

*SOUTH DAKOTA:  
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT*

Writing in 1946, John Gunther described South Dakota as a model of political conservatism.<sup>1</sup> This was indeed a short perspective. In the 1890's the state had been a Populist stronghold. Scorning fusion with the Democrats before 1896, the Populists polled between 30 percent and 40 percent of the vote. In 1896 and 1898, Fusion candidates were victorious. Only six years later, a progressive captured the Republican nomination for governor; and from then until the 1930's South Dakota was a banner progressive state. Teddy Roosevelt carried it in 1912, and it gave strong support to the Non-Partisan League and to the La Follette campaign of 1924. However, the transformation of the Republican Party during the New Deal led to a period of conservative control which was the longest in South Dakota history. In the late 1950's, there was a Democratic resurgence.

South Dakota thus supported the left wing of the Republican Party before the New Deal and the right wing after it. Its electorate contributed to Populist strength in the 1890's, its political leadership to McCarthyite strength in the 1950's. Yet South Dakota agrarian radicalism did not become conservative; rather it declined as a viable alternative to traditional conservatism. There were several reasons for this. Politically, with the New Deal liberal state politicians no longer found a home in the Republican Party. But the GOP continued to

dominate South Dakota politics. Before the New Deal the Republican Party had contained many liberal progressives who held state office in South Dakota by winning Republican primaries. Now liberal leaders did not enter the GOP, but ex-progressive voters, dominated by traditional party loyalty, remained Republican. Nevertheless, to some extent former agrarian radicals did move into the Democratic Party. Those whose politics had been primarily economic — Populists and 1920's progressives — were more likely to do so than those like the prewar South Dakota progressives whose political demands had been more moralistic.

Perhaps the most important factor in the decline of agrarian radicalism was the reduction in the percentage of farm families in South Dakota by almost one half between 1890 and 1950. Economically radical movements had generally pitted farmers against their conservative, small-town rural neighbors. As the relative proportions of farmers in the Middle West declined drastically, the conservative, nonfarm vote increased in importance. Hence, conservative strength in South Dakota and other former agrarian radical territory indicated in large part the disappearance of the agrarian radical social base. Moreover, the farm prosperity brought by World War II muted the appeal of economic slogans to those farmers who remained.

### *Populism and Its Impact on the Major Parties*

For five elections from 1890 to 1894, the Populist Party polled between one quarter and one third of the South Dakota vote. The Fusion tickets of 1896 and 1898 narrowly carried the state for President and governor. Those elections in which the Populists ran without Democratic allies are all highly intercorrelated;<sup>2</sup> voting patterns in the state would not be so stable again for almost half a century.

The economic character of North Dakota Populism challenged the view that Populism appealed primarily to ethnic-

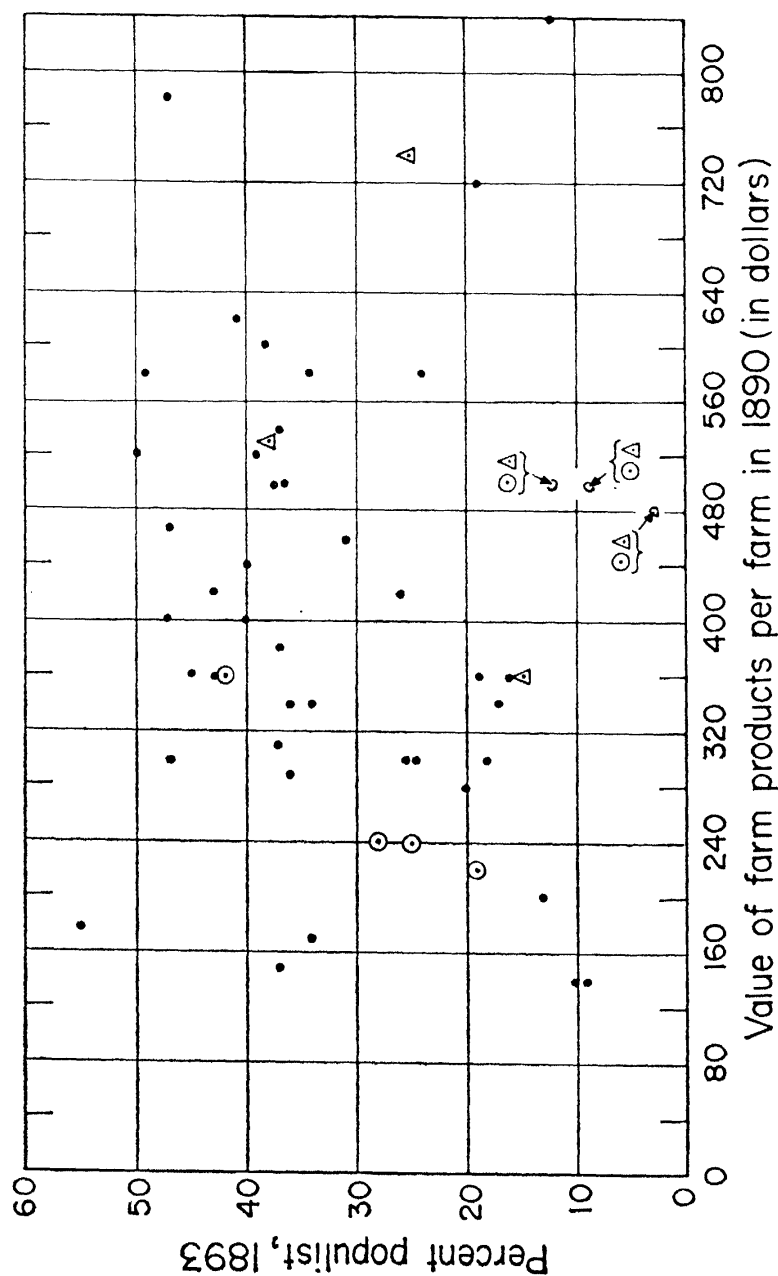


Figure 5.1. Populism and agricultural wealth in South Dakota. Dots represent counties, circled dots those over 8 percent Russian-German, and triangles those over 20 percent acreage in corn and 2:1 corn over wheat.

based status resentments. The best explanation of the Populist vote in South Dakota is also the wealth of the counties.<sup>3</sup> Although this tendency was not so clear-cut as in North Dakota, the Populist vote tended to increase in the richer counties and fall off in the very richest. Yet it remained high in one of the four richest counties, and there were four counties of middling wealth that were much less Populist than the other middle-class counties. The three least Populist were the only three corn belt counties whose population was more than 8 percent Russian-German (see Figure 5.1). North Dakota Russian-German residents were also anti-Populist. The fourth county contained the only real city in the state, suggesting an urban vote against Populism.<sup>4</sup>

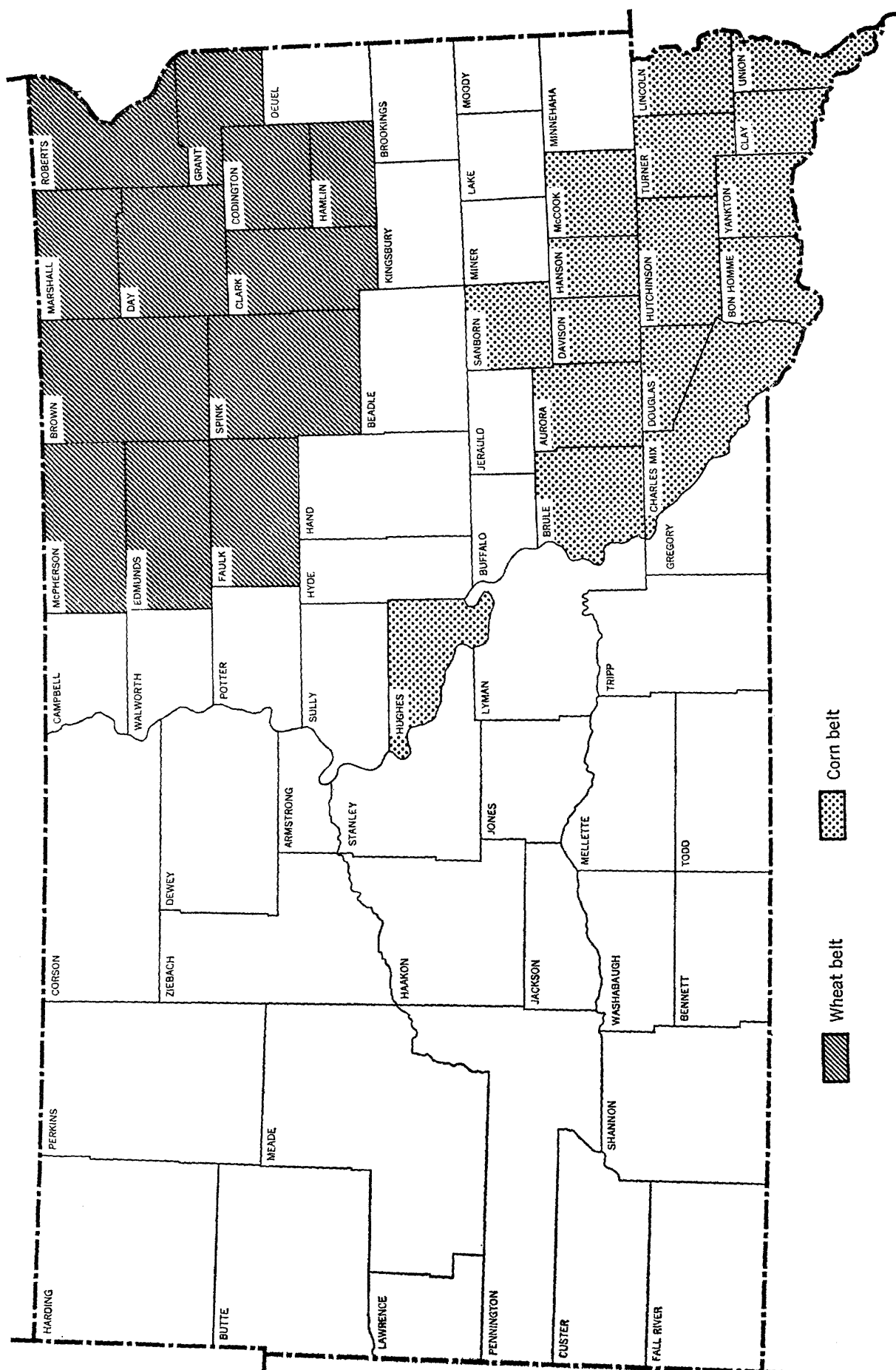
Crop patterns also influenced the Populist vote. Populist counties were concentrated in the wheat belt, anti-Populist counties in the corn belt (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3). But the relationship between the percentage of land planted in wheat and the Populist vote was not high ( $r = .33$ ).

Ethnic influences lowered the association between Populism and wheat. Seven of the eight counties more than 15 percent Scandinavian were more Populist than their acreage in wheat would predict.<sup>5</sup> Eight of the nine counties more than 12 percent German and Russian-German were less Populist than their acreage in wheat would predict (see Figure 5.4). Thus, taking into account the influence of wheat, there was an ethnic vote for and against Populism. Moreover, the low Populist vote in the poorest and in two of the three richest wheat counties in the state substantially lowered the over-all relationship between wheat and Populism.\*

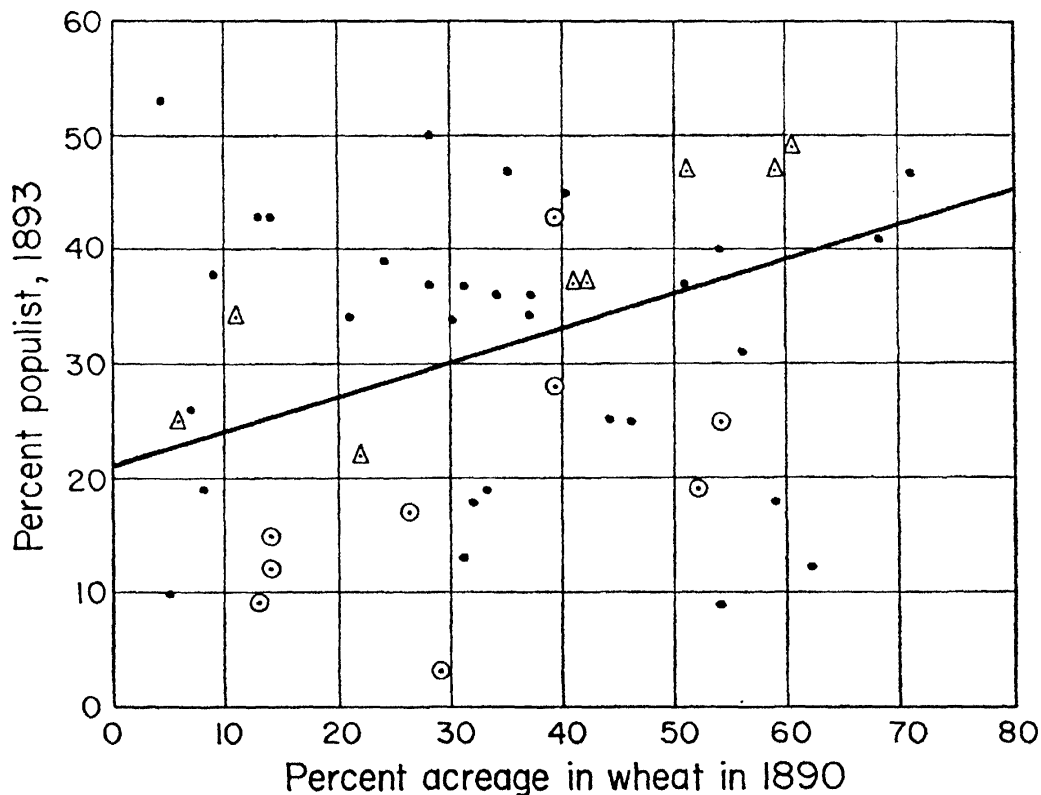
\* Other ethnic data bear on the Populist vote. The two Czech counties were anti-Populist. The one Populist wheat county among the three richest wheat counties was far more Scandinavian than the other two.

As in other states, the Populist vote was related to Republicanism and prohibitionism, probably for ethnic reasons. The prohibition referendum averaged about .55 with the Populist elections. The Populist elections were far more negatively related to the Democratic





Did farmers support Populism more than nonfarmers? Over the state as a whole, there was no such tendency. This was because many other factors — ethnicity, crop, wealth — produced considerable farmer opposition to the Populists. However, it is likely that within counties predisposed by these other factors to support Populism, farmers voted for



*Figure 5.4. Populism, wheat, and ethnicity in South Dakota. Dots represent counties, circled dots those over 12 percent Russian and Russian-German, and triangles over 15 percent Scandinavian.*

the movement far more than nonfarmers. In states where precinct patterns have been examined, this was indeed the case.<sup>6</sup> In any event, farmers were a clear majority of the South Dakota population, and provided most of the Populist votes.

The Populist Party and the Fusion campaigns of 1896–1900 reoriented the major party vote in South Dakota. The vote of 1889 than to the Republican vote of that year, except in 1892, when many Democrats voted for Weaver for President.

Democratic vote in the first decade of the twentieth century remained far closer to the Populist-Democratic fusion base than the traditional Democratic vote had been (see Table 5.1). However, it would be a mistake to exaggerate the extent of this reorientation. Many ex-Republican Populists entering the Democratic Party in 1896 returned to the GOP after 1898.\*

The major party vote in South Dakota was less cohesive than it was in the more settled states farther east, but one consequence of the party reorientation was a growing stability in the major party vote from election to election. Since the Republican Party consistently carried the state by large majorities, the conflict within the GOP between progressives and stalwarts determined South Dakota's stance in state and national politics.

### *Progressivism and the Non-Partisan League*

Pre-World War I progressivism in South Dakota differed in two respects from the Populist Party, the Non-Partisan League, and the progressive movements in North Dakota and Wisconsin.

First, in those states progressivism was a movement of the poor; in South Dakota, it was supported by the rich. The vote for Thorson in 1910, which had the highest intercorrelations with other progressive elections, was correlated .66 with the value of land per acre.

The progressive counties included five of the richest corn belt counties. The stalwart counties included three of the four

\* Democratic counties remained opposed to prohibition, but the average correlation was  $-.49$ , compared to  $-.58$  for the pre-Populist Democratic vote. There was in both periods a low relationship between Catholicism and the Democratic vote. The over-all relationship between German background and the Democratic vote, low in 1889, disappeared after Fusion. Nevertheless, German counties remained somewhat Democratic, as were western, native-stock, and Austrian counties. Russian-German and wheat-belt counties were Republican.



TABLE 5.1

## POPULISM AND THE PARTY VOTE IN SOUTH DAKOTA

	1889	1893	1893	1896	1898	1900	1902	1904	1906	1908	1910	1912
	Dem.	Pop.	Dem.	Fus.	Fus.	Fus.	Dem.	Dem.	Dem.	Dem.	Dem.	Dem.
	Gov.	Judge	Judge	Pres.	Gov.	Pres.	Gov.	Pres.	Gov.	Pres.	Gov.	Pres.
1889 Democratic Governor	—36											
1893 Populist Judge	51	—57										
1896 Fusion President	—01	61	11									
1898 Fusion Governor	—12	51	06	73								
1900 Fusion President	14	36	24	77	83							
1902 Democratic Governor	42	—05	55	53	48	74						
1904 Democratic President	57	—20	63	37	34	58	84					
1906 Democratic Governor	43	—07	54	43	38	63	81	85				
1908 Democratic President	47	02	49	50	57	77	80	75	82			
1910 Democratic Governor	55	—28	56	19	29	52	60	62	70	76		
1912 Democratic President	40	00	34	42	34	55	56	55	52	70	51	
1916 Democratic President	10	17	19	48	56	73	52	41	54	65	39	65

Russian-German counties, a bloc of counties in the southwest, and no corn belt counties but the Russian-German Hutchinson (see Figure 5.5).\*

The strong support for progressivism in the rich, corn belt counties suggests an analysis of the South Dakota movement in terms of status politics rather than economic grievances. The tone of South Dakota progressivism, rooted in corn belt individualism, was more economically moderate and moralistic than the movements in North Dakota and Wisconsin. On the other hand, status politics interpretations have presented progressivism as an urban movement of native-born Protestants. In South Dakota, there was no relation between the proportions of farmers, Catholics, or native-born and the progressive vote.†

The ethnic component of progressivism lay in disproportionate Scandinavian support for the movement and large-scale Russian-German opposition to it.<sup>7</sup> These were the only characteristics of progressivism common to the Dakotas and Wisconsin; they relate progressivism to Populism as well.

South Dakota progressivism differed in a second respect from progressivism in North Dakota and Wisconsin. It was politically diffuse. Whereas other agrarian radical movements exhibited considerable stability, the progressive base of support in South Dakota shifted from election to election. Although Coe Crawford became the progressive Republican

\* Progressive and stalwart counties were those consistently progressive or stalwart in four progressive elections. (Sterling's vote was omitted because of its extremely low correlations with the other progressive elections.)

† Evidence about the ethnic and class composition of the progressive movement has come from the Roosevelt campaign of 1912, which did not attract typical progressive electoral support. But even the evidence about the Progressive Party is dubious. In Massachusetts, state Progressive Party leaders resembled Republicans. The latter were even more likely to be native-born, Protestant, and of British heritage. Lawyers were equally prominent in both parties. Cf. Richard B. Sherman, "The Status Revolution and Massachusetts Progressive Leadership," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 78 (March 1963), pp. 59–63.



governor of South Dakota in 1904, only ten years after the height of Populism, his election, his later primary votes, and the votes given other progressives were related neither to Populism nor to any other electoral configurations in South Dakota's history.<sup>8</sup> Progressive elections showed little connection not only with the past but with each other (see Table 5.2). This is a striking difference from Populism. As a more moderate political movement, progressivism created neither the organizational nor the ideological commitments necessary to make a distinct impression on the South Dakota electorate.

TABLE 5.2

SHIFT IN BASE OF SOUTH DAKOTA PROGRESSIVISM, 1908–1916

	1908 Crawford	1910 Thorson	1912 Sterling	1912 Taft	1914 Crawford
1908 Crawford					
1910 Thorson	56				
1912 Sterling	26	38			
1912 Taft	−01	−46	−09		
1914 Crawford	33	47	16	−53	
1916 Norbeck	08	20	29	04	05

The progressive faction was so powerful in South Dakota that it succeeded in making Teddy Roosevelt the regular Republican candidate on the November ballot in 1912. However, Coe Crawford was defeated in the 1914 Republican senatorial primary, and the gubernatorial primary victory of progressive Peter Norbeck in 1916 marked another shift in progressive support. Norbeck's vote was even less related to earlier progressive elections than they had been to each other and was positively related to the Fusion Democratic vote of 1896. Most important, Norbeck did not get disproportionate support from the rich areas of the state.<sup>9</sup> But any chance Norbeck had of building a stable base of support was thwarted by the Non-Partisan League and the war.

The Non-Partisan League, which was organized in 1916 in North Dakota, contested its first South Dakota election in

1918. In North Dakota, the League had been organized around the grievances of wheat farmers. While its base of support shifted from non-German to German in 1918, it had already made an economic impact that limited its antiwar

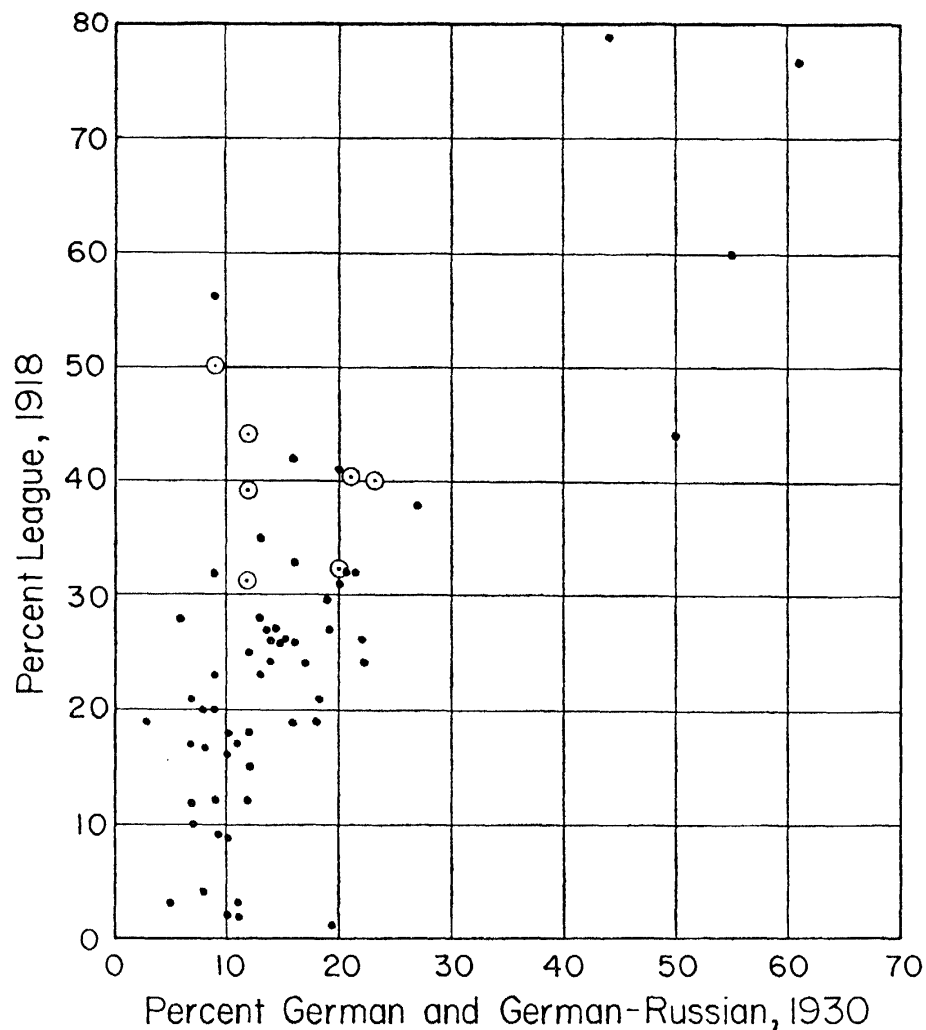


Figure 5.6. *German support for the Non-Partisan League in South Dakota, 1918. Dots represent counties, circled dots those counties strongly for League 1918–1922.*

appeal to the Germans. By the time the League participated in its first South Dakota election, the United States was at war. The League's 1918 vote in South Dakota correlated .71 with the German and Russian-German population. Progressive governor Norbeck, on the other hand, favored the war and lost what earlier German support he had had. Norbeck's

pre- and postwar votes were unrelated to each other.<sup>10</sup> After 1924, when La Follette received strong antiwar support, Germans stopped supporting or opposing progressives on the basis of the war issue.<sup>11</sup>

Wheat and corn-and-wheat counties that had supported the League in 1918 remained with it in 1920 and 1922 as its German support evaporated (see Figure 5.6).<sup>12</sup> The opposition to the League, as to La Follette in 1924, was concentrated in the cattle counties west of the Missouri.

**TABLE 5.3**

**CORRELATIONS OF VOTE FOR PROGRESSIVE CANDIDATES IN SOUTH DAKOTA, 1924–1932**

	1924 McMaster	1926 Norbeck	1926 Bank Guarantee Act	1930 McMaster
1924 McMaster				
1926 Norbeck	25			
1926 Bank				
Guarantee Act	22	20		
1930 McMaster	35	53	47	
1932 Norbeck	12	41	20	56

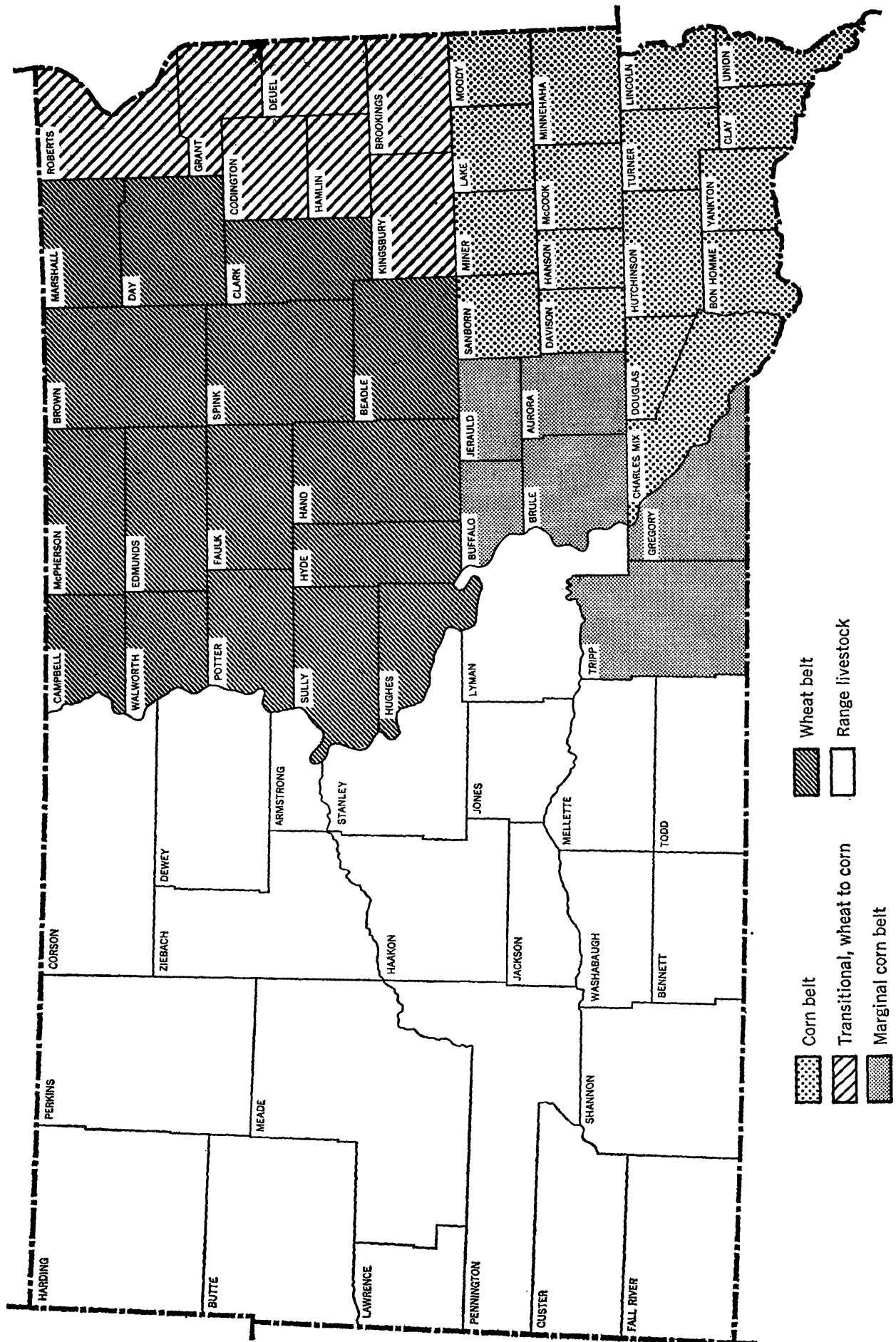
Unlike its North Dakota counterpart, the South Dakota League disappeared after only a few years of activity. In North Dakota, progressivism disintegrated under the onslaught of the League; in South Dakota, the League failed to unseat progressive governor Norbeck. South Dakota progressivism was as vital in the 1920's as it had been before.

A depression in agriculture had succeeded the prewar agricultural prosperity, and progressivism in the second half of the 1920's and in the early years of the Great Depression was primarily a movement of economic protest. The 1930 senatorial primary vote for McMaster, which was fairly closely related to other progressive elections (Table 5.3), provides evidence for the economic character of postwar progressivism. South Dakota was divided into four agricultural regions in 1930 — corn, wheat, transitional from wheat

to corn, and cattle. McMaster did not receive the support of the poorest farmers throughout the state as a whole. But within the corn and transitional regions the poor counties supported McMaster and the rich counties opposed him.<sup>13</sup> Whereas the rich corn belt counties had been progressive before the war, the poor corn belt counties were the most progressive in the state during the late 1920's and early 1930's. In addition, farmers had invaded some southern cattle counties west of the Missouri River in the 1910's and 1920's. Farmers in these counties had suffered considerable hardship from drought, and they tended to support progressivism. The antiprogressive vote was scattered in this period; only a few counties were consistently antiprogressive. (Compare the delineation of South Dakota's economic areas in Figure 5.7 with the map of progressive strength, Figure 5.8.) This progressive pattern had no antecedents in South Dakota political history. It did, however, have consequences.

*The Major Party Reorientation, 1928–1936*

In many states, the Smith election of 1928 ushered in a voting pattern that broke radically with the past. South Dakota, however, tells a different story. True, the Smith vote bore little relation to previous Democratic elections. In part, the cause of the new party cleavage was Smith's Catholic support, but the correlation between Catholicism and the Smith vote was only .45. Similarly, Smith's support correlated only .4 with the vote to repeal prohibition. In other states Smith got a much more Catholic, wet vote. But in South Dakota, Smith's vote was in large part progressive. This was true also of F.D.R.'s 1932 vote, which was related .83 to Smith's support but only barely related to Catholicism and prohibition. Both Smith and Roosevelt were strong in progressive counties; their votes were correlated .57 and .61 with McMaster's 1930 primary vote. Their correlations with La Follette's 1924 vote were lower but still significant ( $r = .37$





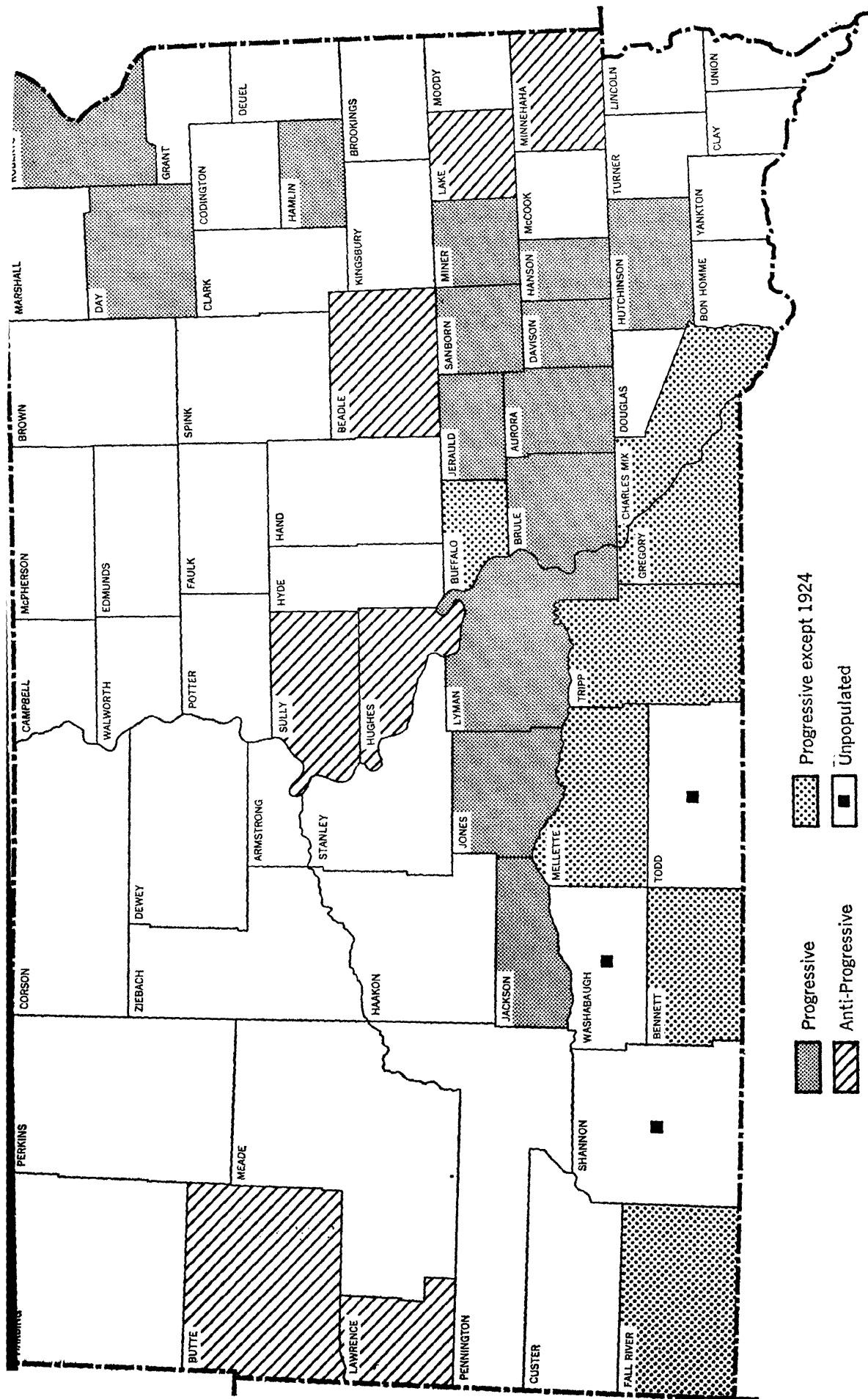


Figure 5.8. Progressivism in South Dakota, 1924–1930.

and .44).<sup>14</sup> The Smith-Roosevelt and progressive votes were united by their economic similarity. Like the McMaster vote, the Roosevelt vote was greatest in the poor corn counties ( $r = .57$ ). In the northeast transitional counties, the relationship between poverty and the Roosevelt vote was .8. In the western counties, the relationship was .63.<sup>15</sup> Only in the wheat belt was there no differentiation along economic lines.

Nevertheless, the poorest counties in the state, in the far west, were the strongest anti-Democratic counties in 1928 and 1932. These same counties had opposed pre- and post-war progressivism. They had been disproportionately Democratic since statehood. But as the progressives moved into the Democratic Party, they moved into the Republican Party.

The party vote reoriented itself in 1928. But this reorientation did not increase Democratic support among the urban and foreign-born as much as it did among the poor rural supporters of agrarian radicalism. The Smith and Roosevelt votes had roots in the pre-New Deal reform past.

The Smith election departed from traditional Democratic voting patterns.<sup>16</sup> But the new party politics did not come fully into existence until the Roosevelt elections of 1936 and 1940 (see Table 5.4). Party stability finally reasserted itself after two decades of instability going back to World War I and the postwar ferment. The contemporary party stability is no more a child of the Smith revolution than it is a return to pre-World War I party lines.<sup>17</sup> The votes for President in 1908 and 1948, for example, are correlated .54. This must be contrasted with the reversal of pre-World War I party allegiances in contemporary Wisconsin. We turn now to the modern party vote in South Dakota — its continuities with the past and its differences.

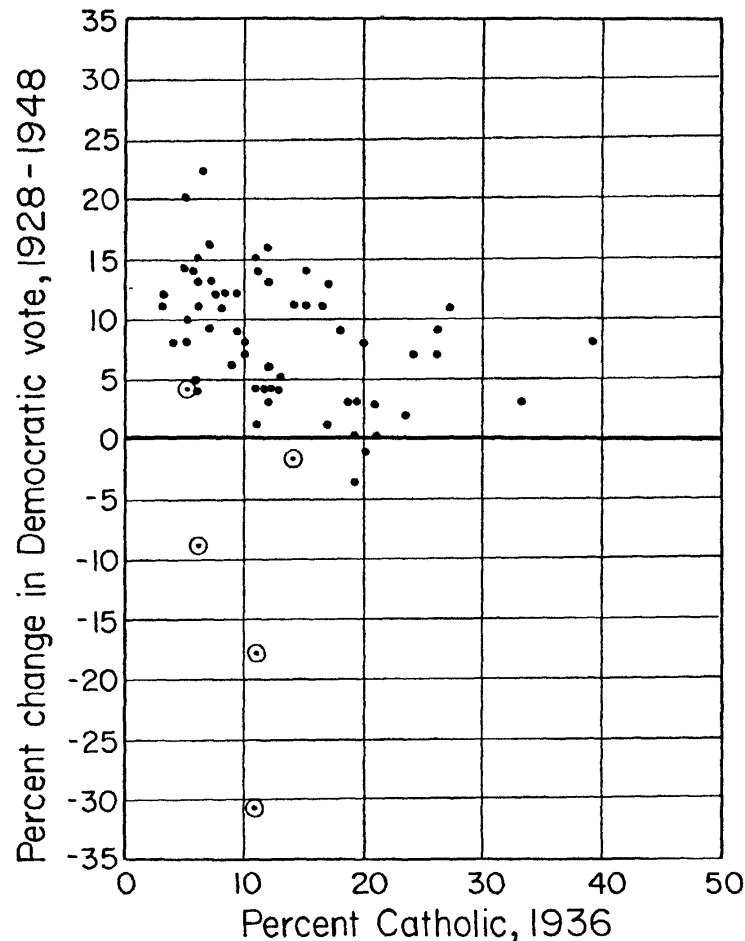
### *The Modern Party Vote*

McCarthy is alleged to have won Catholic and German voters from their Democratic allegiances. But the Democratic

**TABLE 5.4**  
CORRELATIONS OF VOTE FOR SOUTH DAKOTA REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, 1920-1960

	1920	1924	1928	1932	1936	1940	1944	1948	1952	1956
1920										
1924	20									
1928	37	45								
1932	45	49	83							
1936	59	04	52	55						
1940	44	-20	30	28	80					
1944	48	-12	33	32	85	89				
1948	52	-02	44	44	81	82	94			
1952	61	07	52	48	80	83	89	93		
1956	55	15	49	46	72	74	79	86	91	
1960	50	08	50	35	67	72	76	82	87	90

Party in South Dakota had lost the distinctively Catholic composition of the Smith campaign well before McCarthy came on the scene. In addition, Russian-German voters had deserted the party in large numbers (see Figure 5.9). The



*Figure 5.9. The change in the South Dakota Democratic vote, 1928–1948. Dots represent counties, circled dots those that are Russian-German.*

pre-McCarthy Democratic Party differed not only from the party of Al Smith but also from the pre-World War I Democracy. It had gained strength in some eastern wheat counties, and significantly less of its support came from German and western cattle counties.<sup>18</sup>

The relative position of the Democratic Party in the corn belt has remained the same since the days of Smith. The poorer corn belt farmers still support the Democratic Party. Including the seven northeastern counties, which are now part of the corn belt proper, the relation between the percentage of poor farmers and the Stevenson vote in 1952 was .56.<sup>19</sup> Since Smith was the classic urban candidate, it is ironic that this should be one of the lasting changes in the Democratic base associated with the 1928 reorientation. In so far as the Democratic vote has reoriented itself, the economic base of the Non-Partisan League and 1920's progressivism played an important role. These were movements based in the wheat and poorer corn counties and opposed in the west. In this specific sense, the modern Democratic Party has a heritage in post-World War I agrarian radicalism.

Perhaps more significant than the reorientation of the party vote is the current stability in party lines. The intercorrelations of the Democratic vote from 1936 to 1960 fall below .66 only in the relationship between the 1938 and 1940 votes. While the correlations are perhaps lower than in an urban state with two-party equality, there is no period in South Dakota history that rivals the modern period either in the length or in the degree of party stability.<sup>20</sup>

By the 1950's, then, regularized competition between the two parties relatively undisturbed by the intrusions of agrarian radical movements characterized South Dakota politics. McCarthyism grew out of this environment. Its sources of support may be examined in two ways. There is first the support for the traditional right wing of the Republican Party, whose leadership supported McCarthy. We can examine this in the light of the Taft-Eisenhower presidential primary campaign of 1952. There is, second, the support McCarthy is alleged to have mobilized outside this traditional right wing and outside of the Republican Party altogether. We can examine the elections of the McCarthy years for evidence of McCarthy's "mass" appeal.

*Right-Wing Republicanism, Isolationism, and the German Vote*

The isolationist predispositions of Americans of German ancestry are by now familiar. In 1952, Germans supported

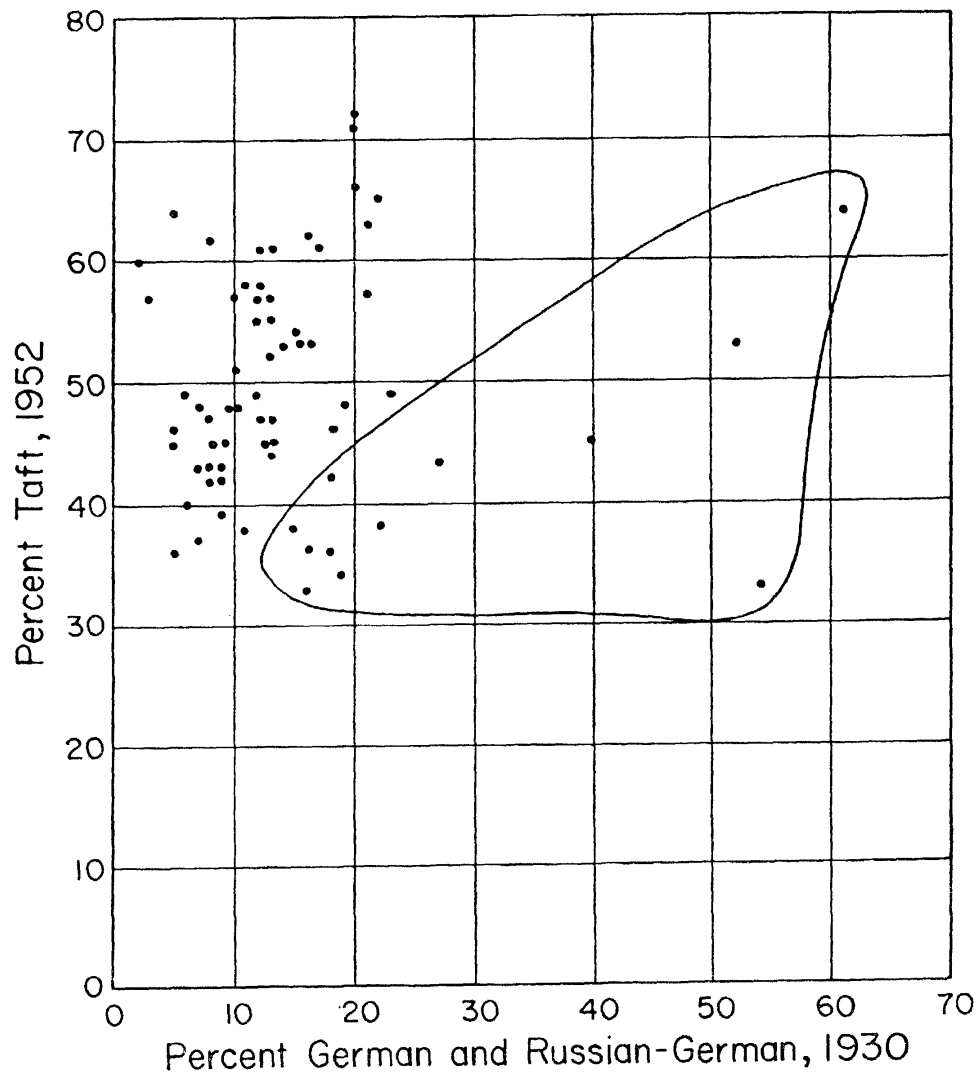


Figure 5.10. *The German population and the Taft vote in South Dakota, 1952 (dots represent counties).*

Taft in his Wisconsin and South Dakota primary campaigns.<sup>21</sup> However, German residents in the South Dakota corn belt were much more likely to support Taft than those in the wheat belt as shown by the encircled dots in Figure 5.10. An analo-

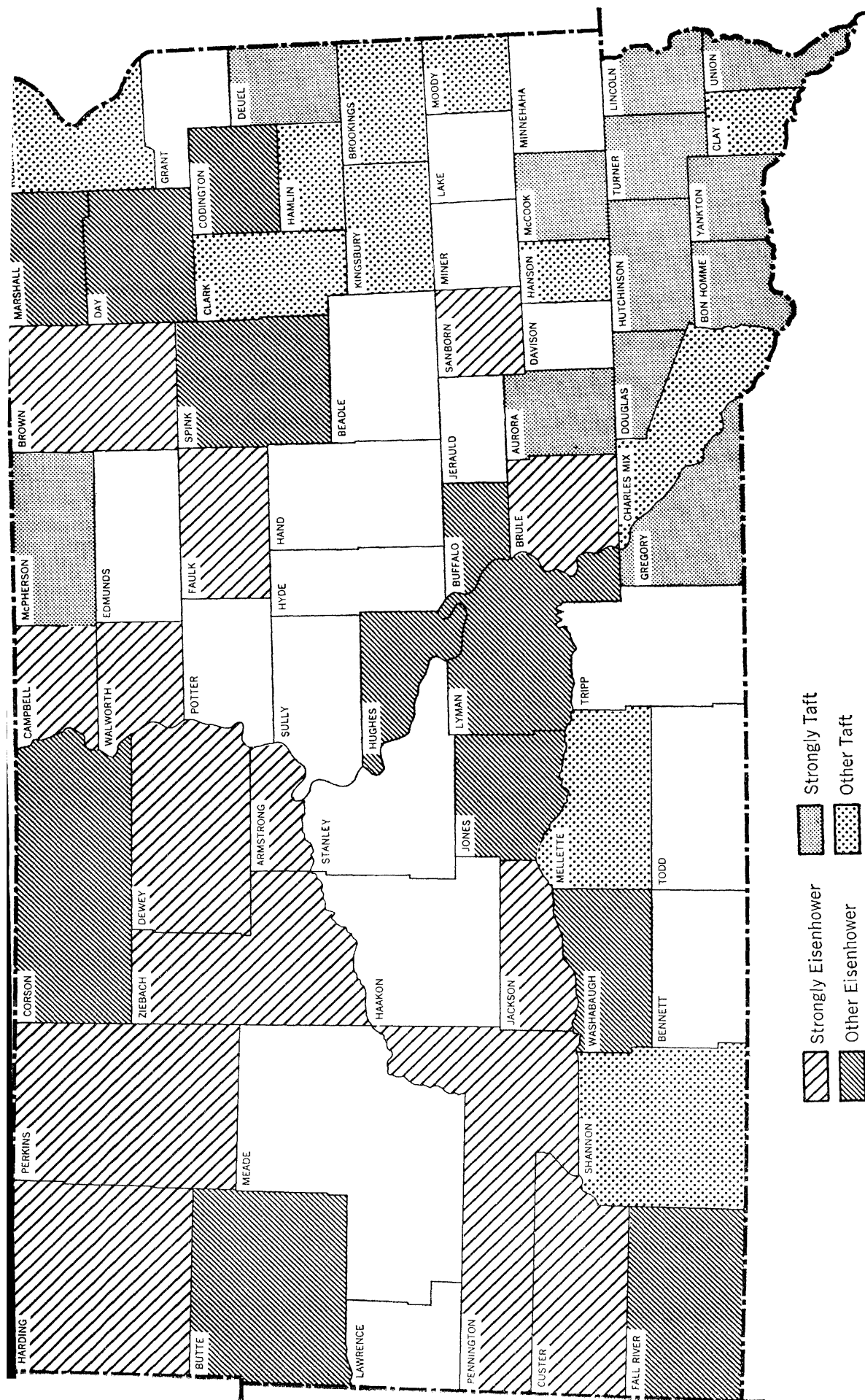


Figure 5.11. Distribution of the vote in the South Dakota presidential primary, 1952.

gous development had occurred in 1940, when German corn belt counties deserted the Democratic Party over the war far more significantly than German wheat belt counties. Moreover, Taft in 1952 received strong support in corn belt counties whether or not they were highly German (see Figure 5.11). By their behavior in 1940 and 1952, corn belt Germans and other corn belt residents have indicated their sensitivity to isolationist appeals.

The Republican Party as a whole in South Dakota was disproportionately German<sup>22</sup> and strong in the corn belt. This combination of an ethnic and economic base for the Republican Party and its right wing is analogous to the support for Republican Parties in North Dakota and Wisconsin. In Wisconsin, the rich and the German areas vote Republican. In the party battle in North Dakota, the poor German and rich eastern areas oppose the resurgent Democratic Party. In these states, if McCarthy disturbed traditional party allegiances at all, his impact was short-lived. Does South Dakota present a different picture?

### *McCarthyism*

The Populist Party mobilized one third of the South Dakota electorate and influenced the development of the major parties. Politicians who called themselves progressive dominated South Dakota politics for thirty years. In this period, party lines were continually shifting, and the support that a particular leader could generate was evident. Thus in 1926, a progressive Republican ran for the Senate while a conservative Republican ran for governor. The former's vote was correlated thirty points higher with Franklin Roosevelt's vote in 1932. Unlike agrarian radicalism, McCarthyism arose in a period of great party stability and made no obvious impact, temporary or permanent, on party lines.

The alleged ground swell for McCarthy is not evident at the electoral level. In Wisconsin, McCarthy's strength was a



regular Republican strength first and foremost. In South Dakota, the Republican officeholders who supported McCarthy did not significantly differ from other Republicans in their electoral support. The contemporary lines of party conflict in South Dakota had formed by 1940. The elections of the McCarthy period did not show up as either deviant or critical elections — they neither deviated from normal party lines nor reoriented the party vote on new lines. The significance of McCarthyism, unlike that of the agrarian radical movements, does not lie at the mass level.

Recognizing the limited impact of McCarthy's electoral appeal, it may still be possible, as it was in Wisconsin, to locate electoral sources of support for the Senator. However, in South Dakota McCarthy himself was not a candidate. If his impact on the Wisconsin electorate was slight, one would expect his impact in a state where he was not a candidate to be even more elusive.

Both South Dakota senators were supporters of McCarthy. Mundt had been elected to the Senate in 1948 following prominence in the House Un-American Activities Committee. He was reelected in 1954, McCarthy making a campaign speech for him. Case had beaten the internationalist Republican incumbent in the 1950 primary on a program of isolationism and economy.<sup>23</sup> In the Senate, he supported McCarthy, but unlike Mundt he voted for the censure resolution. This was because, as a member of the Watkins committee which recommended censure, he was subject to severe pressure. Nevertheless, he was the only member of the committee to waver prior to the final censure vote and was instrumental in having the section referring to General Zwicker removed from the final resolution.

Case was first elected in 1950, the year in which the defeat of senators Tydings, Lucas, and Myers established McCarthy's electoral reputation. Mundt was reelected in 1954, at the height of the controversy over the censure of McCarthy. Either or both of these elections should provide evidence of

pro-McCarthy sentiment among the South Dakota electorate.

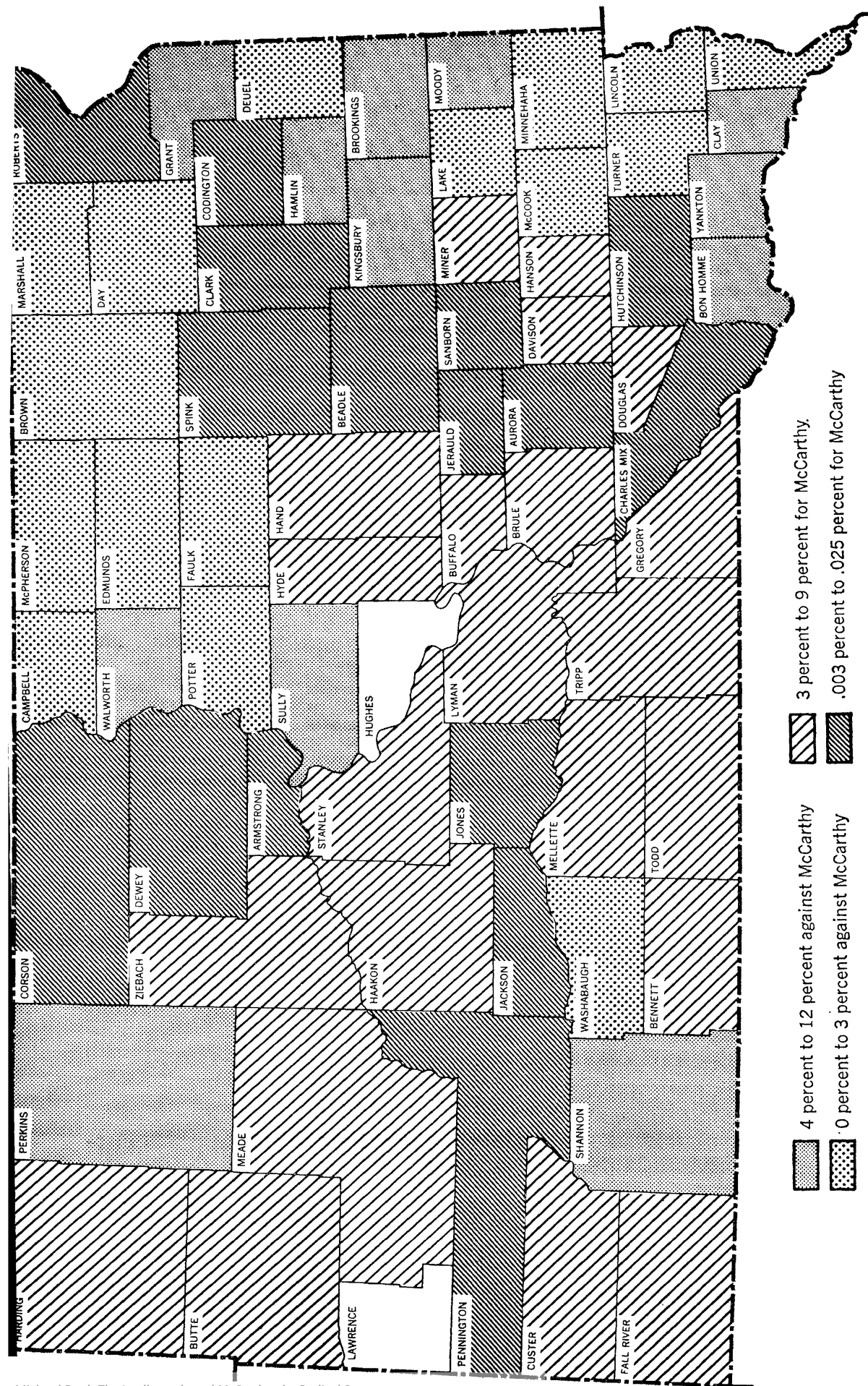
In order to hold constant the regular party vote but minimize factors irrelevant to McCarthyism associated with the various postwar South Dakota elections,<sup>24</sup> four indexes of McCarthyism were constructed. In each case, county percentages above or below the state average on the measure of McCarthyism were subtracted from county percentages above or below the state average on the measure of regular Republicanism. This gave each county a score on each of the four McCarthy indices.\*

The differences in the four indexes underscore the fact that on the whole McCarthyism in the 1950's did not supplant the normal political patterns of off-year elections, ethnicity, and economics. Nevertheless, a broadly consistent trend emerges. McCarthy Republicans picked up strength west of the Missouri and in the western corn belt and lost strength in the wheat belt and among the rich counties of the corn belt. The geographic consistency of the gains and losses is noteworthy. (For a map showing the average scores on the McCarthy indices, see Figure 5.12.)

One can only speculate about the meaning of this pattern. The absence of any political tradition from Populism to McCarthyism is immediately evident. The Populist counties were among the strongest anti-McCarthy counties. They did not support Taft against Eisenhower in 1952; McCarthy and Taft were both weak in the wheat belt.

Pre-World War I progressivism was also not related to McCarthyism. The rich corn belt counties that voted progressive before World War I were anti-McCarthy. Scandinavians, who had been progressive, tended to oppose

\* The four indices were (1) the deviation by counties of the Michelson vote from the state average for Michelson (1946 Republican gubernatorial candidate) minus the deviation by counties of the Case vote from the state average for Case; (2) the average of the Michelson and Dewey deviations minus the Case deviations; (3) Michelson minus the average of Case and Mundt; (4) Michelson and Dewey minus Case and Mundt.



McCarthy.<sup>25</sup> Germans already tended to be Republican and right wing before 1950, and they did not become more Republican after. There was, on the other hand, a slight tendency for the Catholic vote for Mundt and Case to increase over the vote for Dewey and Michelson ( $r = .26$ ). This parallels the increased Catholic vote for McCarthy found by Bean in several states in 1950.<sup>26</sup>

There was a clear connection between the economic progressivism of the 1920's and the support for Mundt and Case. The two tiers of counties in southern South Dakota extending from the Missouri River almost to the eastern border were banner progressive counties, and they also supported McCarthy Republicans. There was, in other words, a tendency for poorer corn-growing areas to support progressivism during times of economic distress and pro-McCarthy Republicans during prosperity. Three factors may have contributed to the behavior of these counties. Perhaps McCarthy was irrelevant to their growing Republicanism, a response instead to corn belt prosperity in the early 1950's.\* Alternatively, their support for McCarthy may have been analogous to his strength in the poor, ex-progressive counties of northern Wisconsin. Finally, like the McCarthy support in the Wisconsin corn belt, it may reflect particular corn belt political characteristics. In the 1930's the depressed corn areas produced the Farm Holiday Movement and the radical wing of the Farmers Union. One might hypothesize that the corn belt is sensitive to economics during hard times and may take extreme action then and is sensitive to McCarthy-type ideological appeals during good times. But the evidence is far too meager to do more than speculate.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, the western part of South Dakota became more

\* The measures of the party vote are from 1946 and 1948, elections previous to those which measure the impact of McCarthy. But to choose an election in the 1950's to measure the regular vote would be to run the risk of overlooking a general shift in the nature of party support brought about by McCarthyism.

Republican during the McCarthy period. This reflects the shift of these conservative counties to the Republican Party as the Democratic Party became more progressive. The shift of the southern counties just west of the Missouri River was perhaps due to recovery from the serious drought and over-utilization of land that plagued this area until World War II. Except for the late 1920's and early 1930's, this southern area had not been progressive. The west as a whole was anti-progressive. If poor corn belt support for McCarthy is seen as the fruition of agrarian radicalism in any sense, then western support for McCarthy must equally be seen as the fruition of conservatism.

The point that must be stressed is that there were no great upheavals in the party vote during the McCarthy period. The McCarthy indexes register shifts of only a few percentage points. Certainly there was no resurgence of Populism — either in the sense of the demographic traits characteristic of Populism, or in the sense of specific Populist counties supporting McCarthy. We began by asking what effect McCarthyism had on the existing party base; we found that McCarthyism was itself dominated by the existing party base.

### *Conclusion*

Evidence and speculation about the history of party politics in America has led many historians to believe both that the New Deal represented a sharp break with past voting patterns and that the progressive Republicans of the pre-New Deal period vote Republican and conservative today. There is no necessary contradiction between these two views, but they point in different directions. In the agrarian midwest before the New Deal, the progressive-stalwart conflict was carried out within the dominant Republican Party. Since the coming of the New Deal the Republican Party has become the conservative party. If the New Deal changed the electoral basis of party politics in these states, it is possible that those who

would have been Republican progressives are now Democrats. The ideological change in the parties in the New Deal period would reflect and anticipate a change in their constituencies. If it is true that pre-New Deal Republican progressives vote Republican today, then the New Deal did not radically shift the bases of the major parties.

In Wisconsin, progressive Republicans did in large part become Democrats with the New Deal. In South Dakota, the story is more complicated. In part, progressives and conservatives changed parties. Western ranching counties changed parties because they remained conservative. Poor corn belt counties switched parties in 1928-1932 because they remained progressive. There was a tendency for wheat farmers, more favorable to governmental action, to move into the Democratic Party. But the party realignment during the Smith-Roosevelt era was hardly total. The reassertion of traditional party loyalty after 1932 means that in South Dakota the kind of people who were voting Republican — and progressive — before World War I are voting Republican — and conservative — now.

In two senses, then, the New Deal Democratic Party in South Dakota was not a complete break with the past. In part, it was the outcome of the progressivism of the 1920's; in part, after 1932 it returned to its pre-New Deal, pre-World War I base. But if the base of the South Dakota parties has remained relatively stable in the last half-century, their ideologies have not. Progressives controlled the Republican Party before World War I; conservatives control it now. Many of the same types of people vote for leaderships which seem at opposite ends of the political spectrum.

This continuity of support should not be overdone. The direct support for progressivism — expressed in the primaries — shows little relation to the party vote, either Democratic or Republican. But there is evidence that those who voted specifically progressive prior to World War I vote disproportionately conservative today. Taft was strong in old pro-

gressive territory. There is no similar evidence of continuity from Populism to reaction. In part this was because Populism created no permanent organizational loyalties upon which later movements were able to capitalize. Not the Populist mass movement but the established traditions of the Republican Party permitted a continuity of support despite a change in program. Moreover, the absence of Populist continuity with reaction reflects the fact that the Populist constituency had particular political-economic goals. Pre-World War I progressivism in South Dakota was a more diffuse movement, stressing moral reform as much as political change. The Populist program was more alien than the progressive platform to contemporary Republicanism.

The most clearly agrarian radical movements in South Dakota — Populism, the Non-Partisan League, and 1920's progressivism — did not evolve into contemporary conservatism. But the weakness of agrarian radicalism after World War II left no significant challenge to conservative Republicanism. McCarthyism rose to power in the Middle West in the context of conservative dominance. While he had marginal agrarian radical support, the overwhelming majority of those who sent McCarthy-supporters to the Senate was part of the regular Republican constituency. In the eastern Middle West, a Republican Party that had rarely been progressive gave McCarthy his support. In the Plains states, McCarthy became strong with the conservative defeat of agrarian radicalism.

## CHAPTER SIX

# POPULISM

Political movements in a crisis period encompass both ideology and economic demands. Their proposals look to changes in the wider society and are in this sense broader than the proposals of interest groups. Their constituents, in deprived positions in society, require more large-scale changes. Moreover, in the disrupted position in which people find themselves during a crisis, they require some general explanation of the relation between narrow economic demands and their general welfare. Deprived of power, they are not likely to be motivated to act to change their situation by appeals to practical self-interest alone. Because the obstacles to surmount are so great, such appeals seem illusory and in fact often are. Therefore, some emotional appeals are essential; protest movements have crusade characteristics. The movements of farmers in the 1890's, workers in the 1930's, and Negroes in the 1960's have all been crusades. The emotional appeals of these movements transcend rationality defined in terms of Benthamite narrow self-interest. But narrow groups are specifically irrational in a crisis period because their methods can succeed neither in achieving results nor in attracting adherents.

To treat mass movements in pluralist terms is to make them a priori irrational. When they are viewed as responses to social crises, a different picture emerges. Populism must