STILLWATER VOTING PATTERNS: SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL DIMENSIONS

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Traditional studies in political geography have focused on stresses in boundaries, balances of power, and other macro-type research. As a result, political geographers have failed to recognize the practical and theoretical value of examining voting behavior on various scales from a time perspective. Some recent research has investigated political behavior, yet most of this research centers on large urban areas. For example, Roger Kasperson's case study of Chicago wards in the 1951, 1955, and 1959 mayorality elections falls short of the research possibilities for political geographers because it concentrates on a large urban area, a limited number of elections, and a single elective office (1, 2).

The need for an examination of voting behavior on a micro-scale over an extended period of time is apparent. To meet this need we shall examine the presidential and gubernatorial elections in Stillwater, Oklahoma between 1936 and 1970 with an emphasis on the spatial distribution of precinct level data. The data employed in this study are aggregate precinct returns for each gubernatorial and presidential election from 1936 to 1970. Election data are available for the period at two-year intervals.

For the purposes of this paper simple "net percentage scores" will be used. These scores are derived in a very elementary manner. The percentages of Democratic vote and Republican vote were first calculated for every election in each precinct. Then a net percentage figure was computed for each of the stable precincts, *i.e.*, those that were spatially static from 1948 to 1970, for the entire time span. These scores represent the political plurality of a precinct over time. The distribution of these scores, on a precinct map, among the eleven stable precincts has resulted in several observations.

An examination of the net plurality scores illustrates the partisanship of the city (Table 1). There was a distinct Democratic advantage from 1936 until 1948-1950. With the Eisenhower landslide of 1952 all precincts, except during J. Howard Edmondson's election as governor in 1958, shifted to the Republican column. Moreover, this shift has been a permanent one. Republican pluralities after 1952 were greater than Democratic pluralities prior to 1950, and,

TABLE 1. *Pluralities in votes cast.*[a]

Years	1936	'38	'40	'42	'44	'46	'48	'50	'52	'54	'56	'58	'60	'62	'64	'66	'68	'70	Net Gain
Precincts																			
1	34	50	11	6	4	0	8	21	32	0	46	36	40	21	2	21	38	15	95-R
2	30	34	2	14	13	26	8	6	18	2	32	32	32	30	2	34	44	28	167-R
3	26	48	4	8	13	2	22	10	22	18	34	62	25	26	6	18	28	15	1-R
5	19	48	7	11	23	10	2	38	36	14	30	38	44	27	4	32	34	18	263-R
6	33	57	25	11	6	5	2	12	32	6	38	32	44	22	2	30	40	31	98-R
7	46	71	18	20	2	14	10	8	36	4	38	48	32	38	9	48	32	21	41-R
8	35	62	2	4	5	10	12	10	20	12	37	42	56	29	16	54	28	21	121-R
9	37	63	8	14	12	16	6	29	48	20	46	42	40	32	8	40	26	17	144-R
10	14	11	4	30	2	4	2	22	20	4	39	46	28	15	6	24	14	23	152-R
11	14	56	12	6	8	19	26	12	46	10	40	48	33	2	2	22	22	25	117-R
12		84	0	28	0	27	0	6	38	16	31	44	36	26	2	36	32	18	58-R

[a] Republican pluralities are printed in bold face.

consequently, the net scores reveal an overall Republican gain. The Republican pluralities vary from 1 in precinct 3 to 263 in precinct 5 (Fig. 1).

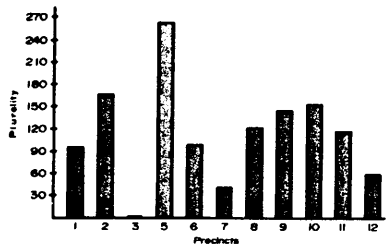

FIGURE 1. Net Republican gains, 1936-1970.

The spatial distribution of these net scores may best be seen if the scores are grouped in intervals and plotted on a precinct map of Stillwater (Fig. 2). The heav-

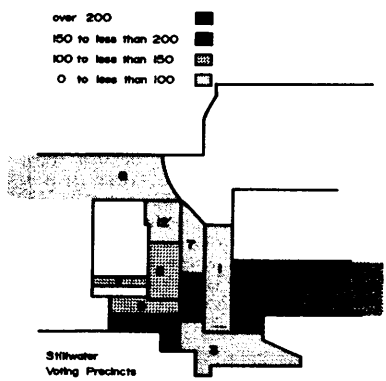

FIGURE 2. Spatial distribution of net Republican gains, 1936-1970.

iest concentrations of party pluralities are in the older part of town within close proximity to the university. Many of these areas, such as precincts 11, 9, 10, 5, and 8, are contiguous. However, it is apparent that no precise pattern links these highly Republican areas. Perhaps this urban scale is so small that no pattern should be expected, but it is interesting to note that none of the well known theories of urban growth, such as Burgess' concentric zone theory and Hoyt's sector theory, are applicable to voting patterns in Stillwater. Modifications of these theories are needed if they are to apply to voting patterns in smaller urban areas.

These net plurality scores offer more insight into the politics of Stillwater when the spatial distribution of the data for gubernatorial elections is compared to the spatial distribution of the presidential elec-

TABLE 2. *Net percentage gains by party and type of election, 1936-1970.*

Precinct	Governor		President	
	Democrat	Republican	Democrat	Republican
1	4	—	—	118
2	—	70	—	97
3	73	—	—	65
5	—	64	—	161
6	4	—	—	105
7	29	—	—	77
8	—	8	—	113
9	—	3	—	141
10	—	57	—	109
11	60	—	—	165
12	81	—	—	139

tion returns (Table 2). The Republican partisanship of the city remains intact throughout the time period for the presidential returns. Moreover, the degree of Republican pluralities varies little over space, an indication of a more static voting behavior in national elections. Interesting information is to be found in the gubernatorial races in Stillwater. In these state elections, in six of eleven precincts, the Democratic Party maintained pluralities varying from 4 to 81. Five of these six precincts, 1, 3, 6, 7, and 12, correspond to precincts lowest in Republican pluralities in both state and national elections. There appears to be more homogeneity in Stillwater voting patterns in national elections than in state elections. Thus, the type of election determines, in part, the partisanship of a city space.

The major feature of Stillwater voting patterns is precinct level variations in Republicanism. However, no geometric configurations of space emerge from the data. This singular substantive conclusion contains pregnant implications for subsequent research by political geographers. Studies of voting patterns in urban areas should consider space and time more closely. Emphasis on large city studies in urban politi-

cal geography could bias generalizations made about urban voting patterns, just as such emphasis on large urban areas has perhaps already influenced urban geography in general. Likewise, studies isolated in time will definitely result in very weak conclusions.

Obviously, more research into voting behavior is justified. But how is the political geographer to proceed? Most important are case studies on various geographic scales, with various types of elections, comparing different spatial areas, and analyzing data over time. If research in political geography turns in this direction, then political geographers will be able to develop a body of theory capable of explaining geographic patterns in voting behavior.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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