

Chapter 14

Andrew Jackson and the Growth of American Democracy

How well did President Andrew Jackson promote democracy?

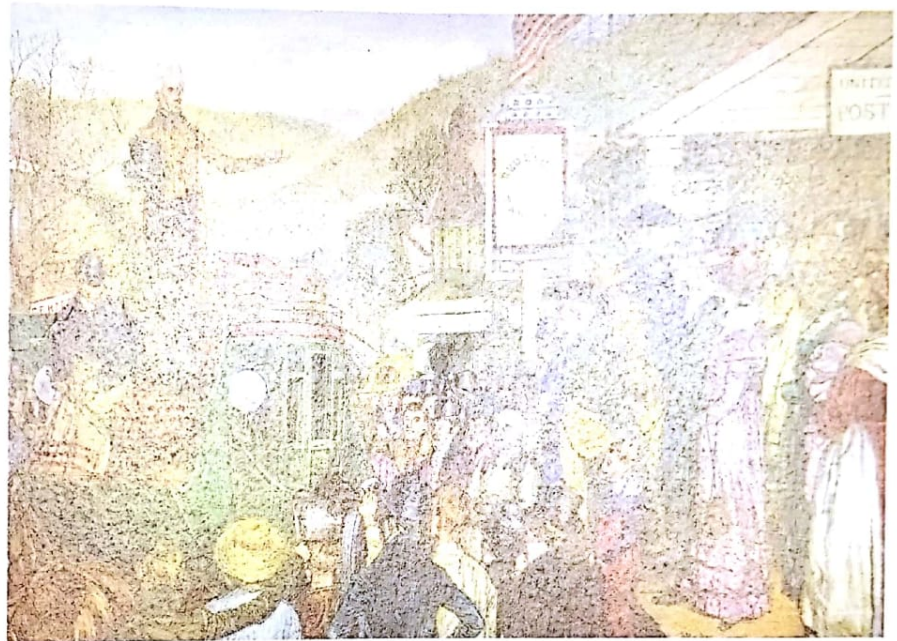
14.1 Introduction

The presidential campaign of 1828 was one of the dirtiest in U.S. history. The two candidates were John Quincy Adams, running for re-election, and Andrew Jackson, the popular hero of the War of 1812's Battle of New Orleans.

During the campaign, both sides hurled accusations at each other, a practice called mudslinging. Adams, for example, was called a "Sabbath-breaker" for traveling on Sunday. He was accused of using public money to purchase "gambling furniture" for the White House. In reality, he had used his own money to buy a billiard table.

The president's supporters lashed back. They called Jackson a crude and **ignorant** man who was unfit to be president. They also brought up old scandals about his wife. Jackson was called "Old Hickory" by his troops because he was as tough as "the hardest wood in all creation." But when he read such lies, he broke down and cried.

When the votes were counted, Jackson was the clear winner. But his supporters came from among the general population, not the rich and upper class. In this chapter, you will discover how his presidency was viewed by different groups of people. You will also learn how Jackson's government affected the growth of democracy in the nation.



Jackson, at the upper left, greets his supporters after winning the presidency in the election of 1828.

Men line up to vote in the presidential election of 1828.

Andrew Jackson was born on the South Carolina frontier. In the early 1800s, he moved to Tennessee and bought a plantation called the Hermitage. His first home there was a log cabin similar to this one.



14.2 From the Frontier to the White House

Andrew Jackson was born in 1767, on the South Carolina frontier. His father died before he was born, leaving the family in poverty. Young Jackson loved sports more than schoolwork. He also had a hot temper. A friend recalled that he would pick a fight at the drop of a hat, and “he’d drop the hat himself.”

The American Revolution ended Jackson’s childhood. When he was just 13, Jackson joined the local militia and was captured by the British. One day, a British officer ordered Jackson to polish his boots. “Sir,” he replied boldly, “I am a prisoner of war, and claim [demand] to be treated as such.” The outraged officer lashed out with his sword, slicing the boy’s head and hand. Jackson carried these scars for the rest of his life.

Frontier Lawyer After the war, Jackson decided to become a lawyer. He went to work in a law office in North Carolina. He quickly became known as “the most roaring, rollicking, game-cocking, horse-racing, card-playing, mischievous fellow” in town.

In 1788, Jackson headed west to Nashville, Tennessee, to practice law. At that time, Nashville was a tiny frontier settlement of rough cabins and tents. But the town grew quickly, and Jackson’s practice grew with it. He soon earned enough money to buy land and slaves and set himself up as a gentleman farmer.

Despite his success, Jackson never outgrew his hot temper. A slave trader named Charles Dickinson found this out when he called Jackson “a worthless scoundrel.” Enraged, Jackson challenged Dickinson to a duel with pistols. At that time, duels were accepted as a way of settling **disputes** between gentlemen. Jackson killed Dickinson with a single shot, even though Dickinson shot first and wounded him.

The People's Choice Jackson entered politics in Tennessee, serving in both the House and Senate. But he did not become widely known until the Battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812. His defense of the city made "Old Hickory" a national hero.

In 1824, Jackson ran for president against three other candidates: Henry Clay, William Crawford, and John Quincy Adams. Jackson won the most popular votes as well as the most electoral votes. But he did not have enough electoral votes for a majority. When no candidate has an electoral majority, the House of Representatives chooses a president from among the three leading candidates.

Clay, who had come in fourth, urged his supporters in the House to vote for Adams. That support gave Adams enough votes to become president. Adams then chose Clay to be his secretary of state.

It made sense for Adams to bring Clay into his cabinet, because the two men shared many of the same goals. Jackson's supporters, however, accused Adams and Clay of making a "corrupt bargain" to rob their hero of his rightful election. They promised revenge in 1828.

Jackson's supporters used the time between elections to build a new political organization that came to be called the Democratic Party, the name it still uses today. This new party, they promised, would represent ordinary farmers, workers, and the poor, not the rich and upper class who controlled the Republican Party.

In the election of 1828, Jackson's supporters worked hard to reach the nation's voters. Besides hurling insults at Adams, they organized parades, picnics, and rallies. At these events, supporters sang "The Hunters of Kentucky"—the nation's first campaign song—and cheered for Old Hickory. They wore Jackson badges, carried hickory sticks, and chanted catchy campaign slogans like "Adams can write, but Jackson can fight."

The result was a great victory for Jackson. But it was also a victory for the idea that the common people should control their government. This idea eventually became known as **Jacksonian Democracy**.

This campaign poster shows the theme of Jackson's presidential campaign. His supporters said that if Jackson were elected, the government would finally be in the hands of ordinary people, not just the rich and upper class.

Jacksonian Democracy the idea that the common people should control the government

Jackson Forever!

The Hero of Two Wars and of Orleans!

The Man of the People!

HE WHO COULD NOT BARTER NOR BARGAIN FOR THE

PRESIDENCY!

Who, although "*A Military Chieftain*," valued the purity of Elections and of the Electors, **MORE** than the Office of **PRESIDENT** itself! Although the greatest in the gift of his countrymen, and the highest in point of dignity of any in the world,

BECAUSE

It should be derived from the

PEOPLE!

No Gag Laws! No Black Cockades! No Reign of Terror! No Standing Army or Navy Officers, when under the pay of Government, to browbeat, or

KNOCK DOWN

Old Revolutionary Characters, or our Representatives while in the discharge of their duty. To the Polls then, and vote for those who will support

OLD HICKORY

AND THE ELECTORAL LAW.

Collection of the New-York Historical Society, Negative #8838.

14.3 The Inauguration of Andrew Jackson

On March 4, 1829, more than 10,000 people, who came from every state, crowded into Washington, D.C., to witness Andrew Jackson's inauguration. The visitors overwhelmed local hotels, sleeping five to a bed. "I never saw such a crowd here before," observed Senator Daniel Webster. "Persons have come five hundred miles to see General Jackson, and they really seem to think that the country is rescued from some dreadful disaster!"

Many of the people flocking into the capital were first-time voters. Until the 1820s, the right to vote had been limited to the rich and upper class. Until then, only white men with property were thought to have the education and experience to vote wisely.

The new states forming west of the Appalachians challenged this argument. Along the frontier, all men—rich or poor, educated or not—shared the same opportunities and dangers. They believed they should also share the same rights, including the right to vote.

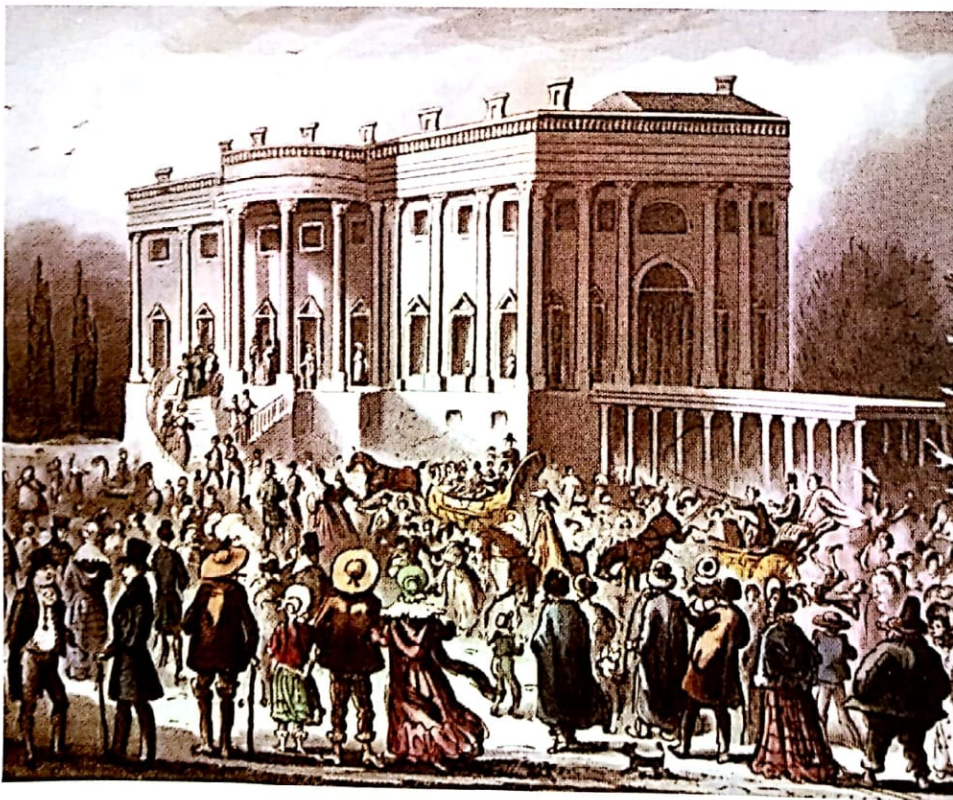
With the western states leading the way, voting laws were changed to give the "common man" the right to vote. This expansion of democracy did not yet include African Americans, American Indians, or women. Still, over one million Americans voted in 1828, more than three times the number who voted in 1824.

Many of these new voters did believe they had rescued the country from disaster. In their view, the national government had been taken over by corrupt "monied interests"—that is, the rich. Jackson had promised to throw the rich out and return the government to "the people." His election reflected a shift in power to the West and to the

farmers, shopkeepers, and small-business owners who supported him.

After Jackson was sworn in as president, a huge crowd followed him to the White House. As the crowd surged in, the celebration turned into a near riot. "Ladies fainted, men were seen with bloody noses, and such a scene of confusion took place as is impossible to describe," wrote an eyewitness, Margaret Bayard Smith. Jackson was nearly "pressed to death" before escaping out a back door. "But it was the People's day, and the People's President," Smith concluded. "And the people would rule."

People of every color, age, and class mobbed the White House to attend a public reception after Andrew Jackson took the oath of office. One observer claimed that the scene was like the invasion of barbarians into Rome.





In this political cartoon, titled "Office Hunters for the Year 1834," Andrew Jackson is a puppet master. He is pulling strings attached to people who want to be appointed to public offices. What is the cartoonist's opinion of Jackson?

14.4 Jackson's Approach to Governing

Andrew Jackson approached governing much as he had leading an army. He listened to others, but then did what he thought was right.

The Kitchen Cabinet Jackson did not rely only on his cabinet for advice. He made most of his decisions with the help of trusted friends and political supporters. Because these advisers were said to meet with him in the White House kitchen, they were called the "kitchen cabinet."

The rich men who had been used to influencing the government viewed the "kitchen cabinet" with deep suspicion. In their eyes, the men around the president were not the proper sort to be running the country. One congressman accused Amos Kendall, Jackson's closest adviser, of being "the President's . . . lying machine." Jackson ignored such charges and continued to turn to men he trusted for advice.

The Spoils System Jackson's critics were even more upset by his decision to replace many Republican officeholders with loyal Democrats. Most of these **civil servants** viewed their posts as lifetime jobs. Jackson disagreed. Rotating people in office was more democratic than lifetime service, he said, because it gave more people a chance to serve their government. Jackson believed that after a few years in office, civil servants should go back to making a living as other people do.

Jackson's opponents called the practice of rewarding political supporters with government jobs the **spoils system**. This term came from the saying "to the victor belong the spoils [prizes] of war."

Jackson's opponents also exaggerated the number of Republicans removed from office. Only about 10 percent of civil servants were replaced—and many deserved to be. One official had stolen \$10,000 from the Treasury. When he begged Jackson to let him stay, the president said, "I would turn out my own father under the same circumstances."

civil servant an employee of the government

spoils system the practice of rewarding political supporters with government jobs

tariff a tax imposed by the government on goods imported from another country

secede to withdraw from an organization or alliance

14.5 The Nullification Crisis

Andrew Jackson's approach to governing met its test in an issue that threatened to break up the United States. In 1828, Congress passed a law raising **tariffs**, or taxes on imported goods such as cloth and glass. The idea was to encourage the growth of manufacturing in the United States. Higher tariffs meant higher prices for imported factory goods. American manufacturers could then outsell their foreign competitors.

Northern states, humming with new factories, favored the new tariff law. But southerners opposed tariffs for several reasons. Tariffs raised the prices they paid for factory goods. High tariffs also discouraged trade among nations, and planters in the South worried that tariffs would hurt cotton sales to other countries. In addition, many southerners believed that a law favoring one region—in this case, the North—was unconstitutional. Based on this belief, John C. Calhoun, Jackson's vice president, called on southern states to declare the tariff "null and void," or illegal and not to be honored.

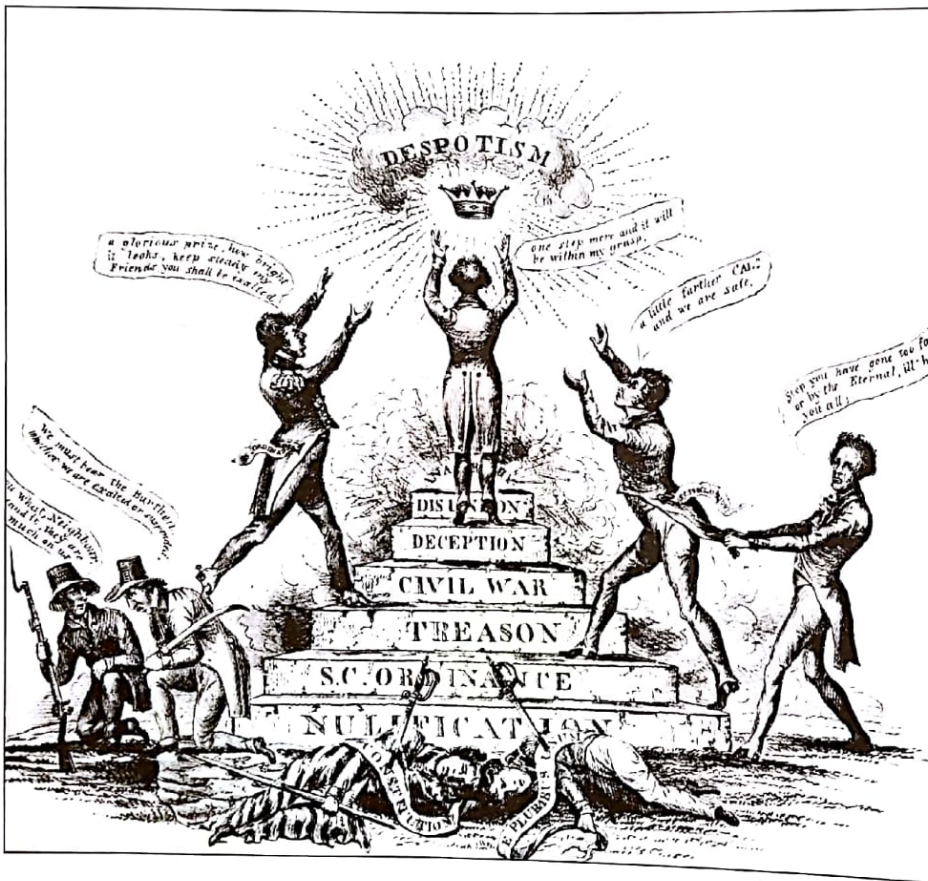
Jackson understood southerners' concerns. In 1832, he signed a new law that lowered tariffs—but not enough to satisfy the most extreme supporters of states' rights in South Carolina. Led by Calhoun, they proclaimed South Carolina's right to nullify, or reject, both the 1828 and 1832 tariff laws. Such an action was called nullification.

South Carolina took the idea of states' rights even further. The state threatened to **secede** if the national government tried to enforce the tariff laws.

Even though he was from South Carolina, Jackson was outraged. "If one drop of blood be shed there in defiance of the laws of the United States," he raged, "I will hang the first man of them I can get my hands on

to the first tree I can find." He called on Congress to pass the Force Bill, which would allow him to use the federal army to collect tariffs if needed. At the same time, Congress passed a compromise bill that lowered tariffs still further.

Faced with such firm opposition, South Carolina backed down and the nullification crisis ended. However, the tensions between the North and the South would increase in the years ahead.



In this cartoon, John C. Calhoun, who believed states have the right to nullify federal laws, is reaching toward a crown. The crown symbolizes his desire for power. Andrew Jackson is pulling on the coat of a Calhoun supporter. He wants to prevent Calhoun from trampling on the Constitution and destroying the Union.