

Polarization Among the States in Presidential Elections:
Placing the 2016 Election in an Historical Context

INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE, AND THEORY

The subject of political polarization in the United States has received considerable attention among scholars, journalists and political pundits for much of the 21st century. With respect to scholarship, the most obvious example concerns the debate between Morris Fiorina (2009) and Alan Abramowitz (2010). While both agree that polarization has increased among elected officials, Fiorina claims that such polarization is far less evident among the general population. Fiorina thus expresses greater alarm about this trend, as indicated in the title of his 2009 book, *Disconnect: The Breakdown of Representation in American Politics*. Consistent with Abramowitz, Hetherington and Weiler (2009) present evidence of increasing polarization among citizens, though they challenge Abramowitz's claim that such polarization can be viewed in positive terms because clearer choices are offered to voters given that one of these choices reflects authoritarian tendencies, as suggested by the title of their book, *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics*.

The subject of political polarization has certainly not been lost on journalists, and one such interesting treatment is Ronald Brownstein's 2008 book, *The Second Civil War: How Extreme Partisanship Has Paralyzed Washington and Polarized America*. Taking a position somewhat between Fiorina and Abramowitz, Brownstein claims that the rhetoric and positions of elected officials have produced polarization among citizens. Unlike Abramowitz, as should be clear by his title, Brownstein views the partisanship and polarization in starkly negative terms.

An additional observation by Brownstein relates more specifically to the topic of the present study. Brownstein notes the increased polarization among citizens has expressed itself in voting in

presidential elections at the state level. More specifically Brownstein presents evidence that the number of states in which presidential candidates were “within ten percentage points of each other” has declined since 1960 (2008: 203). Nicole Mellow notes that this trend has a regional component: “The general partisan gap between voters in the North and Pacific Coast and voters in the South and West has widened over time and is especially evident in the last two decades” (2010: 151).

Characterizations of a “polarized electorate” gained particular attention in part as a result of the closeness of the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. The electoral maps of states, particularly on television news shows, presented a stark portrait of the U.S. as sharply divided between red (Republican) and blue (Democratic) states. According to Jerry Hough, this characterization did not exist in 1996: “The 2000 election was the first in which the terms “red state” and “blue state” came into general use” (2006: 237, also see 217).¹ The sense of polarization may be dramatized by the red/blue maps, but the *degree* to which states are polarized over history has received little systematic attention, and is a focus of the present study.

While the specific topic of this paper is polarization in state voting in presidential elections, it is important to establish more generally evidence of increased polarization among citizens. Most of the studies cited above were published in the 2000s. A recent study by the Pew Research Center released on October 5, 2017 found evidence of growing partisan polarization, as indicated in its opening passages:

The divisions between Democrats and Republicans on fundamental political values “on government, race, immigration, national security, environmental protection and other areas” reached record levels during Barack Obama’s presidency. In Donald Trump’s first year as president, these gaps have grown even larger.

And the magnitude of these differences dwarfs other divisions in society, along such lines as

¹ Fiorina contends that such maps created a false impression that voters were *deeply* divided, or polarized, suggesting instead that these maps simply showed that voters were *closely* divided (2006: 14).

gender, race and ethnicity, religious observance or education. (Pew Research Center, 2017: Internet).

An example of how states have become increasingly polarized can be seen by comparing current circumstances to observations made by Pietro Nivola soon after the 2004 election in an article written for Brookings. Nivola wrote the following to suggest that the red/blue maps created a misleading impression of polarization:

What about the TV maps that depict a red America clashing with a blue? They are colorful but misleading. Most of the country ought to be painted purple. There are plenty of red states—Oklahoma, Kansas, North Carolina, and Virginia, to name a few—that have Democratic governors. The bright blue states of California, New York, and even Massachusetts have Republican governors. Some red states such as Tennessee, North Carolina, and Mississippi send at least as many Democrats as Republicans to the House of Representatives. Michigan and Pennsylvania—two of the biggest blue states—send more Republicans than Democrats. North Dakota is blood red (Bush ran off with 63 percent of the vote there). Yet that state's entire congressional delegation remains composed of Democrats. On election night, Bush also swept all but a half-dozen counties in Montana. But that didn't prevent the Democrats from winning control of the governor's office and state legislature (Nivola, 2005, Internet).

Of those red states with Democratic governors in 2004, Oklahoma and Kansas now have Republican governors, and while Virginia's governor is a Democrat, that state has not voted for a Republican candidate for President since 2004. The bright blue states of California and New York now have Democratic governors. The red states with congressional delegations with at least as many Democrats as Republicans all now have significant advantages for Republicans: Tennessee (7-2); North Carolina (10-3); Mississippi (3-1). North Dakota, with the state's entire congressional delegation . . . composed of Democrats now is split among its two senators, and its only member to the House of Representatives is a Republican. Michigan and Pennsylvania, which Nivola identified as blue states with Republican majority House delegations, each voted for Donald Trump in 2016. Finally, Montana, which elected a Democratic governor and state legislature in 2004 despite voting for George

W. Bush with a significant majority for president in 2004, currently has a Democratic governor, but Republicans hold comfortable majorities in the state Senate (32-18) and House (59-41). The states cited by Nivola to show a country 'painted purple' now appears to be considerably more polarized.

In terms of political theory and U.S. history, polarization was central to realignment theory. As Walter Dean Burnham wrote in his pioneering book about critical elections and realignment, 'Critical elections are characterized by abnormally high intensity . . . The rise in intensity is associated with a considerable increase in ideological polarization, at first within one or more of the major parties and then between them' (1970: 6, 7). Though critical of many claims of realignment theory, David Mayhew's critique also relates to political parties, conceptually defining polarization as 'the distance between the two major parties' stances at any election' (2002: 96) (also see Brady and Han, 2006: 123). Also commenting on polarization, Paulson claims that realignment is associated with 'relatively high issue salience among voters' (2007: 2, emphasis added). Such 'issue salience' is consistent with the type polarization cited above in the discussion of a Pew study, which found evidence that the 'distance' between partisan voters is growing.

While the present study is not directly related to realignment theory, it is an examination of political polarization, and as such allows for an assessment of realignment theory in terms of whether those periods identified as realigning were also periods in which the data confirm such polarization among states. Once this is determined, one can assess whether history has lessons for the present. To accomplish this first requires measures of polarization, as described below.

METHODOLOGY

The level of analysis used in this study is the state. As Paulson explains in his justification for using states as the level of analysis, not only are presidential elections determined by Electoral College votes cast by states, but state results reflect the persistent relative ideological position of the states, particularly on cultural issues (2007: 28). Such ideological positions and divisions over cultural issues are also related to polarization (Abramowitz, 2010: 48), which is also a central concern for the present study. Studies by Clubb, et al. and others also use the state as the level of analysis (Clubb, 1990: 90).

Second, for this study election results are calculated only by the two-party vote, both nationally and for individual states; third parties are ignored. This is consistent with Everett Carl Ladd's study of presidential elections, 1868-1928 (1970: 174), and methods used by David Mayhew in his assessment of partisan advantages in the Electoral College (2010: 196-197).

To develop measures of polarization among states, it is appropriate to begin with a conceptual definition of polarization. Mayhew's understanding of polarization between parties provides a useful starting point: "the distance between the two major parties' stances at any election." Evidence of that distance between the parties may be revealed in voting patterns in a two-step process. First, as the distance between parties grows, the cues given to voters about how to think about issues would become more polarized. As Mellow suggests in her chapter cited above, polarization is associated with regional divisions, evidence of which can be found in voting patterns among states. Other traditional regional divisions include attitudes about race, which historically have divided the South from the non-South, and foreign policy, with the Midwest more isolationist and the coasts more internationalist. Other divisions that have been noted recently and have a regional component include a rural versus

urban divide, and Hispanics versus non-Hispanics. As attitudes about certain issues are activated, the gaps between these groups increase (or become more polarized), and fewer states will be (to quote Brownstein again) Awithin ten percentage points of each other@ (2008: 203). Two measures of such polarization among states are used in the present study, as described below.

Measures of state-level polarization

How does one quantify such Adistance@ among states? To help understand the logic and steps used to calculate the first measure of polarization among states for each election, three tables are presented below: Table One presents raw data for a single election (2016) from which an indicator of polarization is eventually drawn. Table Two reorders the data in Table One to show how an indicator of AMedian Polarization@ is calculated for that 2016 election. Table Three presents data for two indicators of polarization for each presidential election, 1828-2016.

Table One presents presidential election results for 2016, listing states in order from the most Democratic (Hillary Clinton) to most Republican (Donald Trump).

TABLE ONE: 2016 Presidential Election Results by State²

Column 1 <u>State</u>	Column 2 <u>Clinton</u>	Column 3 <u>Trump</u>	Column 4 <u>Clinton%</u>	Column 5 <u>+/- Dem.</u>	Col. 6 <u>ECVs</u>	Column 7 <u>Cumulative ECVs</u>
DC	282,830	12,723	95.70%	+44.58	3	3
Hawaii	266,891	128,847	67.44%	+16.33	4	7
California	8,753,788	4,483,810	66.13%	+15.01	55	62
Vermont	178,573	95,369	65.19%	+14.07	3	65
Massachusetts	1,995,196	1,090,893	64.65%	+13.54	11	76
Maryland	1,677,928	943,169	64.02%	+12.90	10	86
New York	4,556,124	2,819,534	61.77%	+10.66	29	115

² Data for the 2008, 2012 and 2016 elections are gathered from the Federal Election Commission. All other data are drawn from CQ Press, *Presidential Elections, 1789-2004* (2005). Members of the Electoral College who failed to vote for the candidate they were committed to are ignored and their votes are counted for the candidate for whom they were committed to vote.

Illinois	3,090,729	2,146,015	59.02%	+7.91	20	135	
Washington	1,742,718	1,221,747	58.79%	+7.67	12	147	
Rhode Island	252,525	180,543	58.31%	+7.20	4	151	
New Jersey	2,148,278	1,601,933	57.28%	+6.17	14	165	
Connecticut	897,572	673,215	57.14%	+6.03	7	172	
Oregon	1,002,106	782,403	56.16%	+5.04	7	179	
Delaware	235,603	185,127	56.00%	+4.89	3	182	
New Mexico	385,234	319,667	54.65%	+3.54	5	187	
Virginia	1,981,473	1,769,443	52.83%	+1.71	13	200	
Colorado	1,338,870	1,202,484	52.68%	+1.57	9	209	
Maine	357,735	335,593	51.60%	+0.48	4	213 ³	
Nevada	539,260	512,058	51.29%	+0.18	6	219	
Minnesota	1,367,716	1,322,951	50.83%	-0.28	10	229	
New Hampshire	348,526	345,790	50.20%	-0.92	4	233	
Michigan	2,268,839	2,279,543	49.88%	-1.23	16	249	
Pennsylvania	2,926,441	2,970,733	49.62%	-1.49	20	269	Battleground
Wisconsin	1,382,536	1,405,284	49.59%	-1.52	10	279	Battleground
Florida	4,504,975	4,617,886	49.38%	-1.73	29	308	
Arizona	1,161,167	1,252,401	48.11%	-3.00	11	319	
North Carolina	2,189,316	2,362,631	48.10%	-3.02	15	334	
Georgia	1,877,963	2,089,104	47.34%	-3.77	16	350	
Ohio	2,394,164	2,841,005	45.73%	-5.38	18	368	
Texas	3,877,868	4,685,047	45.29%	-5.83	38	406	
Iowa	653,669	800,983	44.94%	-6.18	6	412	
South Carolina	855,373	1,155,389	42.54%	-8.57	9	421	
Alaska	116,454	163,387	41.61%	-9.50	3	424	
Mississippi	485,131	700,714	40.91%	-10.20	6	430	
Missouri	1,071,068	1,594,511	40.18%	-10.93	10	440	
Indiana	1,033,126	1,557,286	39.88%	-11.23	11	451	
Louisiana	780,154	1,178,638	39.83%	-11.28	8	459	
Montana	177,709	279,240	38.89%	-12.22	3	462	
Kansas	427,005	671,018	38.89%	-12.22	6	468	
Utah	310,676	515,231	37.62%	-13.50	6	474	
Nebraska	284,494	495,961	36.45%	-14.66	5	479	
Tennessee	870,695	1,522,925	36.38%	-14.74	11	490	
Arkansas	380,494	684,872	35.71%	-15.40	6	496	
Alabama	729,547	1,318,255	35.63%	-15.49	9	505	
Kentucky	628,854	1,202,971	34.33%	-16.78	8	513	
South Dakota	117,458	227,721	34.03%	-17.09	3	516	
Idaho	189,765	409,055	31.69%	-19.42	4	520	
Oklahoma	420,375	949,136	30.70%	-20.42	7	527	
North Dakota	93,758	216,794	30.19%	-20.92	3	530	
West Virginia	188,794	489,371	27.84%	-23.27	5	535	
Wyoming	55,973	174,419	24.29%	-26.82	3	538	

³ One Electoral Vote cast awarded to Trump for a Congressional District is ignored.

Column four lists the percentage of the vote received by Hillary Clinton, and the fifth column indicates the degree to which each state is more Democratic (+) or less Democratic (-) than the national vote. For example, Pennsylvania's +/- Dem. is calculated by taking its vote for the Democrat (49.62%) and subtracting the national Democratic vote (51.11%), producing a result of -1.49, indicating that Pennsylvania was 1.49% less Democratic than the national as a whole. This -1.49% statistic can be thought of as a measure of how polarized Pennsylvania was from the national vote. Column 5, then, represents the degree to which Pennsylvania - and each state - was polarized from the national vote in the 2016 presidential election.

David Mayhew uses this ordering strategy to identify a "Battleground state" for any given election, defined as the "pivotal state [or] the one that contains the median elector" that is required for each candidate to accumulate the 270 Electoral College votes needed to be elected (2010: 196). His subject is not relevant to the present study, but a similar method can be used to identify a median polarized state rather than a median Electoral College state. For Mayhew's purposes, column 7 in Table One (Cumulative Electoral College Votes) adds the number of Electoral College votes accumulated from the most Democratic state to the least. The median state required for either candidate to accumulate 270 Electoral College votes (for the 2016 election, there were actually two such "median" states, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin) is thus Mayhew's ultimate battleground state or states.

A similar strategy is used to identify a "Median Polarized State" (MPS) for each election. To determine this state, one begins by ordering the states from least polarized to most polarized for each election, ignoring the partisan preference of states. The degree of polarization is measured for each state in terms of the degree (measured as a percentage) to which a state deviates from the national average, as follows:

Individual two-party state vote for Democratic candidate in Year X (calculated as a percentage) MINUS two-party national vote for Democratic candidate in Year X (calculated as a percentage).⁴

Unlike the ordering used in Table One, pluses and minuses are ignored. Table Two (see below) replicates the statistics used in Table One for the 2016 election, but orders states from least polarized to most polarized, ignoring partisan preference. In addition, this table designates the number of House seats for each state (with one House seat awarded for Washington, D.C.) rather than Electoral College votes, for reasons described below:

TABLE TWO: State Polarization in the 2016 Presidential Election

Total popular vote for 2016: Clinton 65,853,516 Trump 62,984,825 Clinton = 51.11329088

Column 1 <u>State</u>	Column 2 <u>Clinton</u>	Column 3 <u>Trump</u>	Column 4 <u>Clinton%</u>	Column 5 <u>+/- Dem.</u>	Col. 6 <u>House Seats</u>	Column 7 <u>Cumulative House Seats</u>
Nevada	539,260	512,058	51.29%	+0.18	4	4
Minnesota	1,367,716	1,322,951	50.83%	-0.28	8	12
Maine	357,735	335,593	51.60%	+0.48	2	14
New Hampshire	348,526	345,790	50.20%	-0.92	2	16
Michigan	2,268,839	2,279,543	49.88%	-1.23	14	30
Pennsylvania	2,926,441	2,970,733	49.62%	-1.49	18	48
Wisconsin	1,382,536	1,405,284	49.59%	-1.52	8	56
Colorado	1,338,870	1,202,484	52.68%	+1.57	7	63
Virginia	1,981,473	1,769,443	52.83%	+1.71	11	74
Florida	4,504,975	4,617,886	49.38%	-1.73	27	101
Arizona	1,161,167	1,252,401	48.11%	-3.00	9	110

⁴ The Democratic Party is used because it is the only major party to field a candidate in each election since 1828. The main opposition party that year and in 1832 was the National Republican Party. From 1836 through 1852 the main opposition party was the Whigs, though the votes for three Whig candidates (who ran in different states) are combined for 1836. The main opposition party since 1856 has been the Republican Party. In only one election since then has any candidate other than a Democrat or Republican been among the top two candidates, 1912, when Teddy Roosevelt bested the Republican, William Taft. To remain consistent with the partisan emphasis of this paper, the vote for Taft, the official Republican candidate, is used here.

North Carolina	2,189,316	2,362,631	48.10%	-3.02	13	123	
New Mexico	385,234	319,667	54.65%	+3.54	3	126	
Georgia	1,877,963	2,089,104	47.34%	-3.77	14	140	
Delaware	235,603	185,127	56.00%	+4.89	1	141	
Oregon	1,002,106	782,403	56.16%	+5.04	5	146	
Ohio	2,394,164	2,841,005	45.73%	-5.38	16	162	
Texas	3,877,868	4,685,047	45.29%	-5.83	36	198	
Connecticut	897,572	673,215	57.14%	+6.03	5	203	
New Jersey	2,148,278	1,601,933	57.28%	+6.17	12	215	
Iowa	653,669	800,983	44.94%	-6.18	4	219	Median
Rhode Island	252,525	180,543	58.31%	+7.20	2	221	
Washington	1,742,718	1,221,747	58.79%	+7.67	10	231	
Illinois	3,090,729	2,146,015	59.02%	+7.91	18	249	
South Carolina	855,373	1,155,389	42.54%	-8.57	7	256	
Alaska	116,454	163,387	41.61%	-9.50	1	257	
Mississippi	485,131	700,714	40.91%	-10.20	4	261	
New York	4,556,124	2,819,534	61.77%	+10.66	27	288	
Missouri	1,071,068	1,594,511	40.18%	-10.93	8	296	
Indiana	1,033,126	1,557,286	39.88%	-11.23	9	305	
Louisiana	780,154	1,178,638	39.83%	-11.28	6	311	
Montana	177,709	279,240	38.89%	-12.22	1	312	
Kansas	427,005	671,018	38.89%	-12.22	4	316	
Maryland	1,677,928	943,169	64.02%	+12.90	8	324	
Utah	310,676	515,231	37.62%	-13.50	4	328	
Massachusetts	1,995,196	1,090,893	64.65%	+13.54	9	337	
Vermont	178,573	95,369	65.19%	+14.07	1	338	
Nebraska	284,494	495,961	36.45%	-14.66	3	341	
Tennessee	870,695	1,522,925	36.38%	-14.74	9	350	
California	8,753,788	4,483,810	66.13%	+15.01	53	403	
Arkansas	380,494	684,872	35.71%	-15.40	4	407	
Alabama	729,547	1,318,255	35.63%	-15.49	7	414	
Hawaii	266,891	128,847	67.44%	+16.33	2	416	
Kentucky	628,854	1,202,971	34.33%	-16.78	6	422	
South Dakota	117,458	227,721	34.03%	-17.09	1	423	
Idaho	189,765	409,055	31.69%	-19.42	2	425	
Oklahoma	420,375	949,136	30.70%	-20.42	5	430	
North Dakota	93,758	216,794	30.19%	-20.92	1	431	
West Virginia	188,794	489,371	27.84%	-23.27	3	434	
Wyoming	55,973	174,419	24.29%	-26.82	1	435	
DC	282,830	12,723	95.70%	+44.58	1	436	

Several strategies could be used to determine an average for polarization in each election. One could simply count the states (and DC) to determine a median state. For the 2016 election, there are with 50 states and DC, so this median would be the 26th state, Alaska, and its score of 9.50 (ignoring pluses and minuses) would be used as the indicator of polarization for the 2016 election. The

disadvantage of this measure is that all states are weighted equally. A second strategy is to weight each state by popular votes cast. The drawback to this strategy, however, is that many southern states had exceptionally low turnout before the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and using voter turnout would therefore reduce their weight substantially below their population and significance to the Electoral College. A third strategy, which more fairly approximates population differences, is to use the number of members to the House of Representative for each state as a weight (granting Washington, D.C. one House seat once it was given Electoral College votes in 1961, even though it has no representation in the House). This strategy is reflected in Table Two, above, for the 2016 election, when there were 435 House seats, and adding one seat for Washington, D.C., 436 House seats. Given that this is an even number, there are two median House seats, the 218th and 219th. To find the Median Polarized State (MPS), one counts House seats from the least polarized state to the 218th and 219th House seats. The state (or states) containing these House seats is designated as the Median Polarized State (or states). That state in 2016 was Iowa. The percentage that this state (or states) deviates from the national vote becomes the Median Polarization State (MPS) score for that election. In the case of 2016, Iowa's popular vote differed from the national vote by 6.18%, which becomes our measure of polarization for the 2016 election. As such, our operational definition of Median Polarized State is:

Median Polarized State: The score for the state that lies at the median of all states in terms of polarization, weighting each state by the number of its members to the House of Representatives (counting Washington, D.C. as one House Seat).

A second measure examines polarization not in terms of a median or average, but instead how many states deviate from the national average to such an extent that they are effectively inconsequential to the outcome of president elections. Establishing that a deviation is somewhat arbitrary, but a threshold of 10% from the national average seems reasonable. To use Table Two as an

example, none of the states that were 10% or more from the national average (twenty-four states and Washington, D.C.) would be considered remotely relevant to the Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump campaign strategies to reach the 270 Electoral College votes necessary to win the election. As was the case in determining a median polarized state, it is useful to weight states on the basis of population, roughly calculated by the number of House seats for each state. As such, the data shown in Table Three indicate the number of states that are Apolarized,@ the number of seats in the House of Representatives these states represent, and the percentage of House seats this represents

DATA

Regarding the AMedian Polarized State@ data, it is also useful to categorize levels of polarization in terms of AHigh,@ AMedium@ and ALow.@ There are 48 elections, and one-third of these (16) are classified for each category. The top one-third of polarized elections (N=16) have scores of 6.18 or more, and are defined here as Highly Polarized for this MPS indicator. The scores for the Median Polarized elections range from 3.51 to 5.93, and the Low third have scores of 3.37 and below.

A similar ranking is used to categorize the percentage of House seats in polarized states, with sixteen elections in each category. The ALow@ percentage of House seats in polarized states includes those elections with 1% to 15% of House seats in polarized states, AMedium@ is 16% to 23%, and AHigh@ includes all elections registering scores of 24% or more.

For both of these measures of polarization among the states, those elections ranking in the top third are indicated with an asterisk in Table Three (shown below), which presents the data for the two indicators of polarization used in this study:

TABLE THREE: POLARIZED STATES AND HOUSE SEATS

<u>Year</u>	MEDIAN POLARIZED <u>STATE</u>	POLARIZED STATES (more than +/- 10% of Nat. Vote)	
		<u>States</u>	<u># House Seats +DC</u>
1828	10.46 *	15=68%	122=60% *
1832	15.79 *	14=61%	132=57% *
1836	3.76	3=12%	11= 5%
1840	2.82	2= 8%	18= 8%
1844	1.74	3=12%	7= 3%
1848	4.41	6=21%	56=25% *
1852	1.59	5=17%	23=10%
1856	16.26 *	26=87%	178=78% *
1860	18.15 *	19=59%	133=58% *
1864	3.61	6=24%	35=19%
1868	3.25	11=33%	52=23%
1872	5.44	10=27%	58=20%
1876	3.36	10=27%	52=18%
1880	3.37	13=34%	70=24% *
1884	2.96	9=24%	59=18%
1888	2.96	8=21%	58=18%
1892	4.72	18=41%	87=24% *
1896	7.07 *	20=45%	124=35% *
1900	6.36 *	14=31%	72=20%
1904	9.99 *	23=51%	188=49% *
1908	7.06 *	12=26%	96=25% *
1912	5.35	22=46%	149=34% *
1916	5.79	12=25%	91=21%
1920	8.70 *	19=40%	165=38% *
1924	12.18 *	30=62%	263=60% *
1928	6.50 *	9=19%	77=18%
1932	7.09 *	17=35%	144=33% *
1936	4.63	13=27%	91=21%
1940	3.75	15=31%	118=27% *
1944	3.09	13=27%	99=23%
1948	3.51	10=21%	89=20%
1952	2.08	11=23%	51=12%
1956	3.20	7=15%	41= 9%
1960	2.55	6=12%	44=10%
1964	4.62	12=24%	71=16%
1968	3.31	10=20%	36= 8%
1972	4.69	9=18%	64=15%
1976	1.97	8=16%	24= 6%
1980	3.83	13=25%	32= 7%
1984	2.98 #	5=10%	10= 2%
1988	3.02	2= 4%	4= 1%
1992	4.84	6=12%	11= 3%

1996	4.62	10=20%	58=13%
2000	5.93	15=29%	97=22%
2004	6.29 *	15=29%	102=23%
2008	8.22 *	18=35%	65=15%
2012	7.16 * #	20=39%	97=22%
2016	6.18 *	25=49%	177=41% *

* indicates a score ranking in top one-third for polarization

indicates Median shared by two states

FINDINGS

To begin, it is clear that the elections with high rankings for these two indicators are not random. The AHigh@ and ANot High@ elections appear in historically distinct periods. These can be grouped as follows:

1828-1832

These two elections won by Andrew Jackson register as AHigh@ for both measures of polarization. Jackson=s election is often identified as a political realignment, and the beginning of the ASecond Party System.@ It is unfortunate that voting records are so sporadic prior to this because comparison of these elections to those of the First Party System are not possible.

1836-1852

Of these five elections, none rank as AHigh@ for the Median Polarized State (MPS) measure, and just one (1848) achieves that standard for the AHouse Seats@ indicator. These elections are all during stable years of the Second Party System

1856-1860

These two elections rank as very high for both indicators of polarization. As with 1828-1832, this is identified as a realigning period, what James Sundquist refers to in a chapter title from his book, *Dynamics of the Party System*, as "The Realignment of the 1850s" (Sundquist, 1973: 63).

1864-1892

Although 1864 should arguably be ignored because the eleven Confederate States of America did not participate in that election, the remaining seven elections represent a stable period associated with the Third Party System. None of these elections ranks as "high" for MPS, and while two achieve that standard for the % House Seats measure, they each just barely reach this, with 24%.

1896-1908

Again drawing on Sundquist chapter headings, these elections include "The Realignment of the 1890s" and "Realignment Averted: The Progressive Era" (1973: 120, 155). The classification of 1896 as a period as a "realignment" has received much criticism, most notably by David Mayhew (2002). Nonetheless this period is identified as beginning "The Party System of 1896" by Beck (1979: 137), and 1896-1928 is marked as the start of the "Fourth Party System" in popular textbooks such as John Bibby's *Politics, Parties, and Elections in America* (2003: 32). Regardless of claims about realignment, the data suggest that this was a period of polarization, achieving the "High" standard for all four elections for MPS, and all but 1900 for the "% House Seats" indicator.

1912-1916

These two elections of President Woodrow Wilson represent a lull in what otherwise was a

period of high polarization. Neither 1912 nor 1916 elections rank as high for MPS, though 1912 achieves that standard for the % House Seats indicator.

1920-1932

All four of these elections rank as high for MPS, and all but 1928 rank as high for the % House Seats indicator. Beck refers to the elections leading up to Franklin Roosevelt's election in 1932 as a period of dealignment, and that turnout was low in the 1920 and 1924 presidential elections (1979: 137). What should be noted for purposes of the present study is that Roosevelt's election in 1932 and the three elections preceding it all scored as High for polarization among the states for the MPS indicator, and High for all but 1928 for % House Seats.

1936-1996

This period of sixteen elections is remarkable in two respects. First, it is by far the longest period without significant oscillations in the data. Second, there are absolutely no elections throughout this sixteen-election period designated as high for MPS, and only one (1940) for the % House Seats data. Moreover, something during Franklin Roosevelt's first term ushered in a period of low polarization among the states. Given the tremendous activity during Roosevelt's first term, and the fact that economic conditions improved after more than three years of steep decline, it is reasonable to conclude that a general consensus that government should play a role in the economy had been achieved, and that general consensus mitigated some of the polarization in the country. In any event, FDR's first reelection campaign (1936) produced the lowest MPS statistic since 1888, almost 50 years.

His second reelection was lower still for the Mean Polarized score, and eight of the next twelve elections rank in the lowest third for MPS. The data for % House Seats is less dramatic, but is consistent with the MPS data. As mentioned, only one election during this period (1940) ranks as

Highly Polarized@ for the % House Seats data, four are Medium,@ and eleven of the sixteen rank as Low.@

In terms of discussion of Party Systems@ and/or realignment, even Mayhew views the 1930s as one of two genuine outlier eras@ that could be considered realigning, the other being the 1860s (2002: 162). In terms of Party Systems,@ Bibby=s previously mentioned textbook divides this period into the Fifth (1932-1968) and Sixth (1968-?) Party Systems (2003: 36, 38).

2000

This election can be viewed as a transition. While it does not qualify as High@ for either indicator, it is close to High@ for both, and in fact was the highest in the Medium@ category for MPS, representing the highest score for that indicator since 1932.

2004-2016

There are only three periods in which four consecutive elections score in the top third for the MPS indicator, one of which is the four elections of 2004-2016. The % House Seats indicator is less clear, with only 2016 achieving a High@ ranking, but some of this ambiguity is due to statistical anomalies. For example, in 2008, three more states (Texas, New York and Massachusetts) would be defined as polarized if the 10 percent or greater from the national vote@ was relaxed to 9.5%, and the percentage of House Seats for that election would more than double from 65 to 136, or 31% of House seats. If the standard was relaxed to 9.8% for the 2012 election, California, Texas and Massachusetts would join the ranks of highly polarized, and the number of House seats in Highly Polarized states would jump from 97 to 195, or 45% of House seats, which would place it among the most polarized elections.

CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions can be reached regarding these findings. First, the patterns of high levels of polarization are not random. The data for *Mean Polarized State* display clear patterns, including three groupings of four elections in a row, and two others with two in a row. There are also streaks of Medium to Low levels of polarization among the states, including seven elections in a row in the Medium and Low ranges (1864-1892), and one streak of seventeen elections in a row (1936-2000). The clusterings of *% House Seats in Polarized States* are not quite as clear cut, though ten of the sixteen elections designated as *High* for MPS are also High for the *% House Seats* indicator. Regarding the unbroken streak of Low to Medium scores for MPS during the 1936-2000 period, only one (1940) ranks as High for the *% of House Seats* indicator.

Second, if one restricts the analysis to elections that even Mayhew suggests are *two genuine outlier eras* (1860 and 1932), there are consistent patterns. To begin, 1860 and 1932 both rank as *High* for each indicator of polarization. The election or elections prior to 1860 and 1932 also ranked High for polarization. For 1860, the 1856 election achieved this score for both indicators, and for 1932, the three elections prior to it were High for the MPS indicator, as did two of the three elections prior to 1932 for *% House Seats*. Finally, for the elections following 1860 and 1932, polarization among the states declined dramatically for both indicators.

This pattern suggests a *Three Act Story*. In Act One, unresolved issues create increased polarization among voters, which in turn is reflected in the polarization among the states data. Prior to 1860, this was the issue of slavery. Prior to 1932, this was unresolved issues left over from the Progressive Era, which was interrupted by World War One and the election of Warren Harding in 1920.

In each case, the tension over the unresolved issues created a significant third party insurgency: the Republican Party in 1856, and Senator Robert LaFollette's candidacy on the Progressive Party ticket in

1924 in which he received 16.6% of the popular vote - more than any third party candidate except Ross Perot (1992) since then - in his challenge to conservative candidates nominated by both major parties that year.

In Act Two, a president is elected who brings sweeping change: the end of slavery for Lincoln after his 1860 victory, and the New Deal for Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) after his 1932 victory. Lincoln may not have envisioned that his election would end slavery in all states, and the Republican platform only called for an end to slavery in states entering the union, but war and the end of America=s Aoriginal sin@ eventually resulted from Lincoln=s election in 1860. Similarly, FDR did not articulate Keynesian economics or specifics of what would be known as The New Deal during the 1932 campaign, but once in office, those policies became his legacy.

In the Third Act, a general consensus is achieved regarding the major issues that formed the essence of each president=s sweeping policy changes, and as a consequence, polarization among the states declines substantially.

For the third major issue, what do the data suggest about other elections that some have labeled as realigning? The Jacksonian period is impossible to evaluate in terms of elections leading up to his first victory in 1828 because of a lack of data or partisan challenge. All four candidates for president in 1824 ran on the same party label: Democratic-Republican. During the previous election (1820) President Monroe ran for reelection virtually unopposed during this Aperiod of virtual one-party rule in the United States,@ which does not suggest significant polarization (CQ Press, 2005: 23). What this period has in common with 1860 and 1932 is that the data for polarization drops significantly after Jackson=s presidency, though in contrast to Lincoln and FDR, this decline was not realized until after Jackson=s second electoral victory.

This brings us to an assessment of the 1896 election, which received considerable attention when it was anointed with Acritical realignment@ status by the early realignment scholars. To begin,

1896 does not repeat the pattern of polarization noted for 1860 and 1932. Unlike 1860 and 1932, high levels of polarization did not precede 1896, though 1896 clearly achieved that status. Second, polarization did not subside after the 1896 election and in fact continued at high levels for the next three elections. A major part of this pattern is likely due to the fact that the victor in 1896 did not represent change, and without reform, no resolution and general consensus that could have reduced polarization among the states was achieved. This failure of policy innovation during the McKinley period represents one of Mayhew's fundamental criticisms of realignment theory. In his words, Apolicy innovations under McKinley during 1897-1901 probably rank in the bottom quartile among all presidential terms in American history@ (2002: 104-105).

The conclusion that 1896 was not a realignment leaves questions unanswered for a period of high polarization. Was this a period of high polarization with little policy change, or was there exceptional policy change at another point during this period? Regarding the issue of policy change or innovation, the chapter heading of Sundquist's book cited above is instructive: AMajor Realignment Averted: The Progressive Era.@ His opening paragraph of that chapter is also instructive:

The period between the Spanish American War and the First World War was a time of great political turmoil, One of the most dynamic reform movements of the country's history, the progressive movement, took form, gained strength, accomplished fundamental change in many of the country's basic institutions, then declined as national attention turned to preparedness and war (1973:155).

Given the Afundamental change@ identified by Sundquist, why did he not consider the Progressive Era as a serious candidate for realignment? Because, as he explains later in that paragraph, AThe distribution of party strength when the era closed did not differ radically from the pattern established in the 1890s@ (1973: 155).

Excluding a period based solely on the basis that there was insufficient change in the

A distribution of party strength@ suggests that Sundquist views partisan change among voters as more important than policy change or polarization, or even change within the parties. Regarding the latter, Sundquist recognized the changes within both parties during this period: AThe Progressive Era has no parallel in American history in the extent to which the two parties vied with one another as agents of reform . . . Responding to the grievances of the time rather than resisting change@ (1973: 155).

Burnham relates such change within parties to realignment forces: A ideological polarizations [can take place] at first within one or more of the major parties and then between them@ (1970: 7). Given Burnham=s attention to change within parties, one could argue that party strength among voters is less significant to voter sentiment than the choices that voters are offered by parties. For example, Presidents Theodore Roosevelt (Republican) and Woodrow Wilson (Democrat) were far more progressive than any presidents in either of their parties since at least 1876. Assuming this to be the case, one could argue that positions of presidential candidates are better indicators of voter preferences than their party labels.

Given this understanding, the Progressive Era is worthy of consideration as a period of realignment. While no reform has been as consequential to U.S. political history as ending slavery, the Progressive Era was, as Sundquist concludes, a period of tremendous reform. If one election is to be designated as Acritical@ in the realignment process, it is reasonable to identify the first presidential election won by a progressive during this period: Teddy Roosevelt in 1904. Also of note, the 1904 election represented the largest landslide in the two-party popular vote up to this point in history, certainly exceeding McKinley=s victories in 1896 or 1900.

The Progressive Era shares other similarities with the Civil War and New Deal periods. As with these other two periods, the 1904 critical election and those preceding it ranked in the AHigh@ category for the MPS statistics, and most of the % House Seats data. Also similar, polarization among the states as measured with the MPS indicator declined in the next election (1908), which followed the

most significant reforms of Roosevelt's presidency (though remained in the High category for 1908), and then dropped to the Medium category for MPS in 1912 and 1916. For the % House Seats data, polarization also declined, but did not reach Medium until 1916.

Unlike the 1860 and 1932 periods, polarization among the states returned to the High category relatively quickly (1920). How might one explain this return to polarization among the states? To begin assumes that polarization declined after the Civil War and with the New Deal because a general consensus was realized: the issue of slavery was essentially settled by the Civil War, and a larger role for government was generally accepted once the economy improved with the New Deal. For the Progressive Era, that consensus, as Sundquist explained in a quote provided above, declined as national attention turned to preparedness and war (1973: 155). The first presidential election after the U.S. entered World War One was held in 1920, and neither major party candidate, Republican Warren Harding and Democrat James Cox, was a champion of progressive reform. With the progressive consensus dissipated, polarization returned, beginning in 1920 and continuing through 1932, as shown in the MPS data for all four elections and for all but 1928 for the % House Seats data.

Before considering the high levels of polarization noted for the 21st century and what this could suggest about the future, it is appropriate to summarize similarities and differences between what has been presented in this paper and realignment theory. The first point to emphasize is that this paper places policy change as the ultimate independent variable for realignment. This is only listed as one part of Burnham's four aspects of critical realignments, they result in significant transformations in the general shape of policy . . . (1970: 10). For purposes of this study, significant transformations in the general shape of policy is considered a requirement of realignment, and the most important variable to be explained.

With that assumption, some claims of realignment suggested by scholars such as Sundquist or Burnham or Beck are rejected, while others are accepted. First, the 1896 election is rejected as a

realignment primarily because the 1896 election produced little in the way of policy change. Second, the election of 1904 is considered realigning, primarily because of the sweeping Progressive Era reforms that President Teddy Roosevelt ushered in and President Wilson continued. Third, and consistent with accepting 1904 as realigning and rejecting 1896, the claim that realignments occur with *Remarkably uniform periodicity* is rejected. Fourth, the notion that these periods must be associated with dramatic partisan change among voters is modified. If reform is a result of both parties changing platforms to promote similar reforms, then it is entirely possible that citizens are voting for substantially different policies, even though the party they support has not changed. In this case the emphasis on partisan preferences in elections may not detect changes in voter policy preferences, which ultimately is more significant for policy and understanding of realignment.

Fifth, it is accepted that the most significant reforms in U.S. history have been associated with economic transformation. Burnham makes a similar, though not entirely consistent, claim:

It has been characteristic of these great convulsions known as critical realignments that the disasters triggering them must not only be profound but must be in the nature of sharp, sudden blows, and recurrent collapses of an unregulated market economy have, historically, been among the most important (1970: 171).

While the Great Depression certainly qualifies as one of these *sharp, sudden blows*, the same could not be said for slavery, which had been an issue in the *New World* for more than 200 years before Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. While the depression beginning in 1893 represented one of these *sharp, sudden blows*, the presidential election three years later did not produce significant reform. Moreover, much of the support for Progressive Era reform was inspired by grievances of urban workers as well as farmers and other reformers resulting from industrialization had been gradually transforming the U.S. economy.

Sixth, Burnham wrote of another aspect of realignment that is accepted in the present study: "Critical elections are characterized by abnormally high intensity . . . [which] is associated with a considerable increase in ideological polarization[] . . ." (1970: 7). As discussed above, it is assumed that this intensity and polarization reflect issues that divide Americans, that these divisions often reflect regional differences among voters, and that these regional differences can be observed and measured in state-level voting.

DISCUSSION AND THE 2016 ELECTION

As noted above, the four presidential elections, 2004-2016, all rank "High" for polarization for the Median Polarized State data, and while only 2016 earned that designation for the % House Seats data, 2004 is close, and 2008 and 2012 only miss because of statistical anomalies. Also as cited above, the degree of polarization among citizens has been documented in surveys, and is the subject of scholarship. As the previous discussion also suggests, these historical periods with high levels of polarization among states have been associated with significant policy change, including the end of slavery, the Progressive Era, and the New Deal.

That policy change was associated with, as Sundquist wrote in a quote cited above, "a fundamental change in many of the country's basic institutions" (1973:155). In each of these historical periods, the power of government grew as demands were made to: (1) end slavery, (2) regulate industry with the Progressive Era, and (3) mitigate the economic crisis of the Great Depression.

In addition, this growth in the power government shifted the relative balance of power between the federal government and state governments decidedly toward the federal government. This is most clear in the case of slavery, when the 13th, 14th and 15th Constitutional Amendments explicitly took the

power to dictate issues such as slavery (and citizenship and voting) away from states and shifted them to the federal government. While the power of states may not have been diminished during the Progressive Era or New Deal, the power of the federal government to regulate industry grew significantly, and as such, the relative power of the federal and state governments shifted to the federal government.

Other than polarization, what other commonalities does the present share with the past? In each of the three examples from the past, economic matters played a significant role in the grievances expressed by citizens. The issue of slavery was not only an issue of equality, but also a matter of property rights (with slaves as property), and the economic power of slave-holders versus those with little or no power, most obviously, slaves. The Progressive Era was not only about regulating industry and trust-busting, but also shifting power to voters with the first presidential primaries, efforts to limit campaign contributions by corporations with the Tillman Act, and two Constitutional Amendments, one requiring the direct election of Senators, and another proving women with the right to vote. In each of these examples, power shifted from those who had accumulated political power to those who had far less political power. With the New Deal, in addition to employing millions of Americans with the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps, unions gained collective bargaining rights with the Wagner Act of 1935, banks were regulated with the Glass-Steagall Act of 1933, a minimum wage and overtime pay and other worker protections were guaranteed with the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, and Social Security was passed in 1935. As with the Civil War and Progressive Movement, power shifted from those with the greatest economic advantages to workers and others with fewer advantages.

How might this history inform the future? Evidence suggests that the present shares some commonalities with these three realigning periods. Economic globalization certainly represents economic transformation. While discussion of economic globalization would require far more than

what is possible in this paper, a 2004 article in *Business Week*, entitled "Working and Poor" identifies a link between globalization, and economic insecurity and inequalities:

To survive in waves of increasing global competition, U.S. companies have relentlessly cut costs and sought maximum productivity. That has put steady downward pressure particularly on the lowest rungs of the labor force
. . . globalization has thrown the least-skilled into head-on competition with people willing to work for pennies on the dollar (Conlin, 2004: 62).

Globalization is not the only factor offered to explain challenges to such workers. The article also discusses the decline in power of unions, and a minimum wage that has declined relative to inflation. What is significant about each of these factors, however, is that they may explain disenchantment among citizens that is rooted most fundamentally in economic inequalities and uncertainty, similar to the three periods of realignment discussed in this paper.

Given that the Great Depression was a catalyst for reform, one might expect that the Great Recession of 2008 could also have triggered a realignment. The election of President Obama might also have suggested that possibility. Voices opposed to reform, however, challenged the new president, particularly with the "Tea Party" movement, the origins of which are traced to comments by CNBC reporter, Rick Santelli, on February 19, 2009, less than a month after Obama's Inauguration (Ray, 2018: Internet). While reforms such as health care, banking regulation and a "Stimulus Package" were enacted, these reforms did not approximate those of the previous periods examined in this paper, and additional reform efforts were thwarted when Republicans regained majority status in the House of Representatives following the 2010 election.

Donald Trump's Electoral College victory in 2016 promised change, though not in the direction suggested by previous realignments. The one major piece of legislation during President Trump's first year in office provided for substantial tax reduction for corporations. In addition,

President Trump used executive orders to reduce regulation of industry. By indicating that he would not support the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement and setting in motion U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, as well as initiating tariffs on steel and aluminum, President Trump has indicated that he opposes power moving up the ladder in the direction of the three previous realignments.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to predict what impact Trump's initiatives will have on economic challenges facing Americans today. It is appropriate, however, to draw on history to inform our understanding of sources of problems previously, and potential solutions. In terms of problems, in each of the three periods discussed in this paper as realigning, problems were related to insufficient government involvement with the economy. This was certainly the case with the federal government's failure to recognize slaves as human beings, and to protect those human beings from the indignity of slavery. This was certainly the case in the federal government's failure to protect industrial workers during the late 19th century, and to allow trusts, and to allow states to prohibit women from voting. History also suggests that lack of regulation of the stock market and banks contributed to the Great Depression. In each case, policy erred on the side of too little government, which contributed to economic crises, and in several cases, injustice.

What clues, then, can history suggest about the future? To begin, the combination of economic transformation caused by globalization and polarization suggest that significant change is on the horizon. While the 2016 election ushered in a period of less government oversight of the economy, history suggests that this path will not mitigate inequalities or produce economic stability. While logic would suggest that one can err on the side of too much government regulation or too little, history suggests that the United States usually errs on the side of too little regulation.

What clues, then, can history suggest about solutions? It might suggest that proposals few people currently envision will come to the fore. After all, Franklin Roosevelt said little about reforms

that would become the New Deal during his election campaign in 1932 (Mayhew, 2002: 96-97). Few were familiar with Keynesian economics until after Roosevelt's inauguration in March of 1933.

While no one can predict the future with certainty, the past does offer clues. With the end of slavery, the Progressive Era, and the New Deal, relative power shifted from states to the national level, and limits or sanctions were placed on producers (meaning slave owners or manufacturers). Given that economic globalization represents a challenge to workers in the United States, the next step in moving power up the ladder could be international cooperation directed to regulating industry. While the previously cited quote from *Business Week* noted that economic globalization placed downward pressure on wages and benefits for workers, some years before that article appeared *Business Week* noted that economic globalization created problems for nation-states to be sovereign in shaping policy:

At the same time that most governments want to regulate world corporations better, they find themselves in a furious effort to capture more of the estimated \$150 billion a year they invest across national borders. World companies choose countries with the most hospitable atmosphere and the best-educated work forces. Since they can't command U.S. companies to invest, U.S. states must compete with tax incentives, education funding, and infrastructure improvements.

In this sense, there has been a reversal of roles between government and the corporation. Governments act as if they are fully sovereign within their own borders on economic policy, but stateless corporations have increasingly learned to shape national climates by offering technology, jobs, and capital. I wouldn't say the nation-state is dead, says Unisys Chairman Blumenthal. But the sovereignty has been greatly circumscribed . . . even for a country as large as the U.S. (Holstein, 1990: 105).

Ironically, the only way to regain sufficient sovereignty to enable national governments to regulate corporations might be to cede some national sovereignty to international governance that could, for example, impose a global, minimum corporate tax, so that corporations could not exact tax concessions from governments. Similarly, global worker safety standards and environmental regulations could be imposed on multinational corporations so that they could not exact concessions

from governments with respect to such policy.

In the wake of the U.K. Brexit vote and Trump's election in 2016 and his anti-internationalist policies and rhetoric, and governments in countries such as Poland that exhibit xenophobic and authoritarian tendencies, or most recently, the rise of far-right parties in Italy, such suggestions may appear to be fantasy. Anyone observing the world today would reasonably conclude that such globalist proposals are in retreat.

And yet the story of both the United States and the world suggests that such notions cannot be rejected as naive. After all, a rallying cry for the birth of the United States was "United we stand; divided we fall."⁵ Consistent with that slogan, Small Pox, one of mankind's deadliest diseases, was eradicated after a Soviet proposed global cooperation in 1959. Global cooperation with the Montreal Protocol dramatically reduced use of chemicals that caused depletion of the ozone layer in the atmosphere, and today that layer is being repaired. The Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 may not have been perfect, but they reduced the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere and sea, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The European Union, which may be challenged today, has played a major role in creating peace among its members in Europe, following two of the deadliest wars on that continent during the first half of the 20th century.

This is not to suggest that a globalist path is inevitable or that it will come without struggle. Indeed, the path to ending slavery was long and required the bloodiest war in U.S. history. Progressive Era reforms followed deadly labor strife, the suffering of many in factories, and the efforts and sacrifices of the Suffragettes. The New Deal came only in the wake of the worst economic depression in U.S. history. It is also important to remember that the United States is not immune from choosing an authoritarian path, as was the case with the McCarthy Era of the 1950s, the Red Scare following

⁵ According to Encyclopedia.com, the phrase "United we stand; Liberty and Justice for all" was published on 18 July 1768, in the *Boston Gazette* (Dilliard, 2003: Internet).

World War One, and most tragically, the genocide of Native Americans and slavery.

While these sober lessons are critical to remember, the periods of polarization noted in this paper all, eventually, led to results that favored solutions in which inequalities were reduced and a general consensus supporting those policies was achieved. While we cannot know the exact path to achieve such goals, history suggests that such solutions have often been found during periods of polarization, and that achieving such solutions will require the efforts and sacrifice of many.

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