

ETHNIC BLOC VOTING IN MIAMI

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From the standpoint of ethnicity, the Miami-Dade County SMSA has recently become one of the most diverse areas in the United States. This growing diversity largely resulted from political and economic events which transpired in Latin America and the Caribbean in the past three decades (Boswell 1983; Boswell and Curtis 1984). Though Hispanics comprised under 7 percent of Dade County's population in 1960, today people of Latin and Caribbean heritage are estimated to constitute over 42 percent of the SMSA's total population. The Cuban minority alone numbers one-half million, or 26 percent of the county's estimated 1983 population of 1.9 million. The "Latinization" of Dade County has further involved substantial numbers of Colombians (50,000), Puerto Ricans (45,000), Nicaraguans (25,000), Dominicans (25,000), Mexicans (14,000), and Argentines (6,000) among others (Boswell 1984, pp. 4-8). The SMSA also has a sizable and growing black population which constituted 17 percent of the county's 1980 population. Since 1980, the metropolitan area's black population has been augmented by significant in-migration from the Caribbean. The SMSA's Haitian population alone was estimated at 50,000 in 1983 (Boswell 1984, 8; see also Boswell 1983). Additionally, Dade County is 15 percent Jewish, and 26 percent non-Jewish and non-Latin white (Winsberg 1983a, 367; Winsberg 1983b 307; Winsberg 1984).

This tremendous rate of demographic change has produced other modifications in the character of Dade County, most notably in the SMSA's aggregate political outlook and in its voting behavior. The electorate of Dade County has historically been liberal and supportive of the Democratic Party, but in the presidential elections of 1980 and 1984 the proportion of the SMSA's major party vote cast for the Republican Party nominee (Ronald Reagan) exceeded the level of support found nationally. Dade County's growing conservatism and support for the Republican Party was earlier predicted by Salter and Mings (1972). Based upon cartographic and survey analyses of the Miami metropolitan area, Salter and Mings predicted that "the traditional support of Miami towards more liberal candidates will decrease proportionate to the increasing involvement of Cubans in the election process," and that "it is conceivable that the Cuban voter will turn Miami from a traditional liberal stronghold to a source of conservative strength" (Salter and Mings 1972, 130). These predictions were not only based upon the size of Miami's rapidly growing Cuban community, but also on the well-founded contention that the great majority of Dade County Cubans would actively support the Republican Party because they perceive that it takes a stronger anti-communist stand than the Democratic Party. As they noted, "it is recognized that such a minority (Cubans), if 'bloc voting,' could possibly be pivotal in any election" (Salter and Mings 1972, 129).

The purpose of this research note is to examine the level of ethnic bloc voting which occurred in Dade County during the presidential elections of 1976, 1980 and 1984. (Bloc voting is defined below as 70 percent or more of a group's members voting in agreement.) We emphasize the role played by the Cuban community in producing Dade County's recent electoral outcomes, but also consider the level of bloc voting among the SMSA's black population for comparison.

The data on ethnic group distribution is drawn from the 1980 census at the tract level of resolution. Comparable electoral data on percent Republican voting were calculated by agglomerating the returns of the nearly 500 voting precincts in Dade County to correspond spatially to the boundaries of the

SMSA's 235 census tracts for all three presidential elections examined. In many cases we apportioned the voting returns of a single precinct between two or more census tracts where the boundaries of reporting units overlapped. An assumption of equal population distribution within voting precincts was employed in the apportionment of electoral returns (O'Loughlin 1981, 365).

Before discussing the level of ethnic bloc voting in Dade County, we examine partisan leanings in presidential elections. Table 1 presents the results of a simple r correlation analysis between percent Republican vote in the 1976, 1980 and 1984 presidential elections, and ethnic divisions by census tract. Percent Cuban yielded the most substantial positive association with percent Republican vote in the three presidential elections, and the size of this association (simple r value) has grown significantly, from 0.63 in 1976, to 0.67 in 1980, and finally to 0.71 in 1984.

Percent other Hispanic and percent Puerto Rican were

also found to be positively correlated with Republican voting. Percent other Hispanic (non-Cuban, non-Puerto Rican, and non-Mexican Hispanic) registered strong positive correlation coefficients of 0.58, 0.61 and 0.61 with Republican voting in the presidential elections of 1976, 1980 and 1984 respectively. Although the level of association between percent Puerto Rican and percent Republican vote by census tract was substantially weaker than for percent Cuban and percent other Hispanic, this association grew in each successive election from only 0.19 in 1976, to 0.25 in the presidential election of 1984.

The only ethnic division found to have significant negative associations with percent Republican vote in all three presidential elections was percent of the population which is black. The level of this correlation remained relatively stable during the three elections, yielding coefficients of -0.64, -0.65, and -0.64 in 1976, 1980, and 1984 respectively.

The results of this simple correlation analysis of the distribution of Dade County's ethnic groups and Republican voting clearly points to the growing predilection by metropolitan Miami's non-Mexican Hispanics for supporting the Republican Party in presidential elections. The level of non-Mexican Hispanics support for the Republican Party is tempered to some degree by the strong negative correlation between percent black and percent Republican vote. While this finding is of little surprise, it does serve to underscore the polarization of presidential voting behavior between blacks and non-Mexican Hispanics in the Miami metropolitan area.

The term "bloc voting," though appearing frequently in the electoral and voting research literature, is rarely given specific definition (for instance, see Lewis 1965; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1976; Frye 1980; Davidson 1984). "Bloc voting" is normally used to indicate the substantial support by some identifiable social or cultural group for a candidate or issue as expressed in the group's voting behavior. A pertinent but rarely addressed issue is the proportion of a group's voting support which must be cast for a candidate or position before that group may be said to be bloc voting. One of the few sources to

TABLE 1

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ETHNICITY AND REPUBLICAN VOTE
(Dade County Census Tracts, 1976, 1980, 1984)

Ethnic Division	Pearson's r		
	1976	1980	1984
Blacks.....	-0.64*	-0.65*	-0.65*
Cubans.....	0.63*	0.67*	0.71*
Puerto Ricans.....	0.19*	0.24*	0.25*
Mexicans.....	-0.07	-0.05	-0.03
Other Hispanics...	0.58*	0.61*	0.61*
Anglos.....	0.18*	0.13**	0.14**

Note: correlation coefficients are between percent of population in categories given and percent Republican vote in those tracts.

* Significant at 0.01

**Significant at 0.05

Source: Calculated by authors.

provide an actual proportion in their definition of bloc voting is the Salter and Mings (1972) article examining the potential impacts of Cuban settlement on the voting behavior of the Miami metropolitan area. They state that "the term 'bloc voting' is used here to signify more than 50 percent of the voting electorate" (Salter and Mings 1972, footnote 9). We do not find this definition adequate, however. The assumption of a minimum of 50 percent of a socio-cultural group's vote supporting a particular candidate or issue to define bloc voting is contradictory to the intended meaning of the term. This is particularly clear when there are only two principal candidates vying for office. Conceivably, each could garner 50 percent of the vote. Thus we use a minimal figure of 70 percent of a group supporting a particular candidate, party, or position on an issue to signify bloc voting. The term "bloc voting" has been associated with the voting behavior of black Americans more than any other ethnic group (Key 1950; Lewis 1965; Frye 1980; Davidson 1984). Since Roosevelt's New Deal, black Americans have traditionally supported the Democratic Party in substantial voting proportions (Sitkoff 1984). For example, in the 1984 presidential election, Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale received an estimated 90 percent of the black vote nationally (Mollison 1984). In this paper, therefore, the level of bloc voting among Dade County's black population provides a basis for comparison with the voting behavior of Cubans.

We gauged the level of ethnic bloc voting first by identifying all census tracts with populations over 50 percent black or 50 percent Cuban (Fig. 1). The 1980 census revealed that there are forty-nine tracts where Cubans constituted the majority. The mean Cuban proportion of these forty-nine tracts was 66 percent; seven tracts exceeded 75 percent Cuban. Over 62 percent of all Cubans residing in Dade County in 1980 lived in one of these forty-nine census tracts. Additionally, large numbers of non-Cuban Hispanics lived in these predominantly Cuban census tracts. The average percent total Hispanic of the forty-nine majority Cuban census tracts exceeded 78 percent. Four tracts were over 90 percent Hispanic.

In 1980 there were forty-six Dade County census tracts having populations greater than 50 percent black. Over 77 percent of all Dade County blacks resided in one of these forty-six tracts. The mean percentage black of these majority black tracts exceeded 78 percent. Eleven tracts were over 95 percent black. The internal ethnic homogeneity of Dade County's predominantly

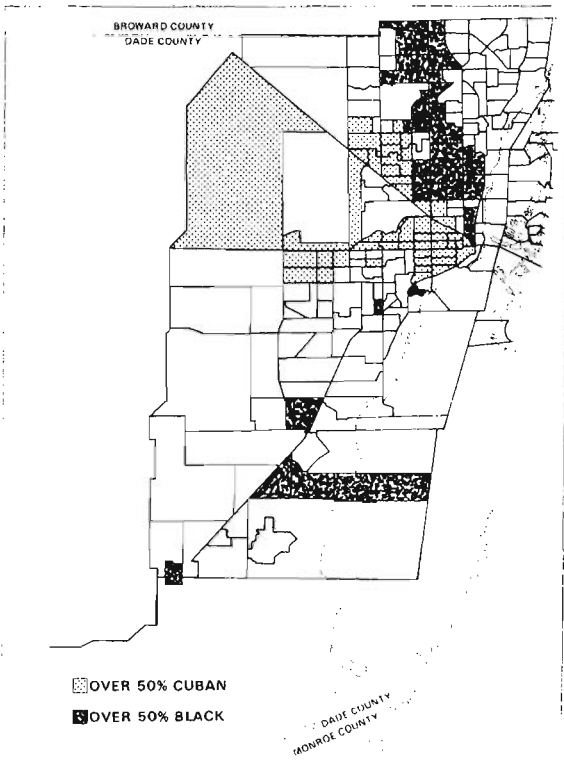


Fig. 1. Predominantly Black and Cuban Census Tracts in Dade County, Florida.

black census tracts, therefore, was significantly greater than in the SMSA's predominantly Cuban tracts. But if percent total Hispanic is considered instead of percent Cuban, the ethnic homogeneity of the predominantly black and predominantly Cuban census tracts was nearly identical.

The percent Republican vote for each of the majority black and Cuban census tracts was then calculated for the presidential elections of 1976, 1980, and 1984 (Table 2). Since these voting figures reflect the returns for the entire census tracts, they do not demonstrate conclusively how Cubans or blacks voted,

TABLE 2
ETHNICITY OF TRACT AND PERCENT REPUBLICAN VOTE
(Percent Republican Vote by Cuban or Black Tract, 1976, 1980, 1984)

Percent Republican Vote	1976		1980		1984	
	Number of tracts	Percent of tracts	Number of tracts	Percent of tracts	Number of tracts	Percent of tracts
Cuban Tracts (Tracts 50% or More Cuban)						
0.0 - 10% ..	0	0	0	0	0	0
10.1 - 20% ..	0	0	0	0	0	0
20.1 - 30% ..	0	0	0	0	0	0
30.1 - 40% ..	2	4.1	0	0	0	0
40.1 - 50% ..	19	38.8	2	4.1	0	0
50.1 - 60% ..	22	44.9	4	8.2	1	2.0
60.1 - 70% ..	6	12.2	16	32.6	1	2.0
70.1 - 80% ..	0	0	27	55.1	8	16.3
80.1 - 90% ..	0	0	0	0	36	73.5
90.1 -100% ..	0	0	0	0	3	6.1
Total ..	49	100.0	49	100.0	49	100.0
Mean Percent Republican Vote.....	52.0		68.9		83.3	
Black Tracts (Tracts 50% or More Black)						
0.0 - 10% ..	22	47.8	21	45.6	14	30.4
10.1 - 20% ..	4	8.7	9	19.6	13	28.3
20.1 - 30% ..	14	30.4	10	21.7	11	23.9
30.1 - 40% ..	5	10.9	6	13.0	7	15.2
40.1 - 50% ..	1	2.2	0	0	1	2.2
50.1 - 60% ..	0	0	0	0	0	0
60.1 - 70% ..	0	0	0	0	0	0
70.1 - 80% ..	0	0	0	0	0	0
80.1 - 90% ..	0	0	0	0	0	0
90.1 -100% ..	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total ..	46	100.0	46	100.0	46	100.0
Mean Percent Republican Vote.....	16.5		14.9		17.6	

Source: Compiled by authors.

only how the populations of areas which are predominantly black or Cuban voted. In the 1976 election, not one predominantly Cuban census tract supported Republican Party presidential nominee Gerald Ford with 70 percent or more of its vote. But four years later, twenty-seven (slightly more than half) of the Cuban tracts bloc voted in excess of 70 percent for Republican Ronald Reagan. In the 1984 election, bloc voting occurred in all but two of the forty-nine majority Cuban census tracts. Thirty-nine Cuban tracts cast over 80 percent of their vote for the Republican. The mean percentage of Republican vote in the Cuban tracts increased from 52 percent in 1976 to over 83 percent in the 1984 presidential election. Clearly, Dade County's predominantly Cuban areas have become increasingly supportive of the Republican Party in their electoral behavior, although it is presently impossible to judge what independent effect the personality of Ronald Reagan has had in the intensification process.

The level of Republican support in Dade County's predominantly black census tracts during the three elections remained relatively stable when contrasted with the growing support in the majority Cuban tracts. Forty of the forty-six majority black tracts gave the Republican Party less than 30 percent of their vote in both 1976 and 1980. In 1984 a slightly reduced number, thirty-eight tracts, provided the Republican Party with less than 30 percent of their electoral support. The voting returns for 1976 and 1984 can be interpreted as a lack of support for the Republican Party, and at the same time as bloc voting for the Democratic Party. The lack of significant third party activity in either of these elections means that Democratic Party support is the simple reciprocal of Republican Party support. The voting percentages for the 1980 election must be interpreted somewhat more cautiously, however, because of the campaign of John Anderson as an Independent. Anderson garnered 8.5 percent of Dade County's vote in 1980, so the percent Republican vote in that year was not the simple reciprocal of the percent Democratic vote. But even considering Anderson's impact, it is clear that the electorate in many of Dade County's predominantly black areas voted as a bloc for the Democratic Party. In the three presidential elections here examined the Republican Party averaged less than 18 percent of the vote from the forty-six black census tracts.

Salter and Mings (1972, 130) stated that "in no way do [we] interpret 'bloc voting' to signify the Cuban vote as a monolithic force." Our findings indicate, however, that in the near future Cubans may well constitute a "monolithic" voting bloc in presidential elections. To some degree this will depend on whether the Republican Party continues to nominate candidates who espouse strongly anti-communist views like those of the Reagan administration (Boswell and Rivero 1985, 7-9).

There is little doubt that the Cuban community has been a major factor in the transition of Dade County from liberal and supportive of the Democratic Party to conservative and supportive of the Republican Party, and that this trend will continue. Cubans now comprise an estimated 26 percent of Dade County's population (Boswell 1984, 8), and Cuban support for the Republican Party is growing. Cubans now appear to be bloc voting at levels traditionally associated with black Americans. A study of pre-Mariel boatlift Cubans living in Florida found that 47 percent were not yet United States citizens, and thus not yet able to vote (Boswell 1984, 32). Given the influx of nearly 125,000 Cubans into South Florida during the Mariel boatlift following the 1980 census enumeration, this proportion is probably now much higher. As greater numbers of more recently arrived Cubans gain citizenship, they are likely to support the Republican Party in voting proportions similar to the Cubans who now vote.

Cubans currently represent not only a substantial proportion of Dade County's population, but they will soon become an immensely larger percentage of the SMSA's electorate. Their numbers, in conjunction with the solidarity of their Republican Party support, will therefore be a "pivotal" factor in all future presidential elections in Dade County.

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