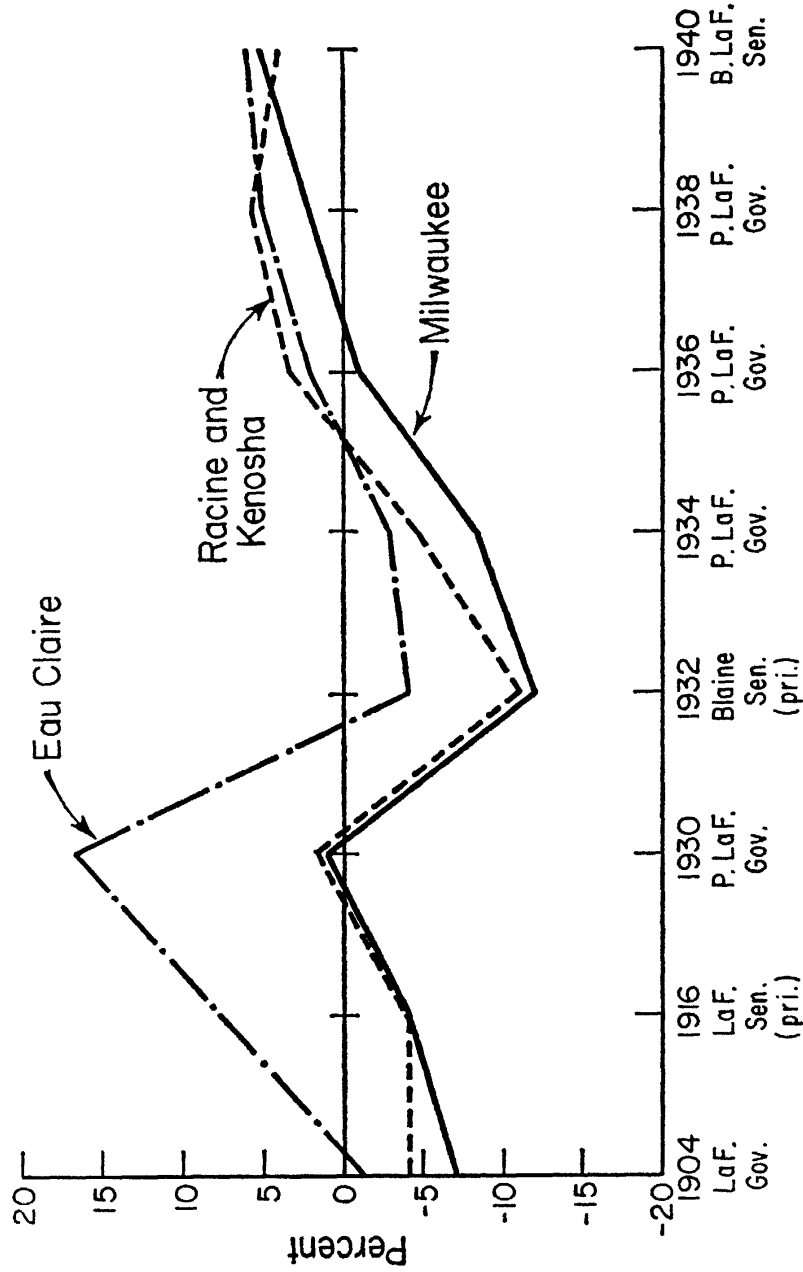


Figure 3.7. The Wisconsin working class becomes progressive (graph shows percentage deviation from county means).

As evidence for his contention, Lubell isolates twenty-two counties in Wisconsin in which Roosevelt's vote dropped 20 percent or more between 1936 and 1940. This drop is alleged to indicate German sensitivity to Roosevelt's interventionist foreign policy. And, Lubell concludes, these German counties similarly deserted Phil La Follette between 1936 and 1938, giving him 45 percent of their vote the first year, 31 percent the second.¹¹ However, La Follette's vote in the state as a whole dropped almost as much as his vote in these counties — from 48 percent to 36 percent. Note that the Lubell counties were below the state average in *both* elections.

Indeed, since the Progressive Party remained antiwar until after 1940, it would be surprising if the Germans had deserted it disproportionately between 1936 and 1938. Rather the party was to gain German support on the war issue after 1940, support which it had lost on economic grounds ten years earlier.¹² The shift in progressive support seen by Lubell taking place in 1940 for ethnic reasons had actually taken place from 1928 to 1932 for economic reasons.

The dispute with Lubell here is of more than minor historical interest. Lubell made the vital discovery that mid-west isolationism had roots in German and other ethnic opposition to the two world wars. He pointed out that since isolationism is ethnically determined, it arises not from indifference to foreign policy but rather from oversensitivity to it. Isolationism is the result not of insularity and lack of concern with Europe but of great attention to the fortunes of one's mother country. Therefore isolationism can turn easily into interventionist jingoism; these are but two sides of the same coin.

In Lubell's analysis, ethnic factors alone explain the isolationist tradition. Progressive isolationism therefore becomes assimilated into the ethnically based, isolationist-jingoist syndrome. Since for Lubell there is only one isolationist tradition, there can be no other explanation for progressive

isolationism. Moreover, since McCarthy capitalized on jingoist isolationism, he achieves in this view a connection with agrarian radicalism.

Yet the progressives in Wisconsin were isolationist before attracting German support, and they remained isolationist through the 1930's, after the Germans had left. Moreover, the Germans were progressive for only a short time, configuring the movement much less than Lubell supposed. The evidence thus points to two isolationist traditions, not one.¹³ To discover a nonethnic basis for agrarian radical isolationism is to raise questions about the association of radical protest with the ethnic-jingoist syndrome. Agrarian radical notions of foreign policy were essentially the product of disinterest in Europe combined with humanitarian impulses. Without defending the naïve isolationism of the agrarian radicals, one must distinguish it from the foreign policy concerns of the Germans. Both types of isolationism were important during World War I. It was the latter that would contribute so heavily to McCarthy's appeal.

The Pluralists and the Democratic Resurgence

According to Hofstadter and Lubell, the Smith vote of 1928 is important not because of its continuity with the past but because of its radical break with existing political alignments.¹⁴ The Smith election, in this view, contributed to and prefigured the New Deal coalition — a coalition differing sharply from previous reform movements. Pluralist history relies on this view of the 1928 campaign. For the pluralists, Smith's break with the past is a break with progressive moralism. Reform politics would now base itself in the cities instead of the farms. It would now capitalize on practical proposals to alleviate economic distress, not on alienation from the industrial order.

In this view, the difference between the elections of 1924 and 1928 is clear-cut. The La Follette election of 1924 was

the last gasp of agrarian radicalism. According to Hofstadter, La Follette progressives returned to the Republican Party after 1924, thus opposing both Smith and the New Deal.¹⁵

Pluralist history begins here by recognizing an important fact. In many states and in the country as a whole, the Smith vote was both a break with the past and a precursor of the New Deal and the present.¹⁶ However, in just those states where agrarian radicalism was strong, a different picture emerges. In these states, the Smith vote was the product not simply of Catholicism, urbanism, and “wet” sentiments but of agrarian unrest as well. Moreover, in these states the Smith vote did not break with the past and presage the future. In North Dakota, the Smith vote was simply a deviant election. If it had little relation to past North Dakota voting patterns, it bore equally little relation to the future. In South Dakota, the vote was rooted in the progressive past and disappeared in the Democratic present. In Wisconsin, the Smith vote also had a past but no future.

As might be expected, Smith’s support was closely related (.80) to the referendum against prohibition the same year. Because Smith brought out a Catholic vote, his highest party correlations (.75 to .8) were with the highly Catholic pre-Bryan Democratic vote. A second source of the Smith vote was the opposition to Coolidge in 1924. Those who voted for Davis or La Follette in 1924 voted for Smith in 1928. His correlation with the Coolidge vote was —.88. This continuity between Smith and La Follette suggests that the roots of the Smith vote in the agrarian unrest of the 1920’s should not be ignored.¹⁷ In the Dakotas too, the Smith vote came out of a progressive-German coalition.

Soon after 1928, this German and Catholic coalition with progressivism dissolved. Smith’s vote was related .71 and .67 to the Roosevelt elections of 1932 and 1936. It then disappeared as a force in Wisconsin politics until 1960, when its correlation of .43 with the Kennedy vote reflects the Catholic composition of both.¹⁸

In his first two campaigns, Roosevelt had also been supported by the German counties.*¹⁹ It was not until 1940 when the Germans made what was to be a permanent shift to the Republicans on the war issue²⁰ that the modern Democratic Party was born. Democratic elections from 1940 to 1960 form a cohesive cluster with intercorrelations of from .75 to .95.²¹

Indeed, the support given progressive candidates, rather than the Smith and early Roosevelt votes, was the main precursor of the modern Democratic Party. Progressive elections from 1936 to 1940 correlate about .55 with support given the post-World War II Democrats. This progressive vote in turn is related to the pre-World War I Republican vote (.35 to .45) and to the La Follette and primary votes of 1904 (.55). The Progressive Party was the instrument of a reorientation that has resulted in a positive relation between the Republican vote of the La Follette period and the Democratic vote of today. Such a reversal of party lines is most unusual in American history.†

The revolution in Wisconsin politics in the 1930's has resulted in two parties unrelated to the two parties that existed before 1936. Thus a map of party strength from 1944 to 1958 shows that the strong Democratic counties of the past have become strongly Republican today, while the Republican Progressive counties have become Democratic (compare Figure 3.3 with Figure 3.8). The German counties in Wisconsin have always been conservative. Before World War II, they could remain in the Democratic

* Because FDR's support in his first two campaigns remained rooted in the conservative, traditionally Democratic, German counties of the south, these Roosevelt elections were unrelated to the support given progressive candidates. But by 1936, F.D.R.'s base was beginning to change; that election was the first Democratic vote to be highly related to the modern Democratic Party.

† Contrast it with the party stability in South Dakota, where the Republican votes before World War I and after World War II correlated about .55.

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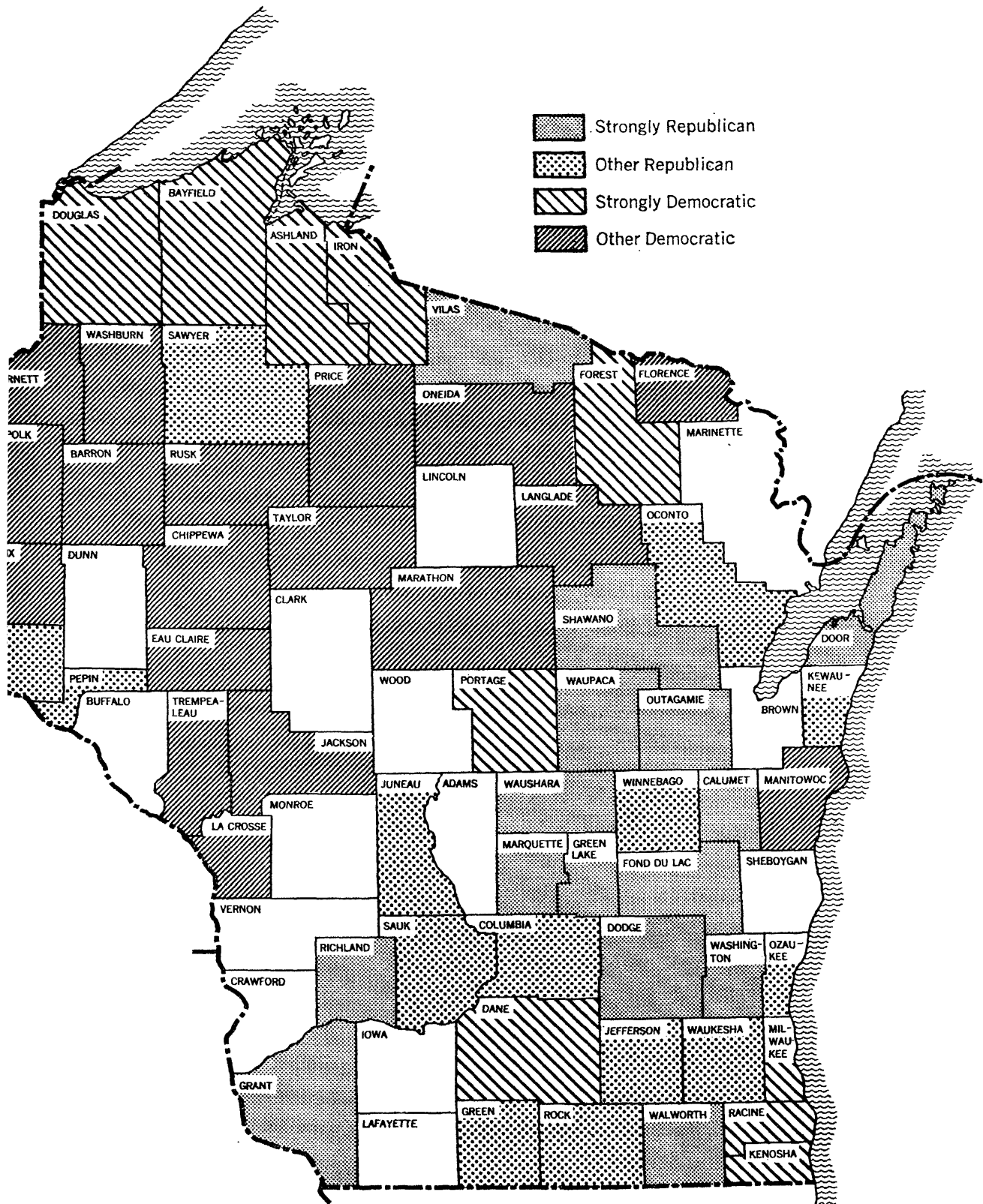


Figure 3.8. The Wisconsin party vote, 1944–1958.

Party, which was the radical party in Wisconsin only in 1896 and 1916. The war drove the Germans from the Democratic Party into the GOP. Since World War II, most non-working-class Germans, for ethnic and economic reasons, have remained in the Republican Party. The GOP is supported as well by the suburban middle class, by those living in Wisconsin's prosperous farming counties to the south, and by the residents of the small cities, towns, and farms of the Fox River Valley to the northeast. The urban working class votes Democratic as do the poor Scandinavian farmers. The modern Wisconsin Democracy is thus a farmer-labor party.²²

Since 1944, only three elections have deviated from the normal party vote. In the special senatorial election of 1957, Democrat William Proxmire won the seat vacated by McCarthy's death. The second deviant election was the Kennedy election, clearly peculiar because of the Catholic vote. (Normally Catholics do not vote disproportionately Democratic in nonmetropolitan Wisconsin.) The third election was the McCarthy election of 1952 (see Table 3.4).

McCarthy and the Progressive Tradition

McCarthy's electoral relation to the progressive tradition is complex. The distinctive basis of pre-World War I progressivism had been its strength in northern Wisconsin and its weakness in the richer, more German, southeast. Since this constellation of support and opposition influenced the modern Democratic party alignment, there is a relationship in absolute terms between support for progressivism and opposition to regular Republicanism. Since McCarthy received a substantially Republican vote, he received an anti-progressive vote as well. In absolute terms, progressive counties tended to oppose McCarthy more than other counties in the state.²³

Indeed, those sections of the population supporting the Progressive ticket in the years before the party realignment

TABLE 3.4
THE MODERN WISCONSIN REPUBLICAN VOTE AND THE MCCARTHY ELECTION

	1940	1942	1944	1946	1948	1950	1952	1952	1954	1956	1957	1958
							Sen.	Pres.			Sen.	
1940												
1942	56											
1944	95	54										
1946	88	52	90									
1948	80	54	85	87								
1950	80	61	83	84	93							
1952	79	46	82	85	81	82						
Senator												
1952	88	50	92	91	91	89	93					
President												
1954	84	56	87	87	91	90	82	92				
1956	73	56	80	79	93	89	76	87	88			
1957	68	56	69	71	77	77	57	70	86	76		
Senator												
1958	81	59	84	83	90	86	78	89	95	92	86	
1960	76	41	78	76	80	75	70	81	84	75	72	82

of 1936–1940 formed the strongest prewar source of opposition to McCarthy.

McCarthy's chief support came from regular Republicans. Nevertheless, he was considerably weaker in the more industrialized and richer counties of the southeast than were other Republicans, and he was stronger in the progressive north.*

When McCarthy ran in the 1946 Republican primary, Bob La Follette, Jr., almost defeated him. Six years later, McCarthy was an easy victor against Len Schmitt, a little-known old progressive. The 1946 primary was clearly in the progressive tradition, with McCarthy on the antiprogressive side. McCarthy's vote correlated at an average of $-.64$ with the Progressive Party vote (see Table 3.3). McCarthy's 1952 primary vote was also antiprogressive, but the correlations were twenty points lower, and the two primaries correlated only $.45$. In addition, several counties did not increase their support for McCarthy in proportion to his increases in the rest of the state. These were principally the industrialized southern counties along the shore of Lake Michigan. (For McCarthy's support in the 1952 primary, see Figure 3.9.)

If McCarthy was less opposed by progressives in 1952 than in 1946, this could in large part be explained by the absence of a La Follette on the 1952 ticket against him. But the evidence of McCarthy's progressive support which is suggested by his relation to the Proxmire vote is not so easily dismissed. McCarthy's vote in November 1952 was negatively related to Proxmire's 1957 vote, but the correlation was 25 to 30 points lower than the majority of party correlations in the period. Both Proxmire and McCarthy deviated from the normal party vote in a progressive direction. There are several elections to which McCarthy's vote was

* In the state as a whole, McCarthy mobilized more opposition than support, running last on the state ticket in 1952, 12 percent behind an outspoken Republican foe.

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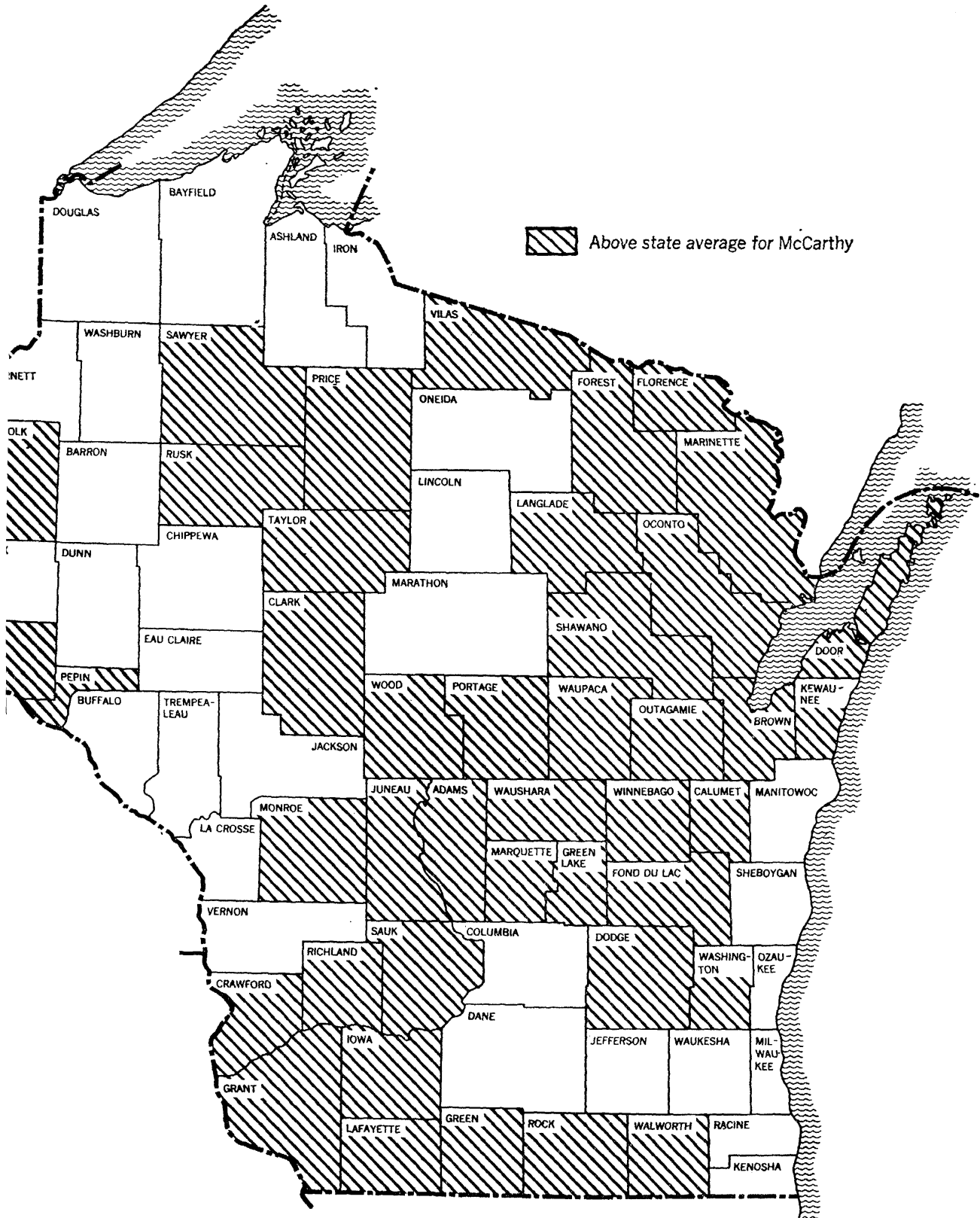


Figure 3.9. McCarthy's strength in the 1952 primary.

more positively related than the normal postwar Republican vote and much more positively related than the vote given Proxmire's Republican opponent Steinle. A progressive candidate ran in almost all the elections that meet these con-

TABLE 3.5

McCARTHY, PROXMIRE, AND THE PROGRESSIVE PAST

	1952 McCarthy	1957 Steinle (Proxmire's opponent)	1950 Republican Governor
1904 La Follette	—10	—33	—28
1904 T. Roosevelt	—03	—21	—18
1904 Direct primary	—23	—42	—31
1914 Philipp (anti- Progressive)	00	18	13
1916 Republican President	30	13	27
1918 Thompson	19	32	37
1922 La Follette	—15	—37	—20
1930 P. La Follette Primary	22	—25	—11
1930 P. La Follette General	—02	—39	—29
1932 Blaine	—09	—45	—41
1932 Hoover	—03	26	01
1934 Progressive Governor	—15	—37	—31
1934 Republican Governor	13	35	23
1936 Progressive Governor	—41	—63	—63
1938 Progressive Governor	—48	—64	—68
1940 Progressive Senator	—58	—64	—74
1950 Schmitt	—07	—53	—29
1957 O'Konski	—15	—54	—27

ditions. In other words, counties which voted progressive in many elections were more likely to support Proxmire than other Democratic candidates of the 1950's and less likely to oppose McCarthy than to oppose other Republicans. For example, McCarthy's correlation with La Follette in 1936 was $-.41$, Steinle's was $-.63$. As far back as 1904, McCarthy's correlation with La Follette was $-.10$, Steinle's was $-.39$ (see Table 3.5).²⁴

How significant was McCarthy's progressive strength, and

how is it to be explained? McCarthy was opposed by urban counties and supported by rural ones all over the state. In order to get a more exact measure of the counties that voted disproportionately for and against McCarthy in 1952, an index was constructed measuring McCarthy's strength with the regular Republican vote held constant (see Figure 3.10).^{*} The correlation between the percentage living on farms and the McCarthy index was .58. McCarthy's losses in urban areas were greater than his gains in rural counties, but he did run better in rural counties than other Republicans of the period. Moreover, McCarthy received substantial regular Republican strength. This, too, was nonurban support; holding German background constant, regular Republicanism correlated $-.44$ with the percentage in manufacturing.

McCarthy and La Follette had a common agrarian appeal. The index of McCarthy's non-Republican strength and the index of La Follette support in 1904 were correlated .25;† with the percentage living on farms held constant, the correlation dropped to .15.

^{*} First the average difference was computed for each county above or below the state average for three Republican candidates (President 1948 and 1952, governor 1950). Second, the difference for each county from the state average for McCarthy in November 1952 was also computed. Subtracting the regular Republican strength from the McCarthy strength resulted in an index of McCarthy's support with the regular Republican vote held constant.²⁵

† The positive correlation is explained by three facts. First, urban counties that had strongly opposed La Follette before the 1930's also strongly opposed McCarthy. Second, of the 26 counties scoring above the state average on the 1904 La Follette index, 19 supported McCarthy more than they supported other Republicans. But McCarthy's over-all differential support averaged only 1.4 per cent. Finally, 8 of the 9 counties that voted for McCarthy as a hometown boy (see discussion later in the chapter) had above-average scores on the 1904 La Follette index. Clearly the friends-and-neighbors effect was more potent than progressivism in its high McCarthy support. As these northeastern counties became wealthier and more developed — in 1914 and particularly by the 1930's — they had ceased to support progressivism.

CHAPTER THREE

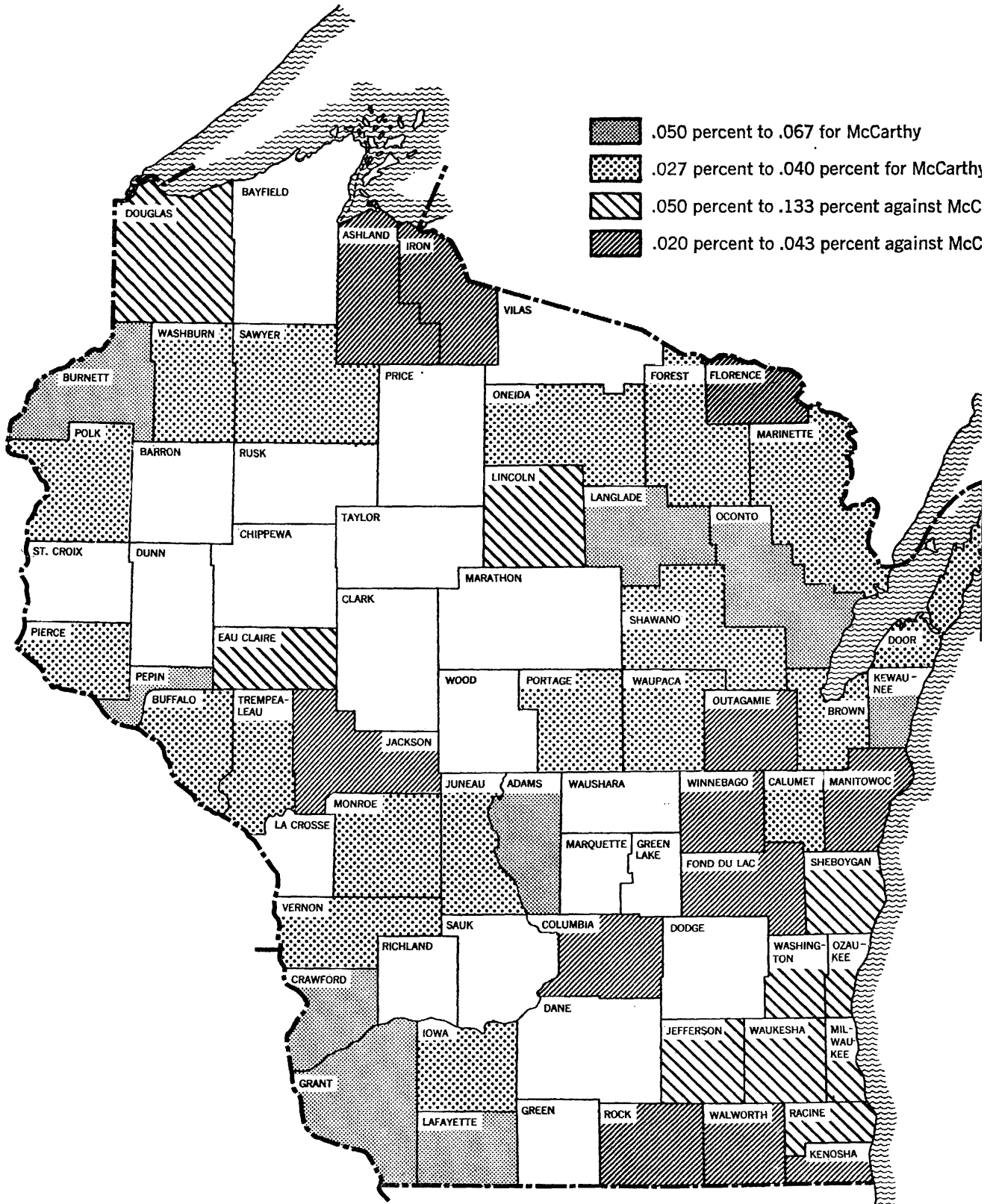


Figure 3.10. McCarthy's strength with the regular Republican vote held constant.

In explaining rural support for McCarthy, the ideas of the pluralists are helpful. Both McCarthy in particular and midwestern and western Republicanism in general represent a suspicion of the values, groups, and power centers of an urban, industrial society. But McCarthy's version had a particular anger at urban sophistication and respectability that made him marginally stronger in rural areas than orthodox conservative Republicans.

This does not justify locating the source of the anti-industrial tradition in agrarian radicalism. But even only in terms of social support, McCarthy's rural strength does not make him an agrarian radical. McCarthy got support from rural areas generally throughout the state; La Follette had been consistently rejected in the rich, southern countryside. Support for agrarian radicals has usually rested on groups with clear-cut common economic interests. McCarthy in Wisconsin benefited from general rural and small-town discontent. By this fact, the rural supporters of McCarthy were not reacting to the specific economic conditions and constellations of power that produced agrarian radicalism.

More important, McCarthy's rural, progressive strength was only one source of his unique appeal and less important than some others. These are revealed when the McCarthy index is plotted against the percentage engaged in mining, manufacturing, and railroading. The counties on this scatter diagram seem to fall into two clusters, one more pro McCarthy than the other (see Figure 3.11). In both clusters, the lower the percentage employed in industry the greater the support for McCarthy. But the more pro-McCarthy cluster contained three kinds of counties — Czech, Catholic, and those near McCarthy's home.

This cluster included all the Czech counties in the state and 12 of the 15 most Catholic counties.²⁶ In addition, the more pro-McCarthy group contained all those counties that supported McCarthy on a "friends-and-neighbors" basis (that is, because he was a home-town boy). McCarthy was

born in a northeastern Wisconsin county, had lived in two others, and the friends-and-neighbors effect extended to six other northeastern counties. Back in 1944, McCarthy had run against Senator Wiley in the Republican primary. Known

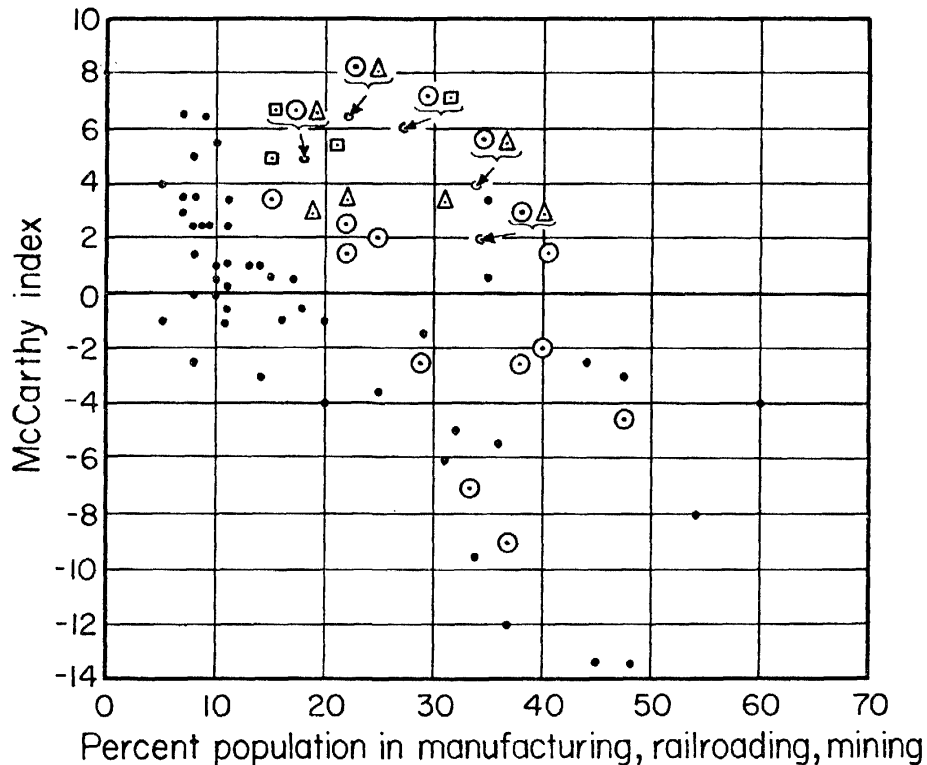


Figure 3.11. McCarthy's strength and the industrial population. Dots represent counties, triangles those NE counties where McCarthy got 40 percent of vote in 1944, circles the 15 highest Catholic counties, squares those over 15 percent Czechoslovakian.

only in his home area, McCarthy polled 31 percent of the vote in the state as a whole. But he received between 41 and 66 percent of the vote in 10 counties. Nine of these form a contiguous bloc in the northeast corner of the state.²⁷ All were in the more pro-McCarthy group on the scatter diagram (Figure 3.11). Catholicism, ethnicity, and the friends-and-neighbors effect accounted for over 80 percent of the counties in the more pro-McCarthy group, but less than 7 percent of the others.*

* McCarthy's primary strength supports the conclusions arrived at

What of McCarthy's general weakness in cities? The evidence, gross as it is, suggests that both the working class and the middle class deserted him. The two congressional districts that existed in Milwaukee in 1952 were drawn roughly on class lines. The Fourth CD was heavily Polish working class and the Fifth was more middle class. The Fourth CD gave Eisenhower in 1952 10 percent more votes than it gave McCarthy, while the Fifth CD gave the President 12 percent more.²⁹ In both congressional districts, the Senator ran far behind Eisenhower. True, in the more middle-class district he ran further behind, but the difference is small. Moreover, in absolute terms the working-class congressional district gave McCarthy 33 percent of its votes; the more middle-class district gave him 38 percent. If the work-

here. In the primary McCarthy ran above his state average in the 5 corn belt counties, some normal Republican counties in the southeast, a bloc of counties near his home territory in the northeast, a few progressive counties in the north and northwest, and a number of counties in central and north-central Wisconsin. These latter counties were mostly those with concentrations of Czechs and Poles. McCarthy ran above his state average in every county more than 5 percent Czech or Polish by the 1930 census except for the 2 Polish counties with by far the largest cities. The Senator ran below his state average in most of the old progressive counties of the north and west, and in the southern industrial counties along the lake front. However, his weakness in the old progressive counties should not be overestimated. He generally received more than 70 percent of the vote in these counties; this figure was below his state average, but very high nevertheless. McCarthy's chief opposition was in the industrial counties (see Figure 3.9).

Similarly, it is possible to locate counties in which Democrats probably voted for McCarthy in the primary. In 5 of the 10 most Democratic counties in the state, the Democratic percentage of the two-party primary vote dropped 10 percent or more between 1950 and 1952. It seems likely that Democrats in these counties had voted in the 1952 Republican primary. In 3 of them, McCarthy ran well below his state average, suggesting Democratic opposition to him. In 2, he ran above his average, apparently attracting Democratic support.²⁸ The 3 counties where McCarthy did poorly all contain very large cities. The 2 where McCarthy attracted Democratic support were poor counties in central and northeastern Wisconsin—one Polish and Catholic, the other in McCarthy's home territory.

ing class is authoritarian in the abstract, in Milwaukee it was not attracted to an authoritarian figure like McCarthy by abstract considerations.

We have found several different kinds of counties tending to support McCarthy more than other Republicans. Let us compare their average support for McCarthy with the progressive average. These figures will at the same time summarize McCarthy's major sources of non-Republican support. McCarthy averaged above the regular Republican vote as follows: in 5 corn belt counties, 4.3 percent; in 9 friends-and-neighbors counties, 2.2 percent; in 5 Czech counties, 6.7 percent; in 8 Polish counties (omitting the two with large cities), 2.4 percent; in 7 nonindustrial Catholic counties, 3.3 percent;* in the 14 most rural counties, 3.1 percent; in 11 most industrial counties, -6.2 percent; in 26 progressive counties, 1.4 percent.

Apparently, the characteristic of Catholicism, the friends-and-neighbors effect, and Czechoslovakian background reinforced the tendency for rural areas to support McCarthy. They acted *in addition to* ruralness. Progressivism, on the other hand, *is explained by* rural support for McCarthy and contributed no additional support of its own.³⁰

Since McCarthy was strong in rural counties whether or not they had been progressive, there was apparently nothing in the particular progressive tradition or base of support that would lead to support for McCarthy. Moreover, judging from the figures, progressive counties were the *least important* source of McCarthy's unique constellation of support in Wisconsin.³¹

McCarthy had more impact in Washington than he did in

* These are the 7 of the 15 most Catholic counties with less than 30 percent of their population engaged in industry. The 8 Catholic counties with large cities or a substantial working class (the presence of nonindustrial cities was not sufficient) averaged 2.2 percent against McCarthy. Note that the nonindustrial Catholic counties were less rural than the progressive counties but supported McCarthy more heavily.

Wisconsin, where he succeeded primarily in driving away urban voters. Martin Trow suggests two reasons for McCarthy's weakness in urban centers. Members of the white-collar, urban middle class were not attracted by appeals to an Americanism attacking the eastern elite, with which they identified. They would not receive status from an assault on the eastern elite and on the bureaucratized industrial structure. Rather they hoped to advance through that structure to places in that elite. Therefore McCarthyism alienated them. As for the workers, according to Trow they had channels through which to express their grievances and hence were not attracted by McCarthy's anomic appeals. Rural voters and small businessmen, he argues, lacking this commitment to modern institutions, could be mobilized by a McCarthy.³²

Trow's analysis of the urban middle class is persuasive because it focuses on the commitment of professionals, businessmen, and white-collar workers to the existing status hierarchy. His analysis of the working class is incomplete because he does not similarly emphasize working-class attachments to McCarthy's targets. Parsons argues that, as part of the strategy of splitting apart existing political alliances, McCarthy made no attack on the New Deal or on labor unions.³³ In fact, precisely because McCarthy capitalized on existing political alliances, he could not support the New Deal. Had he done so, he would have alienated the most important part of his leadership and rank-and-file support. McCarthy's "radicalism" was in large part an attack on the New Deal, and it was understood as such by most of his supporters. It was not only that workers had unions through which to express their grievances, they also could not be mobilized by an attack on Roosevelt and the New Deal. Parsons may not have agreed, but they apparently thought McCarthy was attacking their New Deal gains.

McCarthy could not emancipate himself from his Republican commitments. Nor did he want to, for they pulled him to victory. Far from splitting apart existing political alliances,

McCarthy was elected in Wisconsin by capitalizing on a large Republican following already disturbed about communism and foreign policy. Ethnically, Germans were the main prop of this Republican Party. According to the theory of *The New American Right*, McCarthy made Populist appeals which attracted Germans who wanted to prove their Americanism after two world wars. But McCarthy did not attract Germans who were not already in his party. Were these "Populist" appeals already being made by the Republican right wing? More likely, these were not Populist appeals at all, but appeals which have been general in American politics. Indeed, the attack on Communists, bureaucracy, and the welfare state has traditionally been more an anti-Populist than a Populist appeal. The Germans' overconcern with the Communist issue probably contributes to their recent voting behavior, as Lubell and the authors of *The New American Right* allege. But although Germans were the backbone of McCarthy's support, they were not a group attracted by his unique appeals.

McCarthy did have an appeal beyond that of the regular Republican Party in Wisconsin's nonurban Polish, Czechoslovakian, and Catholic communities. How is this explained? According to *The New American Right*, when people said they liked McCarthy's ends but not his means, they meant the opposite. They did not care about his ends, but liked his tough attacks on the eastern elite and other authorities.³⁴ In this view, second and third generation immigrants supported McCarthy because in calling the eastern aristocracy un-American he increased the immigrants' social status. But is it not significant that Czechs and Poles rather than Scandinavians and Germans were particularly attracted to the senator? Far from being uninterested in McCarthy's ends, these groups must have been aware of recent Communist seizures of power in their native countries. Czechoslovakia had been the victim of a Communist coup d'état only two years be-

fore McCarthy became prominent, and the Czechs were even more clearly pro-McCarthy than the Poles.

It has been argued that the concept of status politics is not a discovery of Lipset and Hofstadter but merely a new name for the ethnic politics always recognized in America.³⁵ However, ethnic politics has traditionally been conceived in terms of practical conflicts over specific goals. Until Lipset and Hofstadter, few people questioned whether the obvious issues in the struggles were really the important ones. The concept of status politics de-politicizes the ethnic and group conflicts. For that very reason, it fails as an explanation of McCarthyism, since it underestimates the importance of the Communist issue in explaining his appeal.

Similar considerations shed light on Catholic support for the Wisconsin senator. Although aspects of the American Catholic social and family structure and general belief system may be relevant in explaining McCarthy's support among Catholics, the church has traditionally been very sensitive to the Communist question. Catholics probably supported the Senator more from concern for his ends than from delight in his style. Moreover, McCarthy himself was a Catholic. This emphasizes the difficulty of ascribing to political or sociological causes what may be the result of the friends-and-neighbors effect.

McCarthy was also disproportionately supported in the corn belt in the southwest corner of the state. This seems to parallel a finding in South Dakota, where in the 1952 presidential primary Taft ran well in corn belt counties. Wisconsin's corn belt counties, among the most rural in the state, acted like other rural Wisconsin counties in supporting McCarthy more than other Republicans of the period. They then disproportionately voted for the Democrat Proxmire.

Corn belt residents seem to vote simply on the basis of economic self-interest during adversity and ideology during prosperity. (In this sense the area fits into the status-class

politics framework of Lipset and Hofstadter.) In South Dakota, the poorer corn belt farmers are Democratic, the richer ones Republican. In a period of agricultural depression, the 1920's, sections of the midwest corn belt supported La Follette. Except when their pocketbooks are involved, corn belt farmers today vote conservative.

Those who have studied life in the corn belt argue that corn belt farmers prize initiative and individualism more than do those engaged in other forms of agriculture.* Perhaps these attitudes lead to a distrust of outside interference, an intolerance for places and events felt to be beyond individual control. There is some evidence that corn belt farmers take matters into their own hands during depression — hence the strength of the Farm Holiday Movement in Iowa in the early 1930's. In times of prosperity, when the corn farmers nevertheless feel confused by outside events, they may be sympathetic to McCarthyite appeals. However, the corn farmers did not support La Follette in the progressive period, or the Populists earlier. Indeed, La Follette and the Populists were in rebellion against the abstract reliance on individual initiative and other characteristics of corn belt Americanism that resulted in opposition to pragmatic social welfare legislation. In this sense, McCarthy's roots in the corn belt were the opposite of his alleged agrarian radical roots.

Corn belt residents, then, may have been attracted to McCarthy because of his general political style. The pluralists emphasize McCarthy's style, his methods, his basic approach to politics both in explaining the character of McCarthyism and in explaining its link with agrarian radicalism. Their

* Traditionally corn farmers were less in touch with outside, more industrialized areas than dairy farmers and less dependent for success on the accidents of weather than wheat farmers. Cooperatives were more common among dairy farmers, while corn farming was more a year-round activity than wheat farming. The typically American values of hard work and self-help, it is argued, therefore found their home in the corn belt.³⁶

analysis suffers from three defects. In the first place, the political style that attracted corn belt residents to McCarthy was a conservative not an agrarian radical style. Similarly, McCarthy had his most important roots in the conservative Republican Party. This was a constituency attracted in part by his style but also traditionally antiradical. Second, many of those who voted for McCarthy were attracted not by his style but by the Republican label under which he ran. McCarthy capitalized on the traditional party vote. In the third place, many of those neither traditionally Republican nor attracted specifically to McCarthy by his broad appeals had a particular political concern: The importance of the Communist issue explains much of the support specifically attracted by McCarthy. This fear was the specific product of the cold war; its focus was foreign policy more than the “status politics” preoccupation with the enemy within. And if those attracted to McCarthy by his party or by his style largely came from an antiradical tradition, so too the Communist issue had no particular political appeal within the La Follette movement. Except during and shortly after World War I, foreign policy in general had little saliency to progressives — particularly the ethnic foreign policy which attracted East Europeans to McCarthy. The La Follettes mobilized support not around foreign policy but around economic grievances. Thus neither McCarthy’s style nor his political issue place him in the progressive tradition.

Conclusion

Progressivism in Wisconsin mobilized poor Scandinavian farmers against the richer areas of the state. In so doing, it in part sundered existing political alliances and eventually re-oriented the traditional party vote. McCarthy, on the other hand, rose to power with the votes of the richer German inhabitants of the farms and small cities in southern and eastern Wisconsin — antiprogressive except when they were

victims of McCarthy-type tactics during World War I. McCarthy's unique strength was not as important as this Republican Party strength. In any case, it reflected less a continuity with the progressive past and more the particular issues, preoccupations, and individual attachments of politics in the Korean War decade. Moreover, McCarthy was unable to transfer what progressive support he did obtain to his allies. In 1956, Glenn Davis, a congressman from southern Wisconsin, ran as the McCarthy and regular Republican candidate against incumbent Alexander Wiley in the Republican senatorial primary. Davis, one of the most vociferous McCarthy supporters in the country, came within a few thousand votes of beating Wiley. Yet Davis' vote was not highly related to support for McCarthy.

In 1956, the "friends-and-neighbors" effect so common in state primaries substantially influenced the political picture. Wiley was from northern Wisconsin, and whether for this reason or some other the progressive counties of the north and west clearly opposed Davis (see Figure 3.12).³⁷ On the other hand, Davis got strong support from the five counties of his own southern congressional district, which had not supported McCarthy. Over-all, Davis' correlation with McCarthy's 1952 primary vote was only .27, and his relation to the McCarthy index is even lower.

McCarthy had been dependent on traditional sources of Republican strength, and Davis too ran best in Republican territory.³⁸ McCarthy was able to deliver to Davis his own home territory in the northeast.* But it is noteworthy that

* Perhaps their common appeal to these conservative German, Polish, and Czechoslovakian counties in the northeast was due to ideology as well as residence. These counties may be similar to the lower-middle-class urban areas that voted against bond issues in the 1950's and were alleged to be sympathetic to McCarthy.³⁹ Here generalized anger and the status resentments described by *The New American Right* may be operating. The relation between the Davis and McCarthy votes indicates that perhaps the Senator was building a stable basis of support in northeastern Wisconsin.

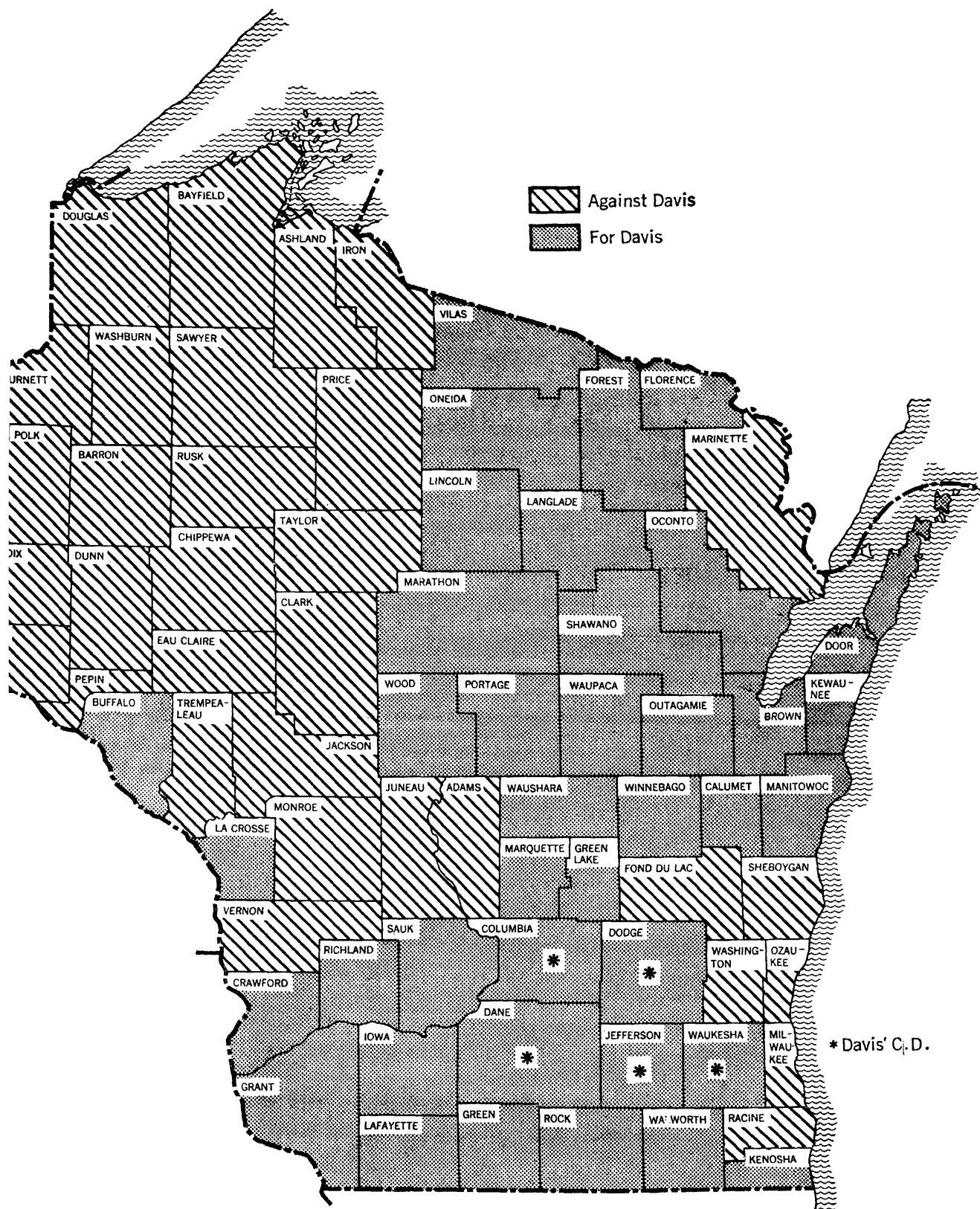


Figure 3.12. Davis' strength in the 1956 Wisconsin senatorial primary.

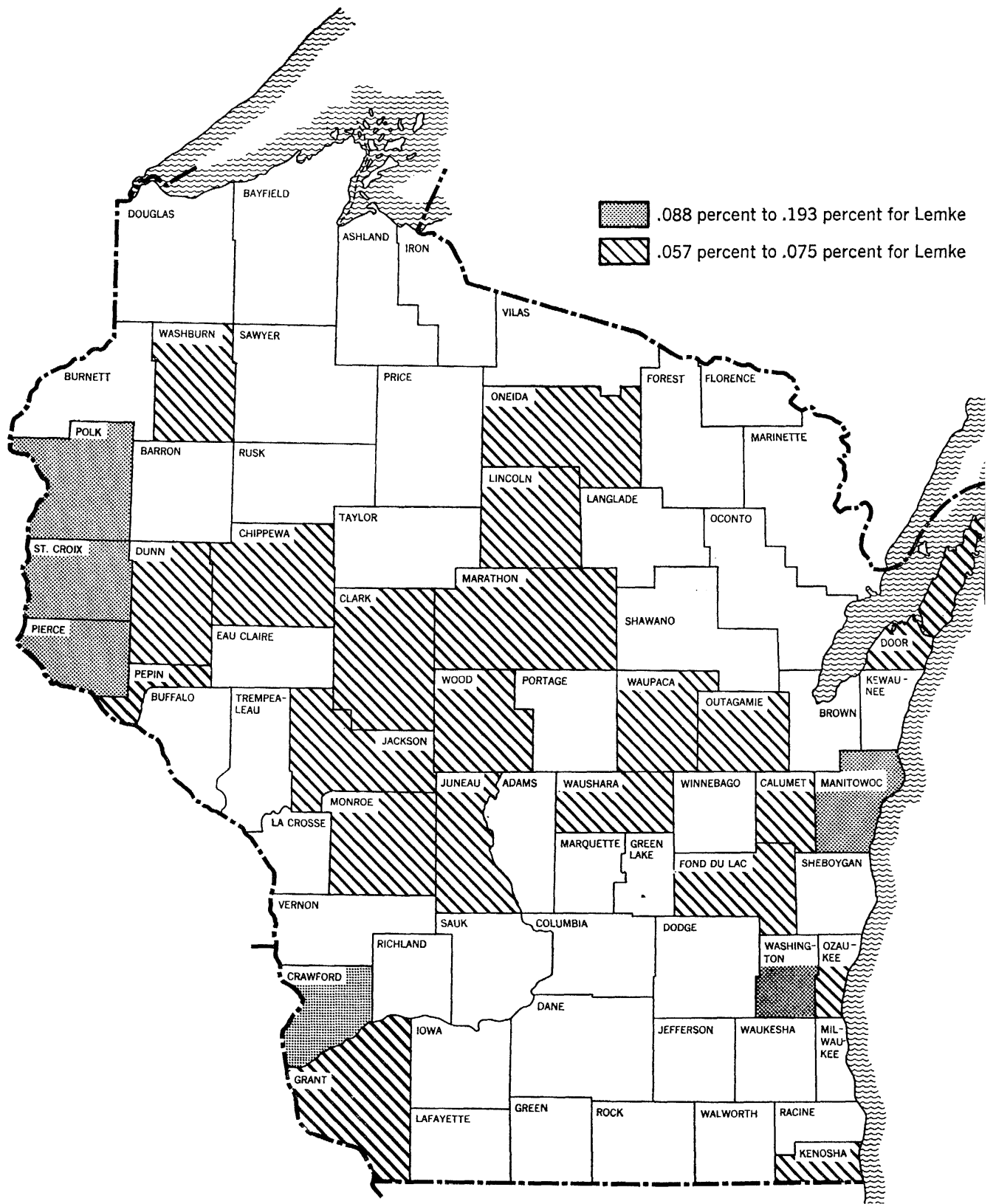


Figure 3.13. Lemke's strength in Wisconsin in 1936.

only two counties in the state could be said to have become consistently more Republican during and after the McCarthy period. One was a corn belt county, the other an urban Catholic county in McCarthy's home territory.

McCarthyism was not a mass protest; it flourished within the normal workings of American politics, not radically outside of them. Perhaps this may be brought home by a brief look at the movement alleged to bridge the gap between La Follette and McCarthy. In 1936, Father Coughlin's Union Party ran William Lemke of North Dakota for President. Lubell writes that the Lemke vote was ethnic rather than economic, Catholic and German rather than progressive.⁴⁰ But in Wisconsin Lemke received even less than his state average of 5 percent in the 3 most Catholic counties of the state.⁴¹ He did run well in a number of German counties, but he polled his greatest vote (19 percent) in a Scandinavian progressive county. Other Scandinavian counties were in the top third of Lemke's support. Lemke ran badly in the Polish and Czech counties but did better in several other central Wisconsin counties. These were mostly German but poorer and often less German than the counties to the south and east (see Figure 3.13).

Lemke's vote united ethnic and class elements that were drifting apart during the progressive period. Had Lemke succeeded in developing a new political alliance of poor rural Germans and Scandinavians, he would have created a new American Right. Perhaps someone like McCarthy would have built upon it. But Lemke got significant support from none of the groups in his coalition. The Union party failed because it was a new and radical Right. McCarthy succeeded because of his roots in existing politics. Lemke's 5 percent of the Wisconsin vote was not so much a bridge between progressivism and McCarthyism as the pinnacle of depression-born proto-fascism, irrelevant to later American politics. With its roots in the traditional conservative past, McCarthyism was a more substantial and less radical movement.

CHAPTER FOUR

NORTH DAKOTA: AGRARIAN RADICALISM, ETHNIC AND ECONOMIC

North Dakota has been more consistently radical than any other state in the union. In 1892, Weaver carried it for the Populists. From 1906 to the present, North Dakota has always had either a left-wing governor or a left-wing senator in office. Yet in 1954, both North Dakota senators voted against the censure of McCarthy. More than that, one of them, William Langer, had become prominent as a Non-Partisan Leaguer, had been a radical governor of North Dakota in the 1930's, and in the Senate had voted with the liberal Democrats on domestic issues.

Most of the agrarian radical leaders who evolved in a conservative and McCarthyite political direction had a Non-Partisan League background. Gerald Nye, sent by the League to the Senate in 1926, chaired the "merchants of death" inquiry which blamed munitions makers for American entry into World War I. A liberal hero as late as 1938, Nye had become an arch reactionary by 1944.* Lynn Frazier, first League governor of North Dakota, ended his career after World War II, calling the League "Communist," "anti-

* Nationally prominent liberals campaigned for Nye in North Dakota in 1938; in 1944, some of the most reactionary men in America toured the state in his behalf.¹