

AREAL VARIATION IN THE 1976 PRESIDENTIAL VOTE: A CASE STUDY OF AKRON¹

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Abstract. A comprehensive, city-wide analysis, based on electoral precincts, was done for the City of Akron concerning the Presidential election of 1976. By superimposing a voting pattern map showing precinct votes, on a census data map showing socio-economic data by census tracts, certain observations were made concerning the Presidential election in Akron. Black voters and lower income groups overwhelmingly supported Carter, higher income groups and college educated voters tended notably to support Ford, and middle income groups supplied the "swing" votes. The election of 1976 could be called both a maintaining and a deviating type of election in which the majority party, the Democrats, elected a President largely because numerous life-long Democrats were bolstered by overwhelming percentages of black voters who voted for their party. There are also indications of white voter deviation, particularly among middle and upper income groups.

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There have been several limited efforts to analyze voting behavior with regard to local elections in such cities as Los Angeles, (McPhail 1971), Seattle, (Hetrick and Calkins 1972), and Christchurch, (Johnston 1974). McPhail divided Los Angeles into numerous statistical divisions much larger than precincts and collapsed the election results and socio-economic data into those units to apply factor analysis. Hetrick and Calkins combined precincts into precinct-groups to tally with census statistical areas in Seattle. Their precinct groups were aggregated to form 88 analysis zones, and voting patterns were then correlated with socio-economic status. Johnston studied the information flow effect and the local flow effect insofar as they related to a city election in Christchurch. He then applied "R" and "Q" mode analyses and established a correlation of polling booth location with local effect. We have analyzed on a precinct basis a national Presidential election's spatial pattern as it related to a mid-sized, mid-American city, Akron, Ohio (fig. 1).

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The 1976 Presidential election should be viewed from at least two perspectives:

1. It might be considered a "typical" kind of election, similar to those of 1968, 1960, 1956, and 1948, in that it did not demonstrate the extraordinary characteristics of either the Johnson landslide of 1964 or the McGovern debacle of 1971.
2. the 1976 election might be considered "atypical" because there is evidence that the winning candidate failed to attract as much support from white, middle-class voters as appears to have been the case with other so-called "typical" elections.

To speak of the 1976 election as more or less representative of the American electoral scene depends upon how the results are interpreted. An analysis of election results as they relate to city space in Akron, Ohio, should help us to decide which of these viewpoints is generally correct.

Angus Cambell has classified elections as "maintaining, deviating, and realigning," (Campbell 1967). The deviating election is one in which a defeat of the majority party occurs, although voters'

GENERALIZED LAND USE - 1975

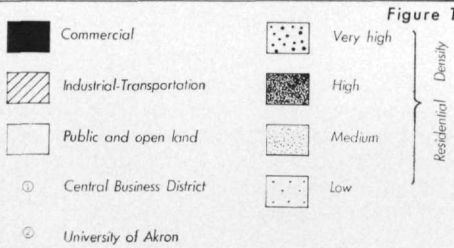
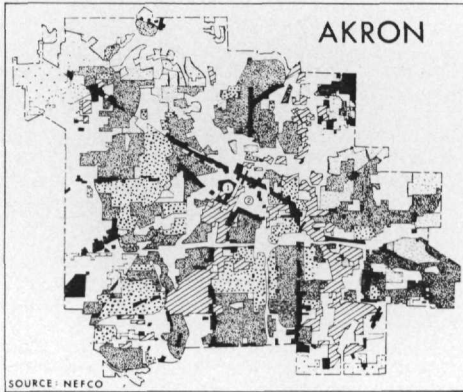


FIGURE 1. Generalized land use map of Akron.

CARTER VOTERS - 1976

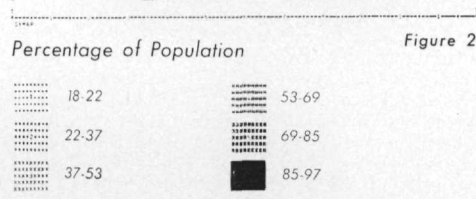
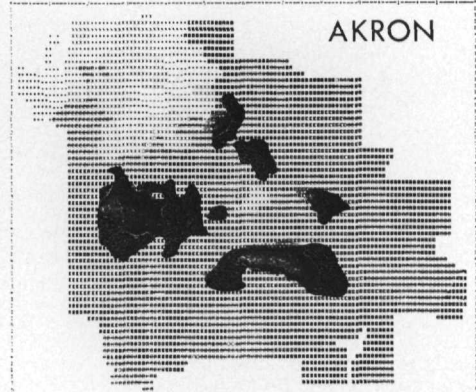


FIGURE 2. Carter votes in the city of Akron: Presidential Election 1976.

party loyalties are not permanently disturbed. The realigning election is one that results in major, permanent changes of party loyalty and sometimes occurs in instances of severe or unusual national crisis (the "Depression" had a profound effect on the election of 1932). The "maintaining election" is one in which the majority party is elected, and voters generally express their lifelong, partisan loyalties. For the most part, the 1976 election may be viewed as both a typical and maintaining one in that the majority party was returned to the Presidency, and many voters voted according to their regular party loyalties. On the other hand, the 1976 election indicated a certain amount of "deviation" from regular Democratic Party loyalties on the part of large numbers of white voters. Our study demonstrated that at least two of the views discussed above might be considered to be partially valid assessments of the 1976 Presidential election.

Three factors have been taken into consideration in order to assess President

Carter's votes in Akron---distribution of black population; distribution of income groups; and distribution of college graduates. A National Broadcasting Co. election-day street poll, based on 16,000 interviews of voters across the nation, indicated that Carter was "to some degree successful in rebuilding the New Deal democratic coalition." (National Broadcasting Co. 1976). Carter attracted some 85% of regular, Democratic voters, about two-thirds of labor union members, a high proportion of lower income voters, and relatively large numbers of the less educated. Moreover, Carter did very well in urban areas an in the South where minority group voters may have given him the election. An ABC/Harris poll analysis of some 300 key precincts in the country demonstrated that Carter drew heavily from minority group voters (specifically, 84% of black voters and 72% of Latino voters). Thus, "Jimmy Carter won his majority . . . by the overwhelming support given him by black Americans" (Hess 1976). In fact, Ford

actually won a majority of white voters nationwide, even though Carter collected some 61% of big city votes. By considering the factors of race, income, and education, our paper will compare the above poll results with the findings in Akron.

CARTOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY

A logical and useful way to organize data is to aggregate subunits into larger units and these, in turn, into still larger units (A's to form B's to form C's, and so on). This concept assures that when one has accounted for a given unit, one has also automatically accounted for all sub-units which are component parts of it, in that no area is left out and no unit is counted more than once). Such a system assures that when an individual refers to a given area, such as tract X in county Y, others can independently identify the area specified. In this study of voting patterns such competing hierarchies did not exist in data organization.

The basic areal data for voting in the city of Akron were election districts, or 361 precincts. These precincts were aggregated into 10 wards. Socio-economic data from the Census were available at the block-groups and census tract level (block groups are defined as all city blocks numbered in a given hundred's series within a census tract). There was very little areal correlation between the wards and the census tracts. There was a variety of tracts and partial tracts included within the ward boundaries, but in only a few cases did entire tracts fall within wards. The mapping poten-

tial did not become any better for matching precincts and block groups. Another problem involving accuracy of counts was that block group totals were often incorrect or had suppressed information in order to avoid disclosure. All blocks in a given group series were not always contiguous.

The authors decided that the best accounting for geographic area would be to use computer mapping of the socio-economic data by census tracts, and the voting information by individual precincts using the same scale. Census data was mapped using a SYMAP A-Conformalines package for the City of Akron (Dougenik and Sheehan 1976). The voting pattern map was produced by using the SYMAP PROXIMAL package which displays data by assigning to every location in the City of Akron the value associated with the data point (centroid of each precinct) to that location. Products of this activity was superimposed, and the areal associations were noted.

RESULTS

The three factors of race, income, and education were the only factors that could be correlated with voting statistics with any degree of accuracy. Such factors as religion, ethnic background, party loyalty, etc., were of considerable interest, but unfortunately were not available for purposes of this study. It should also be stressed that by examining these three dominant factors, we saw very striking correlations in our mapping of electoral

BLACK POPULATION - 1970

INCOMES BELOW \$6000 -1970

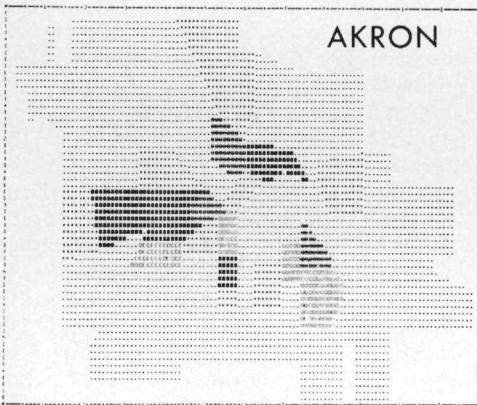


Figure 3

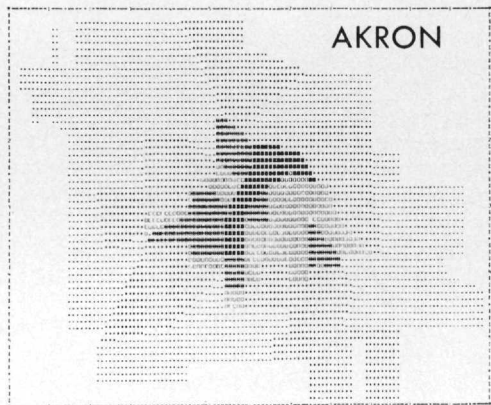


Figure 4

Percentage of Population

Percentage of Population

0-19	56.74
19-37	74.93
37-56	74.93

8-19	41.52
19-30	52.63
30-41	52.63

FIGURE 3. Distribution of Black population in Akron, 1970.

FIGURE 4. Distribution of Lower income groups in Akron, 1970 (\$6,000 and less).

precincts and census tracts. Generally speaking, the wealthier, better educated, white voter voted for President Ford, while the poorer, less educated, black voter cast his ballot for Governor Carter (figures 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8). The other figures show the correlations between middle-range income levels and voting behavior; although the correlations are not quite as distinctive, they are still evident (figures 5 and 6).

vote Democratic since the 1930's (Litchfield 1941), it should come as no surprise that areas with black majorities in Akron voted heavily for Carter. The most striking areal coincidence occurred in the west-central part of the city where black voters gave Carter over 70% of the area's votes (fig. 3). The areas that had between 25% and 50% black population were also generally Carter majority areas, although these were lower income areas

INCOMES \$6,000 - \$11,999 - 1970

INCOMES \$12,000 - \$24,999 - 1970

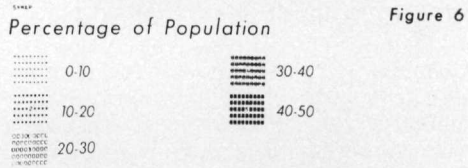
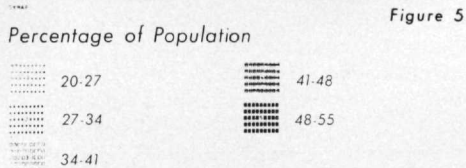
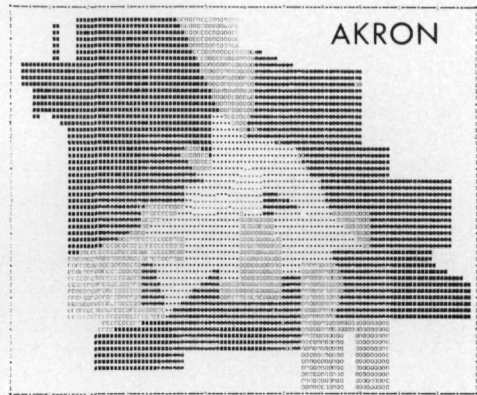
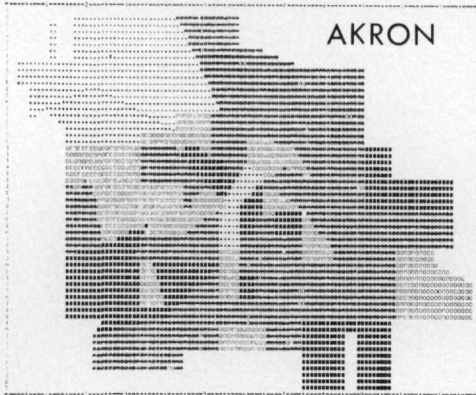


FIGURE 5. Distribution of Lower-Middle income groups in Akron, 1970 (\$6,000-\$11,000).

FIGURE 6. Distribution of Upper-Middle income groups in Akron, 1970 (\$11,000-\$25,000).

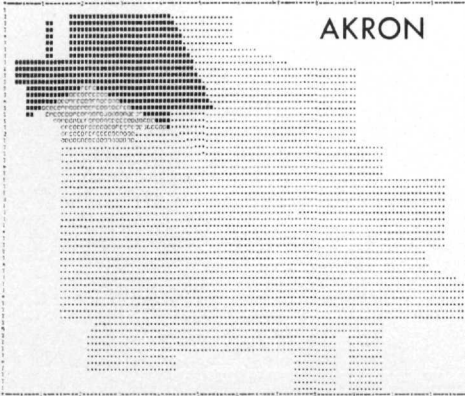
Carter votes were clearly concentrated in the central part of the city and declined as one moved away from the center; particularly toward the northeast (fig. 2). In all probability, if a map of the entire Akron metropolitan area were drawn, we would find that the peripheral areas had even more Ford votes, whereas the inner parts of the city had the most Democratic votes. This reflected a familiar pattern of a Democratic inner city surrounded by a suburban Republican area. Within the inner city, there was only a small pocket (around the University of Akron) where less than 53% of the voters voted for Carter.

Because black voters have tended to

that tended to be traditionally Democratic. There are two significant correlations in terms of income groups and Carter voters. High income groups (\$25,000 and above) concentrated in the north-western part of the city were notably Republican in 1976 (fig. 7). There has been a constant rise in the income polarization of voters since the early 1930's, which was indicated by the Democratic Party affiliation of lower income groups, particularly in the decade of the 1930's when the development of this affiliation was greatly accelerated. The Democratic affiliation of this group grew from 53% to 66% between 1930 and 1938. During the same nine-year

INCOMES \$25,000 AND UP - 1970

COLLEGE GRADUATES - 1970



Percentage of Population Figure 7

0-6	16-22
6-11	22-27
11-16	

FIGURE 7. Distribution of Higher income groups in Akron, 1970 (over \$25,000).



Percentage of Population Figure 8

1-8	22-30
8-15	30-36
15-22	

FIGURE 8. Distribution of College-educated in Akron, 1970.

span, the upper income group's affiliation with the Democrats declined from 51% to 37% (Litchfield 1941). It is therefore logical to assume that the voters in the central part of the city of Akron (where over 30% of the population had incomes less than \$6,000) voted for Carter (fig. 4). There was a minor exception in the University of Akron area where the students are not usually registered voters and in luxury apartment complexes, like Fir Hill Tower, housing college-educated, middle income Republicans (figs. 5, 6, and 8).

Middle and lower-middle income groups were apparently "swing" and "split" voters (figs. 5 and 6). The correlations were not impressive among these groups, however, so one must be careful against over-generalizing. Within these groups there appeared to be some racial division, with the Carter voters tending to be black and the Ford voters tending to be white. In all areas the incidence of racial polarization was unusually high in the 1976 election.

In terms of education, the Akron situation showed the traditional pattern of college-educated voters overwhelmingly

voting Republican (Campbell and Cooper 1956). As previously mentioned, there was also, near the center of the city, a high income college-educated group living around the University of Akron who voted Republican. The northwestern part of Akron, where college-educated voters tended to predominate, also voted for Ford in large numbers (fig. 8).

The Akron voting situation tended to confirm the NBC and ABC/Harris findings by demonstrating that black majority areas voted heavily for Carter, higher income areas voted heavily for Ford, college graduates and more educated voters tended to vote for Ford, and the central city, which was largely low-income and black, was the most heavily Carter-oriented. The 1976 Presidential election in Akron can be compared to the Ohio Senatorial election, in which incumbent Republican Senator Robert Taft, Jr. was defeated by Democrat Howard Metzenbaum. In the Presidential Election the city totals were 59,197 for Carter to 28,468 for Ford, while for Senator the totals were 56,860 for Metzenbaum to 30,563 for Taft. Examining ward and precinct re-

sults, the Senatorial election followed patterns very similar to those of the Presidential, although with slightly reduced majorities. Together, the two elections demonstrated that the Democratic Party votes in general followed the same general pattern. The same also can be said about other presidential elections since 1960 (although with widely differing majorities in 1972), and about state, local, and municipal elections in Akron. That is, the central city is heavily Democratic Party-oriented, while the highest income, northwestern precincts form the bastion of Republican support.

The overall conclusion is that the 1976 Presidential election, at least as reflected in the Akron results, was in large part a "maintaining" type of election and to a lesser extent a "deviating" one. Although it resulted in the defeat of an incumbent President (a rare occurrence that has not happened since 1932) the election reflected many of the more normal, Democratic Party loyalties and voting patterns that Presidential elections have previously reflected in this and other urban areas. President Nixon in 1972 failed to carry Akron by some 14,000 votes, but Carter carried Akron by a plurality of nearly 31,000 votes in 1976, indicating both a return of many democrats to previous loyalties, and a falling away of 1972 Republican voters.

As a typical "deviating" type of election, there was evidence in the Akron statistics that white, middle-class Demo-

cratic voters moved to the Ford column. The evidence was as strong as for a "maintaining" election, as indicated by the strong black voter support. The strong correlations between figure 2 (which shows the concentration of Carter votes) and figure 3 (which shows black residential living patterns) bears out this observation. The correlations between figure 2 and figure 7 (which shows upper income, white voters) also lend support to this conclusion.

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