

The Election of 1828 and the Rise of Andrew Jackson

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

The “corrupt bargain” that brought John Quincy Adams to the presidency following the 1824 election also helped push Adams out of office four years later, but not before another sectional crisis emerged. This crisis centered on economic issues, most notably the tariff, or taxes, that the government placed on imports.

In this tutorial we’ll examine how the controversy that surrounded the tariff, combined with the democratic impulses that expressed frustration toward the “corrupt bargain,” helped catapult Andrew Jackson to the presidency in 1828 as the head of a new political party: the Democrats. Although he ran as the head of a new, national democratic majority, the tariff issue quickly revealed the persistence of sectional tensions.

Our discussion will break down like this:

1. Tariffs and the American System

Tariffs have been around since the beginning of the American republic. Tariffs are a tax on imported manufactured or agricultural products, and often their purpose is to stimulate domestic manufacturing and production. By taxing imported goods, domestic manufacturers and producers are less likely to face international competition for their products, and American consumers are more likely to purchase cheaper domestic products than expensive imports.

Tariffs were a key part of the **American System**, championed by President John Quincy Adams and Secretary of State Henry Clay.



TERM TO KNOW

American System

An early 19th century program of government-sponsored economic development.

The program consisted of three major initiatives:

- Perpetuation of a national bank, or Bank of the United States, which issued paper money, collected taxes, and paid off the national debt.

- The construction of canals, roads, and other forms of infrastructure, also known as “internal improvements,” to foster national development.
- A tariff on imported manufactured goods to promote the development of American industry.

Adams, in particular, envisioned that the federal government would play a key role in all three initiatives behind the American System. Indeed, he was convinced that the federal government had to assume such responsibilities if the United States was to become respectable to the rest of the world.

John Quincy Adams, to Congress, 1825

“The spirit of improvement is abroad upon the earth,” Adams told Congress in 1825 (Foner, 2014). He continued to express his beliefs on the subject of liberty:

“While dwelling with pleasing satisfaction upon the superior excellence of our political institutions, let us not be unmindful that liberty is power, that the nation blessed with the largest portion of liberty must in proportion to its numbers be the most powerful nation upon earth, and that the tenure of power by man is, in the moral purposes of his Creator, upon condition that it shall be exercised to ends of beneficence, to improve the condition of himself and his fellow men.”



THINK ABOUT IT

What do you think Adams meant by his statement “liberty is power?”

The tariff was central to Adams’s plans and, in 1828, Congress enacted a significant increase in the tariff on imported manufactured goods, one that amounted to 50 percent of their value. But the tariff increase—combined with Adams’s other proposals that envisioned a greater role for the federal government in national development—would prompt negative reactions from those who believed that the tariff benefited one section, namely northern manufacturing, at the expense of southern, cash-crop agriculture, which depended upon imported goods.



DID YOU KNOW

Southern opponents to the 1828 tariff, led by **John C. Calhoun** of South Carolina (who also happened to be Adams’s vice-president), referred to it as the “Tariff of Abominations.”



PEOPLE TO KNOW

John C. Calhoun

American statesman from South Carolina who championed states’ rights and nullification in the face of growing sectional tensions.

2. The Election of 1828 and the Rise of Andrew Jackson

The American System, specifically the 1828 tariff, stirred southern and western sentiment against a perceived bias toward northern manufacturers by the federal government. This perception, combined with the “corrupt bargain” of 1824, highlighted the cronyism of Washington politics and argued that the Adams administration’s

economic proposals would benefit only a small, privileged class at the expense of ordinary citizens.

Andrew Jackson was the perfect political figure to take advantage of this sentiment and frustration. He had little formal education, but he appeared to be the quintessential self-made man. After relatively humble beginnings on the South Carolina frontier, by the first decade of the 19th century, he had made his fortune on the Tennessee frontier. He then rose to national prominence during the War of 1812—specifically for defeating the British at the Battle of New Orleans. By the 1820s, he was among the richest men in Tennessee. His plantation, the Hermitage (located outside of Nashville), was worked by well over 100 enslaved people.

Throughout the 1828 election campaign, Jackson rode a wave of popular support that was emblematic of the advent of universal suffrage among White males. At the local level, Jackson’s supporters worked to bring in as many new voters as possible. From Nashville, Tennessee, the Jackson campaign organized supporters around the nation through editorials in partisan newspapers and other publications. Pro-Jackson rallies, parades, and other rituals throughout the nation further broadcast the message that Jackson stood for the common man against a political elite that backed John Quincy Adams, who was running for re-election. Southern opposition to the 1828 tariff also contributed to Jackson’s campaign.



DID YOU KNOW

“Vote for Andrew Jackson who can fight, not John Quincy Adams who can write,” was one popular campaign slogan that highlighted Jackson’s frontier background and service during the War of 1812.



THINK ABOUT IT

Think about the most recent presidential elections of the 21st century. Do you see any parallels between them and the election of 1828? If so, why did these parallels occur?

That voters in every state (with the exception of South Carolina) were able to select their presidential electors instead of the state legislatures by 1828, combined with the rigorous campaign, ensured Jackson a significant victory over Adams in the 1828 election. He captured 56 percent of the popular vote and 68 percent of the votes in the Electoral College. In addition, he carried the West and the South as well as Pennsylvania. Meanwhile, northeastern states voted overwhelmingly for Adams.

“If it be conceded, as it must be by everyone who is the least conversant with our institutions, that the sovereign powers delegated are divided between the General [Federal] and State Governments, and that the latter hold their portion by the same tenure as the former, it would seem impossible to deny to the States the right of deciding on the infractions of their powers, and the proper remedy to be applied for their correction. The right of judging, in such cases, is an essential attribute of sovereignty, of which the States cannot be divested without losing their sovereignty itself, and being reduced to a subordinate corporate condition. In fact, to divide power, and to give to one of the parties the exclusive right of judging of the portion allotted to each, is, in reality, not to divide it at all; and to reserve such exclusive right to the General Government (it matters not by what department) to be exercised, is to convert it, in fact, into a great consolidated government, with unlimited powers, and to divest the States, in reality, of all their rights. It is impossible to understand the force of terms, and to deny so plain a conclusion.”



THINK ABOUT IT

1. What does Calhoun say about the sovereignty of the states and how does this idea inform his opposition to the 1828 tariff?
2. In what ways is Calhoun’s report similar to the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798, which were in response to the Alien and Sedition Acts?



BRAINSTORM

How do you think Calhoun would have responded to John Quincy Adams’s remark that “liberty is power?”

Calhoun’s “report” highlights one of the greatest contradictions associated with the rise of democracy in the United States during the first half of the 19th century, namely the idea held by southern enslavers that a democratic majority could harm their section’s interests. By insisting upon “sovereign powers” between the federal and state governments, Calhoun’s argument opened the door for **nullification**.



TERM TO KNOW

Nullification

The theory that a state could nullify—or declare a federal law null and void — if it threatened the interests or sovereignty of that state.

Calhoun’s resentment toward the tariff and his advocacy of nullification were tied directly to the South’s reliance on cash-crop agriculture, which was becoming increasingly centered on cotton cultivation, and racial slavery. Because the southern economy relied on agriculture, it depended upon the importing of manufactured goods. In turn, a higher tariff on imported goods, although beneficial to northern manufacturers, was detrimental to the South because it raised the prices on goods that the region depended upon. Thus, Calhoun’s theory of nullification—or the voiding of any unwelcome federal law—provided southern enslavers, who were a minority in the United States, with an argument for resisting the national government if it acted contrary to their interests.

The controversy over the tariff was also tied to economics, specifically the price of cotton. By 1831, the price of cotton dropped to eight cents per pound (over a decade earlier, the price for cotton was as high as 31 cents per pound). Although the overall increase in cotton production in the South (combined with decreased demand for cotton by Great Britain) was the primary reason behind this decline in prices, many southern planters blamed their economic struggles on the tariff for raising the prices they had to pay for imported

goods while their own income shrank.

However, Andrew Jackson dismissed Calhoun's argument, and did not make the repeal of the tariff a priority for his administration. Similar to his opponent in the 1828 election, John Quincy Adams, Jackson noted that the Constitution gave Congress the ability to "lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts, and excises" (Foner, 2014). In addition to the constitutional argument, Jackson considered nullification a direct threat to the unity of the American republic.

➔ **EXAMPLE** The divide between Jackson and Calhoun was apparent at a White House dinner in 1830. While staring at Calhoun, Jackson stood and gave a toast: "Our Federal Union—it must be preserved." Calhoun replied immediately, "The Union—next to our liberty most dear."

4. The Nullification Crisis

In response to criticism from Calhoun and South Carolina, Jackson advocated only for a reduction in tariff rates. In 1832, Congress lowered the tariff on imported goods, a move designed to calm southerners. It did not have the desired effect, however.

Calhoun and other advocates of nullification still claimed their right to override federal law and, in November 1832, South Carolina passed the Ordinance of Nullification, which declared the 1828 and 1832 tariffs null and void within its boundaries. The governor of South Carolina even called for a force of 10,000 volunteers to defend the state against any federal action.

On the issue of nullification, South Carolina stood alone for the time being. In fact, several southern states passed resolutions that condemned South Carolina's Ordinance of Nullification.

Jackson responded by insisting upon the power of the federal government. In December 1832, his administration issued a Nullification Proclamation, which declared that no state had the power to void a federal law. In early 1833, Congress passed a Force Bill, which authorized the president to use the federal army and navy to ensure compliance with federal law.

The crisis was averted with a passage of a compromise tariff in 1833, which reduced the duty on imported goods considerably. South Carolina then rescinded its ordinance of nullification.



DID YOU KNOW

In a symbolic act of defiance, the South Carolina legislature nullified the Force Bill shortly after it rescinded its ordinance of nullification regarding the tariff.



SUMMARY

The controversies that surrounded the tariff—along with the emergence of Andrew Jackson as the head of a new political coalition, highlighted the growing sectional tensions within American democracy. The implementation of a tariff to encourage American industrial growth transformed into a national political debate between the nation's economic interests and the "common man," or southern and western voters who flocked to Jackson's presidential campaign. The Nullification Crisis, meanwhile, illustrated how an aggrieved minority of elite, wealthy slaveowners could take a stand against the will of a democratic majority, and it highlighted an emerging sectional divide between

South and North over slavery. Such tensions would color the next three decades of politics in the United States.

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REFERENCES

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TERMS TO KNOW

American System

An early 19th century program of government-sponsored economic development.

Nullification

The theory that a state could nullify, or declare a federal law null and void, if it threatened the interests or sovereignty of that state.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

John C. Calhoun

American statesman from South Carolina who championed states' rights and nullification in the face of growing sectional tensions.



DATES TO KNOW

1824

John Quincy Adams is elected president; Andrew Jackson decries a "Corrupt Bargain."

1828

Congress enacts the "Tariff of Abominations"; John C. Calhoun pens the "South Carolina Exposition and Protest"; Andrew Jackson is elected president.

1832

Congress lowers tariff rates; South Carolina passes the Ordinance of Nullification; Andrew Jackson responds with the Nullification Proclamation.

1833

The Compromise Tariff is passed; the Nullification Crisis ends.