

## **The Election of 1828: A Changing of the U.S. Political Landscape**

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### **Abstract**

During the election of 1828, a rise in political activism within the general populous led candidates to utilize new campaigning strategies. These changes in strategies helped electoral contenders cope with the American public's growing desire for fuller transparency and the shift toward a new campaigning structure based primarily on public image. The development and focus of these new strategies has permanently altered the way future politicians and the general public have since approached campaigning in America. When looking into the 1828 election campaigns of Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams, the following questions were considered. The primary question was how did the candidates use new campaign strategies in order to gain the American public's favor? Additionally, what specific campaign strategies were introduced during the campaign leading to the 1828 election? Which candidate had a higher rate of success in employing these strategies? Finally, what strategies were better utilized by Andrew Jackson and his campaign causing him to win the election? In order to find the answers to these questions I examined newspaper articles, election results, political cartoons, flyers, music scores, dishware, sewing boxes and various other material election-themed novelties. Through examination of articles from the *New Hampshire Patriot & Star Gazette* and the *U.S. Telegraph* I was able to identify an upsurge in the amount of public slander and the formation of a multi-tiered Jacksonian campaign network. In addition, I found many examples of written and illustrated images, in both newspaper articles and on material items, demonstrating a focus on advertising a pre-formed public image of each candidate. Also, an elevation in importance of the popular vote was a chief cause of the change in American political activism as well as causing the need for candidates to focus on appealing to certain sectors of the American public. Resources further indicated a significant introduction of functional and novelty items, such as dishware and tiaras, as a strategy to promote familiarity with the candidates' public image. A shift toward focus on a need for public support and Jackson's natural ability to manipulate new techniques are what allowed him to win in 1828. Jackson's focus on being personally relatable was a major deviation toward campaigns relying on support of the average American public instead of support of the Electoral College and other members of more elite society. This occurred because of the unpopular election of Adams during the last campaign by the Electoral College in contradiction to the popular vote. The accumulated circumstances of the time triggered an escalation in campaigning and formation of new public-focused strategies that permanently altered the way political elections proceeded in the United States.

**Key Words: Adams, Jackson, Election**

### **1. Introduction:**

For the first time, in election of 1828, the United States witnessed rising levels of public interest causing candidates to utilize new campaign techniques to accommodate the public's growing desire for an open, relatable candidate. This shift permanently altered the way presidential campaigns and elections would be handled in the United States. Implementation of new campaign techniques gave the Jacksonian party tactical advantage in gaining the popular vote. The primary factors considered when determining how Andrew Jackson and his supporters better utilized these

new techniques are a rise in voter turnout, political mudslinging, local campaign groups, visual aids, and material propaganda. And, of course, Jackson's winning of the election.

The election of 1824 set the stage for a split in the Republican Party and the formation of a new party system. At the end of the previous system, the Federalist Party and the Republican Party held the majority of political power in congressional and presidential elections<sup>1</sup>. But recession of the Federalist Party created a gap in the political system that was quickly absorbed by the Republican Party. This allowed several Republican candidates to lead in the presidential election of 1824. However, Andrew Jackson repeatedly expressed dislike of several of John Q. Adams' political decisions,<sup>2</sup> especially the "Corrupt Bargain." During the 1824 election, while Jackson held a large portion of the popular vote, no candidate held the majority of the electoral vote.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Henry Clay purportedly offered to help Adams win the election by using his wide network of congressional connections. Adams and Clay each had a small portion of the electoral vote and many believed neither held a great chance at winning the election.<sup>4</sup> At this time, some not only assumed but prompted Clay to form an alliance with Adams in a show of political solidarity between West and South. Despite this alliance shift, the election still appeared to some to be in Jackson's favor when observing the results of the popular vote.<sup>5</sup> When Congress declared Adams the president of the United States many Jackson supporters claimed a "Corrupt Bargain" was made, and Adams' election did not reflect the American public's true choice. These events and Clay's appointment to the presidential cabinet greatly disturbed Jackson and his followers. These major disagreements within the Republican Party also appeared to drive Adams and his followers to disassociate themselves from the Old Jacksonian Republican camp.<sup>6</sup> In 1828, Andrew Jackson ran as the primary candidate for the Democratic Republican party, while John Q. Adams was said to have run under the newly formed National Republican Party. However, there is some minor dispute between historians as to whether or not the National Republican Party had fully separated itself at this time from the Democratic Republican Party or if it was still a faction of the Republican Party. Whether they categorize Adams' and Jackson's political affiliations as separate parties or factions of the same party, it is agreed the U.S. party system experienced a significant shift in structure at this point.

## 2. Voting Demographic & Moral Values:

One major aspect of U.S. politics that changed within the election of 1828 was the voting demographic. This does not refer to a change in eligibility to vote, but instead to a significant increase in voter turnout among the general population. Previous to 1828, the U.S. experienced political scandals and economic declines including the "Corrupt Bargain" and "the Panic of 1819", neither of which were handled by the political elite to the satisfaction of the general public.<sup>7</sup> In response, the American public became more active in the political arena. The surge in political activism between 1824 and 1828 is apparent in popular vote numbers. During the 1824 election, the overall recorded popular vote was estimated as 264,465. In 1828, this number leapt by 800,000 to 1,143,450 votes<sup>8</sup>. While Adams supporters accounted for a majority of popular vote in New England, Jackson won several larger southern states by a landslide. Jackson's lead in the popular vote was documented the *US Telegraph* newspaper which reported election results for states such as Pennsylvania where Jackson held the lead by over fifty thousand votes.<sup>9</sup> Statistics indicated a rise in the number of politically active Americans and in Jackson's overall popularity among the general public.

Mounting disagreement between the two Republican factions, paired with growing public dissatisfaction, led to a shift in American moral values within politics. The shift was exemplified in several major political improprieties; the Rachel Jackson marriage scandal, the "Coffin Handbill" scandal, Adams' expenditure scandals and the Russian foreign affairs scandal. These scandals were thoroughly reported by newspapers of the day. Jackson's marriage scandal began when Adams' campaign claimed Jackson's marriage to his wife was not legitimate. Adams used partisan newspapers to reveal Rachel Jackson's marriage to late husband Lewis Robards had not been properly resolved through divorce in 1791.<sup>10</sup> The Adams campaign tried to injure Jackson's image by portraying him as a sinful man. Jackson retained a majority of support from followers by immediately legitimizing his marriage to Rachel Jackson. Spread of slander by means of partisan newspapers was a technique Adams used in the previous election and one he relied heavily upon throughout the 1828 election. His near singular focus on this method is partially evidenced in the volume of newspaper articles currently available in support of Adams and the rarity of other Adams themed propaganda. Jackson supporters' willingness to overlook the illegitimacy of his marriage demonstrated the public's growing tolerance for political mudslinging. In previous electoral races, candidates generally avoided attacking personal matters; instead they focused on using their opponent's public actions to attack their character. Furthermore, an increased rate of literacy amongst both men and women allowed for a wider range

and variety of newspapers to be distributed.<sup>11</sup> An increasingly politically active citizenry also led to growth in the number of politically focused newspapers.

Andrew Jackson additionally underwent scrutiny for his actions in the First Seminole War. During the war, Jackson executed several soldiers including two British men allied with the U.S. military.<sup>12</sup> Directly following the war, and again during the 1828 election, Jackson's authority to execute the soldiers was questioned by opponents. Supporters argued Jackson had the right to deny both soldiers the usual rights granted to prisoners of war.<sup>13</sup> During the 1828 campaign, Adams supporters highlighted this issue by creating "coffin handbills", which were short descriptions of soldiers Jackson executed. However, through his large network of supporters, Jackson successfully argued the constitutionality of his decisions, effectively upholding his image as an honorable war hero. Part of the reasoning for attacking this aspect of Jackson's public image was the threat it posed. Jackson frequently used his role as the Hero of New Orleans to combat slander directed toward him. This often threatened Adams popularity and role within the U.S.'s political system by making him appear "an inept, pampered, narrow-minded dilettante."<sup>14</sup> Adams experienced such slander due to his upper class upbringing. By simply posting a statement in an article or poster Jackson and supporters reminded the public of the General's hands on approach and past success in an honorable role thus distancing him from the American aristocracy. In addition, Adams' attempts to disqualify Jackson's military ventures fell flat due to the inconsistencies found within the "coffin handbills" (Figure 2).



Figure 2. John Binns, *Monumental Inscriptions!* 1828, Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division Washington, D.C.

Jackson's supporters, like the *New Hampshire Gazette & Patriot Star*, often claimed "They have therefore, resorted to the old expedient to divert it, and have conjured up another horrible story about General Jackson."<sup>15</sup>

Like Jackson, Adams faced new political attacks on his personal life, however, Adams combated these attacks less successfully. This may partially have been due to increasing dislike among the public for anything associated with the aristocratic political elite. The growing American entrepreneurial middle class likely retained hostilities towards the political elite of the time because of crises such as the "Panic of 1819."<sup>16</sup> Many Americans were dissatisfied with current political leaders' indirect attempts to settle recent economic issues. Several newspapers disdainfully implied Adams often handled political and military matters indirectly, preferring to be "seated in his closet, surrounded by his books..."<sup>17</sup> Although American literacy was increasing, and books were still seen as expensive leisure items of the elite class. Tensions surrounding Adams' removed nature caused the American public to look past the

candidates' political accomplishments into his personal life. This new level of transparency allowed Jackson supporters to criticize Adams' use of public funds. Adams was accused of spending government funds on aristocratic fineries such as "the purchase of Billiards Tables..."<sup>18</sup> In addition, it was reported "The traveling expenses of Mr. Adams family, from St. Petersburg to Paris, were charged at the sum of 1,600 dollars..."<sup>19</sup> Adams' large expenditures and tours of European cities were not taken lightly as average Americans recently suffered economic declines. Combined with few public appearances by Adams throughout his presidency and campaign, these issues made Adams appear removed from concerns of lower and middle classes.

### 3. Networking:

Political mudslinging and public dissatisfaction increased Americans' desire to take an active role in the election of 1828 as well. The Jackson campaign took full advantage of this; leading to formation of a multi-level campaign network. This network played a major role in molding the presidential candidate's image and protecting it from attack. It also allowed political elite and non-elite to work together for their common goal of getting Jackson elected to the presidency. Unlike Adams, Jackson appealed to a wider voter base during 1828 because he fed the general populace's desire for a candidate who interacted directly with the public. Through his own direct interactions, and those of his local support groups, he united multiple political factions under his image as the candidate of the common people. Period newspapers frequently display ads for local township based Jacksonian campaign group meetings. The Norwich Courier reported a group of Federalists held a meeting in the *Exchange Coffee House* in Boston.<sup>20</sup> The advertisement is a prime example of how the Jackson campaign united with other political groups, including some former supporters of Adams. The Jackson campaign viewed itself as part of the Democratic-Republican Party but supporters associated themselves with other political parties or did not belong to parties at all. Many local groups also supported a large number of constantly active members, such as in Bradford where "more than a hundred person, 'good men and true,' were assembled" for a Jackson support campaign strategy meeting.<sup>21</sup> These local groups met frequently and mobilized faster in reaction to scandals than campaign movements on state or national levels. They also distributed their candidate's message more quickly and directly to voters in their area. The Adams campaign often did not work on a state or local level, which is partly why they were less successful in reaching the American public.

Additionally, the Jackson campaign was more effective in gaining support because well-structured and coordinated local chapters provided the public a direct means to actively participate in election based politics. Each local chapter, based around a township, participated in state level gatherings such as the "Jackson State Convention" in Maryland, as reported by the *US Telegraph* newspaper.<sup>22</sup> The state conventions delegated distribution of pamphlets and merchandise to local sectors and discussed how local groups should approach campaign issues in order to present a united front. In turn, state groups were directed by the national campaign movement through conventions such as the one in "Washington Square."<sup>23</sup> Jackson frequently attended conventions on state and national levels to make supporters feel a direct connection to him. Jackson's physical presence and efforts to directly organize his campaign at all levels furthered his image as the "common peoples" candidate. His actions caused supporters to be more enthusiastic and active than supporters of the Adams campaign. In their enthusiasm, Jackson supporters frequently ran articles containing testimonials of both common Americans and political elites to promote Jackson's public image. In the *Eastern Argus*, a writer and Jackson supporter, provided testimonials of several iconic American politicians such as James Monroe, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams claiming "Gen. Jackson justly enjoys an eminent degree of public favor..."<sup>24</sup> Testimonials strengthened Jackson's popularity; making the average American reader assume Jackson held the majority of popular vote from the beginning of the election. The Jackson campaign also used the *US Telegraph* newspaper to publish various visitations by the candidate to create excitement over the campaign.<sup>25</sup> The *US Telegraph* newspaper was run by the Jackson campaign and completely dedicated to publishing information on Jackson's movements in the election of 1828; making it the only the newspaper at the time created for the sole purpose of supporting a single candidate. This was one of the main methods the Jackson campaign used to keep their network up to date on events outside of convention meetings. Some scholars, such as Erik Eriksson, believe many Americans may have been drawn to Jackson because of local leaders he associated himself with on the Democratic Republican ticket.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. Visual Aids and Merchandising:

The development of Jacksonian campaign networks also led to creation and widespread popularity of candidate-themed visual propaganda including political artwork and branded household items. Jackson supporters were particularly successful in creating and distributing posters and pamphlets through their multi-tiered campaign network. Posters such as the *Hero of New Orleans* by Childs ensured the American public was constantly reminded of Jackson's military triumphs. They also prevented association of Jackson with anything aristocratic.<sup>27</sup> Jackson's military hero image allowed him to appear assertive yet willing to directly interact with the public as he did with his troops. This likely appealed to the growing entrepreneurial class who were trying to disassociate themselves from the removed aristocratic image of current political leaders, such as Adams. At the same time, the Jackson campaign utilized the public's admiration for the founding fathers to promote their candidate. The election of 1828 was the first in which founding fathers did not hold large influence because most had passed away. Americans still, however, revered their image, which is why the previously mentioned testimonials by people such as Thomas Jefferson boosted Gen. Jackson's public image. In one particular campaign poster Jackson is surrounded by several founding fathers, including George Washington, in order to help viewers associate him with the role of the president and the U.S.'s 'glory days' or founders era politics (Figure 6).<sup>28</sup>



Figure 6. Samuel Troxel, "Sgraffito Plate, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania," 1828, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The Adams presidency was frequently viewed as something negative in need of change, as seen in *the Pedlar and his pack* (Figure 3).<sup>29</sup>



Figure 3. James Akin, *The pedlar and his pack or The desperate effort, an over balance*, 1828, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

This cartoon highlighted public dislike for the Adams campaign's partially untruthful "coffin handbills." The "coffin handbills" are represented in the image by coffins carried by Adams. The ornately carved chair with presidential eagle represented Adams mispending of federal money on European fineries. Such cartoons conveyed the Jackson campaign's political messages to a range of viewers who may not have had the necessary literacy to understand detailed newspaper articles. During the campaign, Jackson was often referred to as 'Old Hickory.' This originated from a campaign song called "The Hunters of Kentucky"<sup>30</sup> which memorialized Jackson's heroic efforts at the Battle of New Orleans.<sup>31</sup> The Jackson campaign played the song at events as an identifier and positive publicity for their candidate. The lyrics, nicknaming Jackson 'Old Hickory', provided local supporters easily a producible method of demonstrating support for Jackson. Supporters carried hickory sprigs, hats and brooms at his conventions; creating a type of stylistic trend reminding voters of their candidate. By associating himself with the common 'Hickory' and common hunters from Kentucky, Jackson furthered his image as the candidate of the 'common' people.<sup>32</sup> This provided an easy, enjoyable method for recalling facts about Jackson, while also making Jackson a common name at social events or parties. The *Ohio Ticket* demonstrated the Jackson campaign's use of visual aids to convey political messages and highlights their use of merchandising (Figure 1).<sup>33</sup>



Figure 1. Ohio Election Ticket, *To Sweep the Augean Stable. for President Andrew Jackson for Vice-President John C. Calhoun.*, 1828, Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division Washington, D.C.

The wooden broom image on the ticket, symbolizing Andrew Jackson, demonstrated how he would 'clean' the Adams cabinet out of the White House. Through humorous delivery of political slander the ballot allowed Jackson to insult his opponent's character without it reflecting poorly in the eyes of his constituents. It also provided campaigners a way to promote not only Jackson but their own campaign-based merchandise.

The Jackson campaign, moreover, regularly utilized a variety of merchandise items to advertise Jackson's candidacy. An example is mass-produced tokens displaying Jackson's image as the 'Hero of New Orleans' created between 1824 and 1828 (Figure 4).<sup>34</sup>



Figure 4. Unknown, *An Andrew Jackson Campaign Token*, 1824, Virginia Historical Society.

These were cheaply made and easily distributed by Jackson supporters. Other items, such as dishware and quadruple jugs, were created with utilitarian purpose to make them more relatable for lower and middle class households. Functional quadruple jugs were popular due to a large storage capacity and artistic depictions of Jackson (Figure 5).<sup>35</sup>



Figure 5. Unknown, "Quadruple Jug 'Jackson Shooting Adams'," ca. 1824, Private Collection.

The jug in image six shows Jackson shooting Adams. The humorous but violent depiction reminded voters of Jackson's hands on attitude. Such jugs were often used for alcohol storage which meant when used it would further associate Jackson's image with something the voter likely enjoyed. Other useful items, such as simply decorated ceramic dishes, were also made to promote the Jacksonian campaign. Image seven displays a colorful, but not overly ornate plate.<sup>36</sup> The hand-crafted plate is another example of how the Jackson campaign promoted their candidate by placing icons on everyday household items. While items were display-worthy, there was always a functionality to them in order to prevent Jackson's image from being associated with the 'elite' or luxurious, like Adams' (Figure 6). Unlike Jacksonians, Adams campaigners focused on conveying their political messages through partisan newspapers while underutilizing household merchandise items. The Adams campaign released a select few items such as ornately decorated sewing boxes (Figure 7).<sup>37</sup>



Figure 7. Unknown, *A pressed cardboard sewing-box with a portrait of John Quincy Adams*, 1828, Virginia Historical Society.

These were nothing compared to the volume of logoed jugs, dishware, sewing boxes, handkerchiefs and other household items released by the Jackson campaign. (Figure 9).<sup>38</sup>



Figure 9. Roger A. Fischer, *Tippecanoe and Trinkets Too: the Material Culture of American Presidential Campaigns, 1828-1984*.

The distribution and popularity of the household items, and collectibles such as tiaras, greatly appealed to many American women (Figure 10).<sup>39</sup>



Figure 10. Roger A. Fischer, *Tippecanoe and Trinkets Too: the Material Culture of American Presidential Campaigns, 1828-1984*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988: 13.



While women couldn't vote yet, they did have some influence over their sons and husbands. In addition, the utilitarian nature of many of the items causes the voters who own them to be exposed to the Jacksonian platform on a daily basis. In the end, the merchandise items provided good return to the candidate by providing campaign funds and advertisement while giving the voters something in exchange for their financial contribution and support, namely objects with utility and often a bit of down to earth novelty.

By repeatedly placing Jackson images and symbols on household objects and advertisements campaigners molded the candidate into a familiar public icon. This status allowed the campaign to easily combat slander by the Adams campaign. Constant visual stimulus paired with use of songs and slogans allowed the Jacksonian party to control which characteristics of their candidate were exposed to the public. Jackson's reputation as a war hero also made it easier to manipulate his real image into that of household icon. Despite Jackson's frequent public appearances, many Americans' only images of Jackson came from campaign propaganda and descriptions in partisan newspapers. Due to the Jackson campaign's mass production of the pre-made image of their candidate through various techniques, they stopped slander of partisan newspapers who favored Adams from greatly effecting public opinion of Jackson. The Adams campaign's portrayal of John Q. Adams, having not utilized many visual campaign techniques, was left more susceptible to alteration by their political opponent. Ultimately, these circumstances lead the election of 1828 to become a battle over publicity and public image rather than an attempt to gain the more politically-informed American public's vote.

## 5. Conclusion:

Previously mentioned factors demonstrate how political campaigning changed during the presidential election of 1828. The election showed permanent alteration in public morals and ethics in relation to Americans' tolerance for political slander. The level of exposure seen in the campaign and election of 1828 had never before been demanded by the American public. Both Jackson and Adams were forced to find new methods to create a separate public image to satisfy the public's demands for full exposure, while also defending their personal lives. Before this era political candidates never had to maintain a separate public image to this extent. It is demonstrated how Jackson, and to some extent Adams, utilized merchandising and visual aids to maintain his public image. Jackson's employment of a multi-tiered campaign network allowed him to better utilize new merchandising techniques on a larger scale. Innovative methods allowed Jackson to better accommodate the public's desire for a more involved presidential candidate than Adams; ultimately providing Jackson with the necessary tools to win the election of 1828. These same methods used by Jackson allowed for the eventual development of modern campaigning in the U.S. They illustrate how candidates used personal and public image and merchandising to mold themselves into candidates the American public could accept.

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