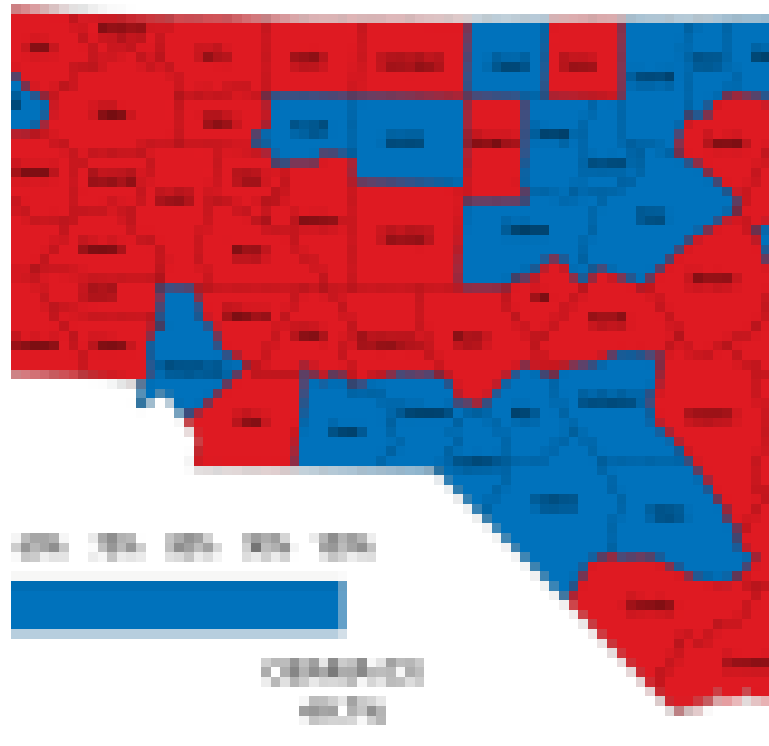# Mapping election returns, 1960–2008

BY DAVID WALBERT

The maps in the slideshow linked here show results for statewide North Carolina elections in presidential election years from 1960 to 2008 — that is, all elections for president and governor and all U.S. Senate elections that occurred in a presidential election year. (Since senators serve six-year terms and each state has two senators, we vote for a senator in two of every three presidential election years.)

On each map, counties are colored red, blue, or yellow depending on which party's candidate won a majority of that county's votes. Republican counties are red and Democratic counties are blue, while counties voting for independent candidates or candidates running for "third parties" are colored yellow. Underneath the map is a bar showing the total vote statewide. Candidates are listed if they received at least 1 percent of the statewide vote.

The maps will help you to see how voting patterns have changed with time and place.

North Carolina elections, 1960–2008[1]

[2]

The maps in this slideshow, drawn from election returns, show how North Carolinians have voted in statewide elections over the past 50 years.

Analyzing the maps

First, read the background essay below the slideshow. Then try to answer these questions.

GEOGRAPHY

1. Which regions of the state have most often had Democratic majorities? Republican? Which parts are evenly split or have gone back and forth?
2. How consistent have these patterns been — how much have they changed over time, from election to election? Does this surprise you? Why or why not?
3. Can you think of anything in the history, geography, or culture of these parts of the state that would help to explain these voting patterns?

SPLIT TICKETS

When people vote for candidates of more than one political party in the same election, they're said to *split their ticket* or ballot. North Carolinians have frequently elected Democrats and Republicans to statewide office in the same year.

1. Have North Carolina voters been more likely to vote Republican or Democratic in elections for national office (President and U.S. Senate)? How has this changed over time?
2. Have North Carolina voters been more likely to vote Republican or Democratic in elections for governor? How has this changed over time?
3. Why might a voter want to vote a *straight ticket* — that is, to vote for a single party's candidates? Think of as many reasons as you can.
4. Why might voters split their tickets? Think of as many reasons as you can.
5. Why might many North Carolinians vote one way in state elections but another in national elections? How might state and national issues or personalities be a factor?

CHANGES IN POPULATION

Now, compare the maps of electoral returns to these maps of changing population[3].

1. What counties have most clearly changed their voting patterns? What, if anything, has changed in those counties? How might those changes affect voting patterns?
2. Do counties with high **urban** populations tend to vote Democratic or Republican? Why might that be?
3. Do counties with high **African American** populations tend to vote Democratic or Republican? Why might that be? (*Note:* The distribution of population by race hasn't changed much over the past forty years, so we didn't include these maps in the slidesho. Use this map for 2000[4].)
4. Look at the maps of elections since 2000. Do counties with high percentages of **newcomers** tend to vote Democratic or Republican? Why might that be — do you think it says more about where the newcomers are coming *from* or about where they're going *to*? Where might the migrants be coming from? What might attract them to North Carolina?

On the web

More from LEARN NC

Visit us on the web at www.learnnc.org to learn more about topics related to this article, including North Carolina, elections, history, political parties, and politics.

Notes

1. See http://www.learnnc.org/lp/mapliner.php?id=ncelections-1960-2010.

2. See http://www.learnnc.org/lp/mapliner.php?id=ncelections-1960-2010.

3. See http://www.learnnc.org/lp/mapliner.php?id=nc-recent-census-maps.

4. See http://www.learnnc.org/lp/multimedia/14163.

About the author

DAVID WALBERT

David Walbert is Editorial and Web Director for LEARN NC in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Education. He is responsible for all of LEARN NC's educational publications, oversees development of various web applications including LEARN NC's website and content management systems, and is the organization's primary web, information, and visual designer. He has worked with LEARN NC since August 1997.

David holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of *Garden Spot: Lancaster County, the Old Order Amish, and the Selling of Rural America*, published in 2002 by Oxford University Press. With LEARN NC, he has written numerous articles for K–12 teachers on topics such as historical education, visual literacy, writing instruction, and technology integration.