AN ANALYSIS OF THE 1977 OMAHA GENERAL ELECTION

BY

MURRAY FROST

I. VOTING PATTERN AND TURNOUT

Voting Pattern

Party registration was the factor most associated with the mayoral vote, according to an analysis of survey data collected by CAUR in the five days preceding the May 10, 1977 election.\(^1\) Although the pattern of votes in the non-partisan mayoral election was also associated with sex, geographical area, and age, the relationship was strongest for party registration. Betty Abbott (a registered Republican) was favored by 58 percent of the registered Republicans willing to disclose their choices, and Al Veys (a registered Democrat) received 71 percent of the registered Democrats' stated preferences.\(^2\) (See Table 1.) Despite the high association of party registration with the mayoralty voting pattern, very few voters indicated a candidate's party affiliation when asked their reasons for their voting preferences.

A number of responses to this open-ended question, however, did indicate that the candidate's sex was an important factor in the election. Approximately 10 percent of the reasons given for supporting either Veys or Abbott referred to the candidate's sex; the proportion was slightly higher for Veys voters. The relationship between a voter's preference for mayor and his or her sex can be seen in Table 1. Although Veys drew support from 70 percent of the men with announced preferences, he was able to gain only 50 percent from the women. (Each candidate received 20 percentage-points greater support from his or her own sex than from the other sex.) Since the candidates received 20 percentage-points greater support from voters with the same party registration as themselves, party appears to have been a more significant factor influencing the vote than was sex. (More sophisticated statistical tests confirm this finding.)

Veys won 84 percent of the announced preferences of Democratic men, while Abbott won 61 percent from Republican women. "Cross-pressured" voters—Republican men and Democratic women—gave majorities to candidates sharing their party rather than their sex with 59 percent of the Democratic women indicating they would vote for Veys, and 53 percent of the Republican men saying they would vote for Abbott.

A third factor related to the voting pattern in the mayoralty race was geographical area. Veys was a strong favorite

![Table 1: Stated Voting Preferences and Related Factors, 1977 Omaha Mayoral Election](image)

\(^{1}\)The survey was conducted by drawing a systematic random sample from the Omaha telephone directory; sample size was 497.

\(^{2}\)Proportions for voter preferences reported in this article are based on a weighted sample—i.e., since men were under-represented among respondents, their replies were multiplied by three in order to make the representativeness of men and women approximately equal (the weighted sample analyzed here was 51.5 percent male). It should also be noted that the analysis of candidate preferences is based on only a portion of those contacted by CAUR in its survey. Although none of the findings reported here would change, only those respondents who indicated they had voted in the primary and intended to vote in the general election are included here. Respondents who indicated they had not voted in the primary, but would vote in the general election were excluded on the assumption that they were not likely to vote. More than 88 percent of all respondents claiming they were registered to vote in the Omaha election said they would vote, yet the turnout was actually 45 percent.
In South Omaha—receiving 83 percent of the announced preferences of voters living south of Dodge Street and east of 42nd Street. In an expanded South Omaha area (south of Dodge and east of 42nd Street) the margin of the preference of the four candidates voting to the west of the Veys' weakest area of support was west of 72nd Street where he received only 62 percent of the reported announced preferences. The fact that Veys did not factor in the voting pattern of age, with Veys receiving more votes from younger voters than from older ones. He received 81 percent from voters under 25 years old, and this proportion declined with each successive age group with Veys' support dropping off to 51 percent for those voters 65 years of age or older.

In contrast to Veys' pattern, Campaigning was also important, and raises serious questions about the age 

Voting Turnout

The survey also asked the respondents for their preferences for the seven City Council seats. The most interesting result of this portion of the survey was the fact that 75 of the seven actual winners were predicted—as the low proportion of voters who reported that they had made up their minds. The survey began five days before the election and people were still being polled on the eve of the election, yet only 39 percent named any Council candidate. Of those who expressed a preference on the eve of the election, only 73 percent named any Council candidate, and the average number of candidates named was only 1.3. Only 10 percent indicated preferences for a majority of candidates.

Since voters in the Omaha general election actually voted for an average of 5.8 Council candidates, it is clear that many bulbs for one candidate who had been named by less than one of the seven actual winners was predicted—as the low proportion of voters who reported that they had made up their minds. The survey began five days before the election and people were still being polled on the eve of the election, yet only 39 percent named any Council candidate. Of those who expressed a preference on the eve of the election, only 73 percent named any Council candidate, and the average number of candidates named was only 1.3. Only 10 percent indicated preferences for a majority of candidates.

Voting Turnout

Voting is still viewed by most Americans as a civic duty, even though it does not necessarily bring about the result people want. More people indicate their intention to vote than actually vote; post election surveys similarly record more voters than actually cast. Pollsters reason in predicting the vote, as well as those interested in explaining the vote, therefore, must be concerned with respondents who claim they will vote and do not. Frequently pollsters will adjust their raw proportions before releasing their results.

The pre-election survey conducted by CAUR had to be adjusted because some of those claiming to be registered to vote in the Omaha election they said intended to vote in that election, the actual turnout was about halfway of that or 45 percent, to vote in the election. An analysis of the survey responses indicated that party registration was the most important single factor in voting decisions. In addition, it also indicated that Veys was disproportionately preferred by men, South Omaha residents, and the young. The turnout rates for each of these groups (except the youngest) were higher than Veys' support among voters 65 years or older at the 52 Street. In

In summary, ballot position is neutral—it can make a difference—and therefore the law requires your action in making a decision. The question is whether the candidates should be considered the same even as Election Day dawned), or whether this finding is still true—i.e., it is likely to be observed that without rotation of ballot position the outcome of the Council election would have been different.

Using the Election Commission's method of analyzing merely the order of the finish, but not the margins of victory, it is clear that ballot position was not neutral. It must be noted, however, that the relationship between ballot position and the order of the finish in any election is not a simple one—i.e., there was a range in the order of finish for any candidate who was not on the top or bottom of the ballot... The predictive-precinct order of the 12 candidates in between also followed the same overall general order.

However, an alternative analysis of the data finds the opposite conclusion—i.e., ballot position does make a difference. In fact, it is possible to infer that without rotation of ballot position the outcome of the Council election would have been different.

Conventional wisdom says that ballot position influences the voters' first choice of a candidate. Nevertheless, it is clear that a candidate may want to vote in the best or worst ballot position for each candidate, the differences ranged from 2.79 percentage-points to 6.52 percentage-points, or from 2,071 to 4,363 votes. A candidate named John Doe running in the first position would receive a margin of 26 votes separation: 4,063 votes; we may use the mean (average) proportion of 41.40 percent of the votes cast when he ran in the ninth ballot position. If there were no ballot rotation, the number of votes in the first ballot position would be 4,547 percent in each precinct, he would have received 32,985 votes on cast in Election Day (i.e., excluding absentee and write-in votes) enough to re-elect him to the Council (in sixth place).

This spread between the average proportion in the best and worst positions for any candidate was not confined to the marginal candidates. Even front-runner Rosenthal had a 2.57 percentage-point difference between his average proportions of votes cast in each ballot position (69.14 percent and 62.57 percent respectively). The spread for all candidates was 3.16 percentage-points—i.e., all candidates running in the first ballot position received an average proportion of 43.35 percent of the votes cast, while all candidates running in the ninth ballot position received an average proportion of 40.19 percent of the votes cast. As shown in the table below, the difference in proportions is 32.79 percentage-points higher than in the worst (third) position of 40.19 percent. For the four marginal candidates combined being listed first was the best position, and being listed ninth in the field of 14 was the worst position. More significant, given the World-Herald account of the election, it is clear that the six best positions were at either end of the list—i.e., the average for these four candidates being listed first, third, or ninth on the ballot produced the sixth

**TABLE II**

**VOTING TURNOUT: RANKED POSITIONS AGAINST OMaha MAYORAL ELECTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Voters Assumed Non-voters</th>
<th>Voters Assumed Non-voters</th>
<th>Total Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>45,985</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>47,192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>42,869</td>
<td>1,511</td>
<td>44,380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>40,753</td>
<td>1,712</td>
<td>42,465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>38,637</td>
<td>1,911</td>
<td>40,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>36,521</td>
<td>2,112</td>
<td>38,633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>34,405</td>
<td>2,313</td>
<td>36,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>32,289</td>
<td>2,514</td>
<td>34,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>30,173</td>
<td>2,715</td>
<td>32,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>28,057</td>
<td>2,916</td>
<td>31,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>25,941</td>
<td>3,117</td>
<td>29,058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>23,825</td>
<td>3,318</td>
<td>27,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>21,709</td>
<td>3,520</td>
<td>25,229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th</td>
<td>19,593</td>
<td>3,722</td>
<td>23,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14th</td>
<td>17,477</td>
<td>3,923</td>
<td>21,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**

- Data calculated from official final results for voters and vote cast for the 14 candidates on the ballot as provided by the Election Commissioners.
- The exact wording of the question was: ""Many people did not vote in the Omaha Primary Election last month. Did you vote in that election?"

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*For an early review of literature and test of this hypothesis see Henry M. Bain and C. Frank Hecok, "The Importance of Voter Position in Choosing a Candidate," (World-Herald Study 1970). *
The Regional unemployment rate of 6 percent was 1 percentage point below the rate of one year ago but has shown that the decline in unemployment has been slow for some of the Region’s urban areas. Fargo and St. Joseph experienced no decline in their rates (5.9 and 9.3%, respectively) from the same period last year. The index of employment for all metropolitan areas remains 1.4 percentage points lower than that of the nation.

Department store sales increased in most of the Region’s cities, and states and two cities related to the CAUR Division of Housing.

The majority of the staff and students participated in research and writing for the monthly Review of Applied Urban Research. The Review has a circulation of 2,000 and is provided at no charge to Nebraska residents and at nominal charge to residents of other states. The Review has become recognized for disseminating information on urban conditions and issues to all segments of the urban business and professional community. Economic and demographic data are monitored and reported regularly for six Omaha subareas and for 26 metropolitan areas of the Midcontinent Region. Residential construction loans are monitored and reported monthly for subdivisions in Douglas and Sarpy Counties.

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sarpy County Subdivisions with only one committed, under current reporting period</th>
<th>Outstanding Loans for Sarpy Counties.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OUTSTANDING LOANS FOR</td>
<td>COUNTIES.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOODHUM</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WINCHESTER</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROANOKE ESTATES</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GREEN VALLEY</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HILLDALE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBROSE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BELLEVUE, BANK ST.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHO VALLEY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOODLAND</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARPY COUNTY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subdivision identified by number in Table 1.
In providing service to the community, State, region and nation, members of the staff are active participants on the Nebraska State Housing Advisory Board, Metropolitan Data Users Consortium, MAPA Regional Growth and Development Advisory Committee, United Way Planning and Budget Committee, Mayor’s (Omaha) Economic Development Committee, Mayor’s (Lincoln) Energy Action Committee, Metropolitan Affairs Committee of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Research Committee of the Economic Development Council, Midcontinent Research and Development Council and the Council on Urban Economic Development. During the past year CAUR conducted a land use conference and individual staff members participated in workshops dealing with housing, consumer education and needs assessments.

In keeping with the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s focus on the problems of the urban community a Division of Housing Research and Services was established. The objectives are to provide a housing information clearinghouse; to foster the growth within the University of a research capability in all aspects of housing; to establish a long range comprehensive research program on all aspects of housing; to provide technical assistance at the request of the housing industry, labor, the financial industry, government officials and consumers; and to conduct educational programs and activities utilizing University resources. The work of the Division is guided by a 25 member advisory committee reporting to the Director of CAUR. It is expected that the forthcoming appointment of a permanent full-time Coordinator of the Division of Housing Research and Services will result in an increase in effort, and hence greater overall achievement than was possible during the 1976-77 Fiscal Year.

The major achievements of the Division of Housing Research and Services include awards of a Title I grant of $16,500 for the development and application of a Housing Consumer Education Program and a grant of $84,000 from the Administration on Aging of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, to formulate a strategy for developing AoA policy and research on housing for the elderly. The latter project involves a joint effort on the part of the Housing Division and the Gerontology Program. The Title I project will combine faculty/staff and students from four UNO units (Home Economics, Business Administration, Engineering and CAUR) with staff from the Franklin Community Federal Credit Union. The consumer education program will provide prospective borrowers information about home purchasing and ownership, repair and rehabilitation, planning and operation, and energy conservation.

The Center for Applied Urban Research provided students with educational experiences on several levels. First, the majority of the professional staff taught at least one course during the academic year in the urban studies, geography and sociology departments and the Goodrich Program. Second, the Center served as a laboratory setting for a number of other classes. During the academic year, four students participated in an informal student internship program, working with CAUR staff or a public agency on research topics for academic credit. Five graduate students and graduate assistants worked with the Center on specific projects or were assigned to assist in overall research activity. Six work-study students received practical work experience and assistance while attending the University. In addition, seven young people received on-the-job training during the year under the CETA Training and CETA Summer Youth Programs.

Opportunities for teaching faculty to engage in applied urban research were increased recently through the CAUR Faculty Summer Urban Research Fellowship Program.

The achievements of CAUR during the 1976-77 Fiscal Year and planned developments indicate a continued growth in research and services. The result will be increasing participation in the University’s contribution to the solution of urban problems in the Omaha area, the State, region and nation.

ANNOUNCEMENT

A 1977 CAUR Summer Urban Research Fellowship has been awarded to Dr. Jane Woody, Assistant Professor in the UNO School of Social Work. The objective of the Fellowship is to provide resources to enable a faculty member to complete a short-term project and a fundable proposal for major research relating to urban problems. Dr. Woody will identify social and psychological problems of children whose parents are divorced. Her survey of professional attitudes, related research and services available in the Omaha area is designed as a pilot demonstration for a national study. The urgency of such research has been emphasized by the National Institute of Mental Health in its establishment of a branch of the Juvenile Problems Research Program expressly to fund research dealing with the children of divorced parents.

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