

Black voters prove their clout

By Paul Taylor
Inquirer Staff Writer

Perhaps the most important lesson of Tuesday's election was this. When blacks go to the polls, they can become the most potent voting bloc in the country.

Blacks registered in record numbers this year, and their votes have been credited with swinging no less than seven states from President Ford to Jimmy Carter.

One of the seven was Pennsylvania, where the black vote in Philadelphia alone was sufficient to offset Ford's strength elsewhere in the state.

Indeed, the black voters' muscle was nowhere more evident than in Philadelphia. Here are some figures:

- More blacks (312,863) were registered to vote in Philadelphia this year than ever before. Twelve years ago, blacks were 27 percent of the city's electorate; today they account for 32 percent.

- 70 percent of the registered black voters went to the polls on Tuesday. In last year's mayoral election, the black voter turnout was only 50 percent.

- 90 percent of the black vote in the

city went to Carter; 57 percent of the white vote went to Carter.

- Of Carter's 488,000 votes in Philadelphia, 197,000, or about 40 percent, came from blacks.

- Philadelphia blacks gave Carter 175,000 votes more than they gave President Ford, accounting for fully 70 percent of Carter's overall 250,000-vote margin in Philadelphia. This enabled the Democrat to win the state by a margin of 122,000 popular votes.

The exceptional strength of the black vote in Philadelphia is part of a nationwide picture. The black electorate has been credited with providing Carter with margins that enabled him to carry Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Maryland, Missouri and North Carolina.

Nationally black voter turnout was 70 percent—compared to 50 percent for whites—and more than 90 percent of all blacks who went to the polls voted for Carter.

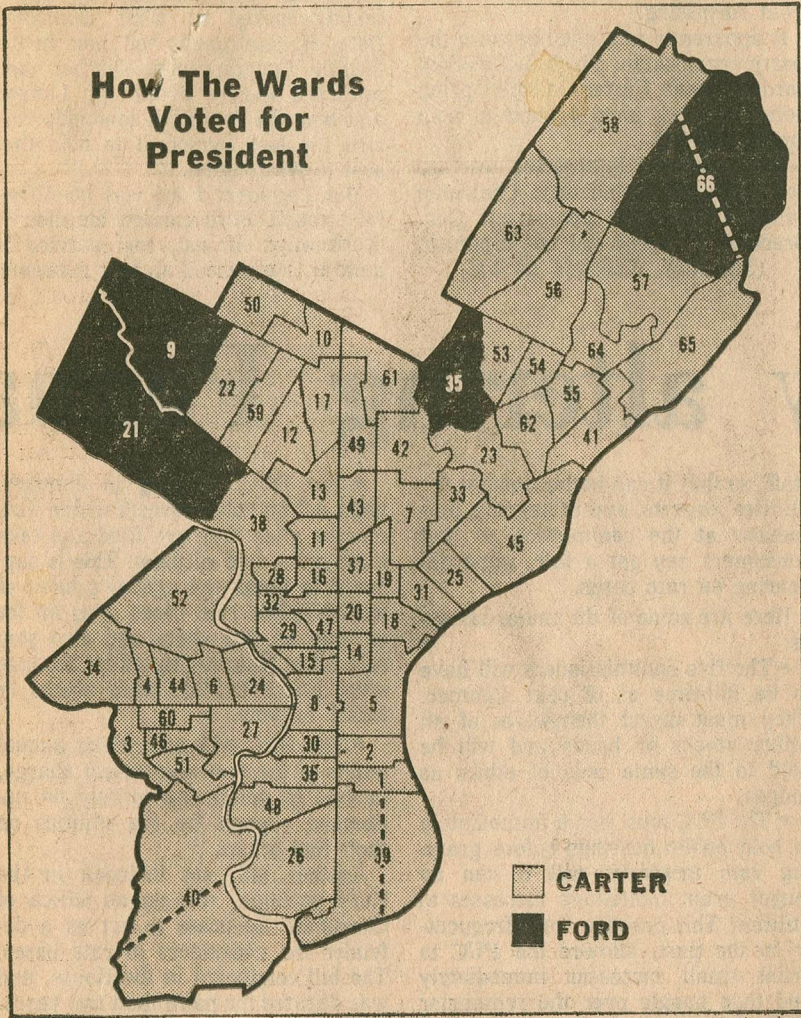
Black leaders in Philadelphia attributed Tuesday's turnout here to several factors, including a black-get-out-the-vote effort organized

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locally and funded by the Carter campaign.

"About a month ago, a judgment was made by a number of blacks that the Carter campaign was not as effective in the black community as it might be," said H. Patrick Swygert, deputy dean of the Temple Law School.

A minority steering committee for Carter was established here by Swygert; Lawyer Nolan Atkinson; State Sen. Herbert Arlene; Clerk of Courts Edgar Campbell; black community leaders Sam Evans, Jannie Blackwell and John Anderson; State Rep. Hardy Williams, and U. S. Rep. Robert N. C. Nix.

The committee, which received \$20,000 from the Carter campaign, sent sound trucks into black neighborhoods during the two weeks leading up to the election and used student volunteers for a get-out-the-vote Election Day canvass.

Former mayoral candidate Charles Bowser agreed that the efforts of the steering committee were important, but added that the "basic magnet was Carter's position on jobs, and Ford's insensitivity to unemployment."

With last month's black unemployment rate rising to 13.5 percent nationally—nearly double the rate for whites—the choice for blacks was crystal clear, he said.

Mary Goldman, a West Philadelphia ward leader, agreed. "I don't

think anyone turns out the black vote in a presidential election, she said. "People just come out and vote, period. Organizations don't have much influence."

The irony of the huge black vote here for Carter is that it has enabled Mayor Frank L. Rizzo to lay claim to the title of kingmaker.

Rizzo does, in fact, enjoy the loyalty of nearly all of the city's 20 Democratic black ward leaders, but it does not follow that he "controls" the black vote.

Indeed, it is even doubtful that he controls the white vote in a presidential election. In the wards where the mayor enjoys his greatest popularity, Carter consistently ran 10 to 15 points behind Rizzo's 1975 vote totals.

It seems apparent, then, that Carter might well have received a 250,000-vote margin in Philadelphia without Rizzo's machine.

But the mayor was in the right place at the right time, and much of the credit inevitably came his way.

In the post-election euphoria, Rizzo received lavish praise from Carter's local campaign staff and a thank-you telephone call from the president-elect himself.

Bowser, for one, thinks they know better.

"They can read election returns just as well as anybody," he said, "and you better believe they know where that vote came from."

If they don't, you better believe that Bower and his friends will tell them.

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