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# Expert Says Voting Rights Denied Eleven Years Marked Victory

ATLANTA, Georgia -- The southern black vote on November 2, 1976 was the most decisive and influential single exercise of minority political power in this century, according to the nonpartisan Voter Education Project (VEP).

"In the largest black vote of this century, the margins of victory for President-elect Jimmy Carter, several southern members of the U. S. Congress, and for local and state candidates were provided by minorities who were largely denied voting rights just 11 years ago," commented John Lewis, VEP executive director and long-time civil rights leader. "After a long, hard year of intensive voter registration in the 11 southern states, the final groundwork was laid for the record turnout on November 2. It's a great object lesson. Two and one-half million unregistered blacks can now see a positive example of the power of the black vote and, hopefully, will add their voices to the governmental process in future elections."

In a preliminary survey of the effect of the black vote on November 2, the Voter Education Project made spot-checks of predominantly black precincts in each of the 11 southern states and determined that, on the average, between 60 and 70 percent of all registered blacks turned out to vote. Over 95 percent of all southern blacks were estimated to have cast their ballot for Jimmy Carter for President.

According to the VEP study, a recently -expanded base of registered black voters and a record black turnout combined to provide President-elect Jimmy Carter with the obvious margin of victory across the South, with the exception of Virginia. President Ford was estimated to have won approximately 55 percent of the white vote of the 11 southern states.

Looking closer at black returns, an estimated 200,000 blacks or 73 percent of registered black voters in South Carolina turned out, giving Carter 98 percent of their votes. Carter's winning margin in South Carolina was 90,000 votes, having received 40 percent of approximately 782,000 white votes.

In South Carolina, the black vote also assured the victory of incumbent John Jenerette, who won the 6th U. S. Congressional District post by a margin of 15,000 votes. The presence of active local registration projects and a host of black candidates for local offices increased voter interest and participation in that state. All 13 black members of The South Carolina House of Representatives won reelection.

In North Carolina, where the black vote was decisive for Carter for President, it provided margins of victory for other candidates as well. Congressional incumbent Stephen L. Neal from the 5th District and John Brooks, a liberal candidate running against an appointed incumbent for the post of state labor commissioner, also received strong black votes which made possible their election victories. Black voter turnout in the city of Durham was estimated at 70 percent, with at least 95 percent of the votes going to Jimmy Carter.

Tennessee's black voters provided Carter with approximately 60 percent of his vote as the black turnout in areas such as Memphis was estimated at over 70 percent. Blacks also overwhelmingly supported and provided the margin of victory for James Sasser, challenger for the U. S. Senate seat held by William Brock. In a statewide race, black support was crucial in the Public Service Commission race of Franklin Cochran.

Tennessee's only black representative, Harold Ford, won reelection as did his two southern black colleagues, Andrew Young of Georgia and Barbara Jordan of Texas. Ford received an estimated 96 percent of the black vote in the 8th District of West Tennessee and increased his base of white support from 14 percent of the vote in 1974 to 21 percent in 1976.

Republican candidate Paul Trible won a closely contested race in Virginia's 1st Congressional District, with the narrow margin of his victory coming from the black vote. While his opponent for this vacated seat won the majority of black votes cast, black voters who split their tickets made the difference as Trible won with less than a 2,000 vote margin.

In Mississippi's 2nd Congressional District, David Bowen won 62 percent of the vote total, including strong support from blacks who comprise 38 percent of the voters in that district. Statewide, approximately 55 percent of the state's 290,000 registered blacks voted, casting approximately 95 percent of their ballots for Jimmy Carter.

"We have not yet completed our survey to determine how many of the approximately 400 blacks who ran for office were successful," said Lewis, "but we are compiling scattered results which show that blacks were elected for the first time to the county commission and school board posts in Richland County, South Carolina and, most significantly, a black sheriff was elected in Williamsburg County, South Carolina."

Lewis said his organization, which provides nonpartisan assistance to minority political participation through programs of education and motivation, cannot afford to relax its efforts because of the record black southern turnout.

"We are pleased that large numbers of blacks responded positively and exercised their voice in government," explained Lewis, "but the Voter Education Project is more concerned with the remaining voiceless millions of blacks in the South. This has been the concern of VEP for fifteen years. Now, in a larger sense, we also have to take stock of the health of our democracy, which has the lowest rate of voter participation of any democracy in the world."

It may be that the Voter Education Project can play a larger, more vital role to the entire country by spearheading a national effort to eliminate restrictive, bureaucratic barriers and make of ourselves a nation of voters with a participation rate equal to or higher than any other democracy," said Lewis. "It should be America's goal to achieve this democratic idea."

The Voter Education Project, based in Atlanta, Georgia, has traditionally operated its programs in the 11 southern states from Virginia to Texas. It is supported by the tax-deductible contributions of foundations, corporations, unions, religious organizations, and individuals.