

Election Swayed By Minority Group Vote

Minority Voters Decide Election

By LLOYD L. GENERAL

The shouting and the tumult has died; the campaign buttons have suddenly become as obsolete as high button shoes; the victors are looking forward to the future, and the defeated have gone off to lick their wounds.

Election Day 1962 is over and the pundits have moved to the center of the stage to peer, probe and predict just what will happen as a result of the changes.

It is generally conceded that the Democrats and President Kennedy came out stronger in the overall picture, but there was concern about the surprisingly strong showing of Republicans in the South.

Politicians and pollsters divide voters into two groups and aspiring candidates bend over backwards to woo certain blocs whose vote might well mean the difference between victory and defeat. One such group is what is called the "Negro vote."

This election year saw a marked change in the attitudes of politicians toward the Negro segment of the population. Not since Reconstruction Days had so many Negroes in so many states run for high office. And never had they been so successful.

In Georgia, Leroy Johnson became the first Negro in the state legislature in more than 50 years by winning election to

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the state senate from the 35th district of Fulton (Atlanta) county. He defeated the Republican candidate, T. M. Alexander, also a Negro, by an overwhelming margin.

Edward W. Brooks was elected attorney general of Massachusetts; Gerald Lamb became the state treasurer in Connecticut; and Otis N. Smith won a seat on the supreme court bench of Michigan.

In Los Angeles, Augustus Hawkins won and thus became the fifth member of his race in the U.S. House of Representatives. In fact, there was hardly a state where Negroes did not win elective office.

If the Negro politicians set new records, Negro voters were not to be outdone. In the North, the South, West and East they turned out in record numbers, making themselves a force to be reckoned with.

In such cities as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit and Atlanta, the Negro vote meant the balance of power, and in most cases it was used to best advantage.

There were, however, a few exceptions, and in those exceptions many an observer found cause for concern. One of the most glaring facts was the tendency of Negro voters to cast a straight Democratic ballot, thus perpetuating the claim that the Negro vote is a "captive vote" for the Democratic party.

In some cases this "bloc voting" caused harm. Perhaps the most outstanding example was in Chicago, where Mrs. Jewel Rogers LaFontant lost her bid for election to the Superior court.

Mrs. LaFontant, who seconded the nomination of presidential hopeful Richard Nixon at the 1960 national convention, was endorsed by every major civic group in the county. She had the unanimous backing of all the city's newspapers and

had a massive corps of citizens working in her behalf.

But, Mrs. LaFontant is a Republican, and in the Democratic stronghold of Chicago she went down to stunning defeat. There is no doubt that her loss was caused by the overwhelming tendency of the Negro voters of Chicago to vote Democratic.

No one could deny that Mrs. LaFontant was eminently qualified for the post of Superior court judge, and it must be said that her defeat was not in the best interests of either the Negro population or the city itself.

Republicans, however, have begun to wake up to the potential of the Negro vote, and this year they slated more Negroes than ever before. This can bring only good, for it is an acknowledged fact that if Negroes vote as a group, their vote should be for the candidate rather than the party.

One of the most heartening factors in the national picture was the change in the South. In some areas in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia, Negroes voted for the first time since Reconstruction.

The hard-fought battle against discrimination at the polls was beginning to pay off, and there was every likelihood that in the presidential elections of 1964 the Negro vote in the South will be a formidable force.

Surprisingly, there was little of the race-baiting which usually accompanies political campaigns in southern areas. In fact, in the primaries, many a die-hard segregationist bit the political dust and moderates moved to the fore.

An exception was in Alabama, where a stern test of the segregation policies of the state university is expected shortly. There Gov.-Elect George Wallace said his overwhelming victory indicates that most Alabamians approve of his die-hard stand against integration.

Wallace pledged during his campaign to go to jail rather than submit to federal ordered desegregation. He received more than 225,000 votes to

about 10,000 for independent Frank Walls in the general election.

"If there had been 50,000 or 60,000 against me, then that may have been a sign of disapproval," Wallace said.

No such claim was made by Orville Faubus, who won reelection as governor of Arkansas, where federal troops were first used to force school integration. It may well be that Faubus knew, as Wallace will soon know, that such fire-breathing defiance is mere shouting in the wind.

Come January, Negroes will take their places in the halls of government from Washington to California. They will serve in the legislative, executive and judicial branches, proud symbols of a changing America attitude.

And there is every indication that, more than ever, the Negro voter realizes the power of his franchise and will cease to be a pawn in the political game.

Never again will any politician or any political party either look upon the Negro vote as his private fief or ignore it. For in 1962 that vote became a major factor in American politics.