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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. 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 Veyes (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 Veyes or Abbott referred to the candidate’s sex; the proportion was slightly higher for Veyes voters. The relationship between a voter’s preference for mayor and his or her sex can be seen in Table 1. Although Veyes 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.) Veyes 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 Veyes, 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. Veyes was a strong favorite

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1The survey was conducted by drawing a systematic random sample from the Omaha telephone directory; sample size was 497.

2Proportions 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.

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### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Veys (Percent)</th>
<th>Abbott (Percent)</th>
<th>Total Respondents (Number)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party Registration</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>North &amp; Southwest</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North Central &amp; Northeast</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Central &amp; Southeast</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20-45</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46-65</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 65</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Under $8,000</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$8,000-$12,000</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$12,000-$20,000</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over $20,000</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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in South Omaha—receiving 83 percent of the announced preferences of voters living south of Dodge and east of 42nd Street. In an expanded South Omaha area (south of Dodge and east of 42nd Street) the response rate of the general public was 88 percent. The 7.4 percent of the seven areas in the Omaha area (south of Dodge and east of 42nd Street) with a weak area of support was west of 72nd Street where he received only 52 percent of the reported announced preferences.

Voting age, according to the findings of the preceding study, is an important factor in voting patterns. 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 the support of both elderly voters and of those under age 18 was relatively low. Veys won 73 percent of the preferences of those reporting incomes between $8,000 and $12,000, and approximately 60 percent from voters earning $10,000 or less.

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 the seven actual winners were predicted—was 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 for one of the candidates (49 percent named any Council candidate), and the average number of candidates named was only 1.3. Only 10 percent indicated preferences for a mayoral candidate.

Since voters in the Omaha general election actually voted for an average of 5.8 Council candidates,3 it is clear that many ballots for Council candidates were last minute decisions. This suggests that last minute campaigning for Council office could play an important role in the elections. This extremely important, and no serious questions about the role of issues in the Council election. Issues were rarely noted in the survey's open-ended question which asked for reasons for choosing a particular candidate. Only 3 percent of the reasons given were identified as related to specific issues.

Voting Turnout

Voting is still seen by most Americans as a civic duty, even if they do not necessarily perform their duty. As a result, more people indicate their intention to vote than actually vote; post election surveys similarly record more voters claimed than actual. Pollsters interviewed people in the survey, 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.4

The pre-election survey conducted by CAUR had to be adjusted because of the findings 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 half of that or 46 percent.

Respondents were also asked whether they had voted in the primary.5 Almost half (49 percent) claimed they had. Even though this finding was found to be an isolated finding and there was an assumption made that only those who reported they voted in the primary and intended to vote in the general election would vote and that the others could be treated as "non-voters." Based on these assumptions several observations can be made. More significant, perhaps, about the findings on turnout reported in Table 2, is that the Veys candidacy (and/or effective organization) produced a higher turn-out of registered voters in Omaha. The Nebraska voter registration law requires that a 59 percent turn-out in the southeast sector of the city (south of Dodge and east of 42nd) of 59 percent in the southeast sector of the city (south of Dodge and east of 42nd) compared to 47 percent elsewhere in the City, and that Veys' candidacy was also helped by other turnout rates.

Voting Turnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race Registration</th>
<th>Vote Yes</th>
<th>Vote No</th>
<th>Vote Uncertain</th>
<th>Vote No Intent</th>
<th>Vote Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 65</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 25</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Central</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 65</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5Veys was not weighed because turnout rates and women's rates were similar.

7In general, the economies of the Midcontinent urban areas were off to a good start during the first quarter of 1977. Nonagricultural wage and salary employment was up 104,400 or 3.5 percent higher one year earlier. This represents a 2.2 percent gain in the rate of job growth in the 29 selected areas of the Midcontinent Region and compares to a less than 2 percent gain for the United States.


Good Start for Midcontinent Metropolitan Areas

Although the increase in manufacturing employment for the first quarter of 1977 was encouraging, the gains in the urban areas were up an average of 3 percent over the same period one year ago. On the other hand, construction employment in the 29 selected areas of the Midcontinent Region was 1 percent lower than in the preceding period. The good news is that housing units authorized by permits were up sharply for both
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 (both 3.1 and 3.2 respectively) from the same period one year ago and Sioux City had its unemployment rate increase and its rate remains above the first quarter 1976 rate. The data also indicate that the unemployment rate for the metropolitan areas, however remains 1.4 percentage points lower than that of the nation.

Department store sales increased in most of the Region's States and cities, and two studies 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 supplied 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 quarterly 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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In providing service to the community, State, region and
country, 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 Commis-
tee, 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 educa-
tion 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 $94,000 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 Econom-
ics, 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 experi-
ence 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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