An Analysis Of Voting Trends In Lewis And Clark County From 1948 To 1968

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An Analysis of Voting Trends
In Lewis and Clark County
From 1948 to 1968

by
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A Thesis
submitted to
The Department of Political Science of
Carroll College
In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Academic Honors
with the B.A. Degree in Political Science

Carroll College
Helena, Montana
March 28, 1969
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INTRODUCTION

Lewis and Clark County has, throughout the period of its existence, been one of Montana's most unique and important political districts. Since 1965, Lewis and Clark County has also been known as Montana's twenty-first political district. This new designation was adopted after the Montana legislature was redistricted and reapportioned in order to conform with the U.S. Supreme Court's "one man, one vote" ruling on reapportionment. Consequently, the names Lewis and Clark County and District 21 will be used interchangeably in this thesis.

Although the entire political history of District 21 is colorful and important in understanding current political trends, this thesis will concentrate primarily on an analysis of the last twenty years. It has been limited to the time between 1948 and 1968 for three significant reasons:

1. By focusing our attention only on the last two decades, we will be able to gain a better perspective of present political trends, especially of the 1968 general election results.

2. During the last sixteen years, there have been three different, consecutive Republican governors and administrations in Montana. By going back to 1948, we will be able to better observe the effect the last Democratic administration, and the three subsequent Republican administrations, have had on local politics in this county.

3. The unlikelihood of major changes occurring over a shorter time period in the political make-up of the county also figured into our limiting this analysis to the past twenty years.

Lewis and Clark County is not unique because it is unpredictable. As a former state Democratic Central Committee executive secretary stated:
"It's often the most predictable county in Montana, although at times it's a little difficult to understand."¹ The county's singular political consciousness lies then, not with unusual tendencies, but rather in political characteristics which can be found only in this district. Primary and most important of these political traits is the location of the state capitol in Helena. The location of Montana's statehouse at Helena makes Lewis and Clark County the ideal district in which a study can be made to determine the possible impact state political trends can have on local politics. A close personal friend, with a good insight into the operations of state government, remarked: "The biggest business in Helena revolves around state politics, and somehow and sometime nearly everyone here becomes involved with it."² The influence of the state government on local politics is not the only characteristic which has an impact on the voting trends in this district; however, since this influence is the county's most dominant characteristic, it will be given special emphasis in this thesis.

This analysis of the political trends of District 21 is based upon examination of voting results between 1948 and 1968, and through personal interviews with people closely connected with the political status of the county, as well as other, less important factors. The personal interview approach was used to gather information instead of a survey of all voters because it was felt that the views of those most closely connected with the political scene would provide a better insight into

¹Mr. Ron Richards, former Montana Democratic Central Committee Executive Secretary and present Administrative Aide to Governor Forrest H. Anderson. Private Interview. Helena, Montana. Nov. 19, 1968.

factors which contribute to the political environment of this county. It was also felt that a survey approach affecting all voters might infringe upon the electors' sacred right of not having to express or explain the manner in which they marked their ballots.

The reader must be forewarned that of all the social institutions which exhibit certain inconsistencies, our political structure is foremost in displaying them. Since the voting results of any one area are often subject to change, and change without worthwhile explanation, one must be cautioned not to make voting trends or inclinations into definite, unchangeable patterns. This caution must also be adhered to because the nature of politics permits much speculation on political trends; although they are most often true, they cannot be proven with scientific accuracy. This condition must be taken into account by the readers of this thesis because many views expressed by the persons interviewed are based on their own speculations on the political trends of this county.

The goal of this thesis, then, is to provide an in-depth analysis of the major political traits which have influenced the voters of Lewis and Clark County between 1948 and 1968. It is hoped that this analysis will not only provide a clearer insight into how the location of a state capitol in a county affects its voting characteristics, but that it might also shed some new light on the already colorful political history of this county. Since many political campaigns are based on studies like this one, it is also hoped that this thesis might furnish some new directions for candidates to follow in future elections.
CHAPTER I: LEWIS AND CLARK COUNTY

District 21 is situated in West-central Montana, and it is one of the twenty-four counties which make up Montana's Western or First Congressional District. 1 A large county, it encompasses 3,447 square miles, much of which is composed of mountainous sections of the Continental Divide. 2 Although the geographic size of the county is quite large, its population is concentrated in its south-eastern corner. It is in this section that the cities of Helena and East Helena are located. The county's entire population was estimated in 1967 to be 32,000. The metropolitan area of Helena had a 1967 population estimated at 25,000, with another 1,800 people residing in East Helena. 3 Together, these two communities make up 86.4 per cent of the county's total population. (See Illustration 1 for location of Helena and East Helena.)

Because such a large proportion of the county's population lives in the Helena-East Helena area, it is difficult to assess the political trends of the district without first having a good understanding of the political characteristics of these two communities. So important are they that when one speaks of what is happening politically in Lewis and


2 Lewis and Clark County Commissioner's Office. 1969, Helena, Montana.

Clark County, he is referring to what has occurred in the Helena-East Helena area. The dominance of this area can be seen in the following situation: during the last twenty years, not one state legislator has been elected from the northern, outlying towns of the county. The communities of Wolf Creek, Augusta, and Lincoln have not had one of their own residents represent them during this period.\(^4\) This is not meant to dismiss the influence these rural communities have had on electing legislative candidates; however, it does reveal that most candidates are residents of the more heavily populated southeastern section of the county.

The large concentration of the county's population in Helena and East Helena enables urban interests to prevail over rural interests. A predominance of urban thought is unusual in most of Montana's political districts, for, despite the recent reapportionment of the state legislature, there is still a strong rural interest evidenced in most districts.

The Helena-East Helena area did benefit from the reapportionment of the state legislature in 1965. The new ruling provided for the election of two state senators from this district, where before, only one senator had represented each county; it also allowed for the election of four state representatives from this district where before there had been three.\(^5\)

Farming and ranching interests were not completely decimated by reapportionment: they remain today strong and influential forces in this county, and in the state. There are few elected officials in Montana who do not take the agricultural interest into account, whether they were elected from an urban area or from an area which was primarily rural in its


\(^5\) Ibid., Reapportionment's Effect on the County, 1965.
orientation.

Although Lewis and Clark County has few large industries, an exception being the existence of two smeltering companies in East Helena, it does have one of the highest per household incomes in the state. In 1967, the per household income in Lewis and Clark County was listed at $8,316. For the city of Helena, it was slightly higher. The figure given was $8,779. There are two significant factors which contribute to the existence of Helena's high per household income. The first is Helena's position as a strong financial and business center. Many corporations have their central offices located here. The second essential factor is again the location of the state government in Helena. Since a large number of financial, business, and state administrative positions exist in Helena, it follows that the personnel who head these departments are usually highly trained and well-paid individuals. An example of this can be seen with the state government since approximately fifty per cent of its payroll goes to residents of Helena. The other big factor is this: because there are so many administrative offices here, there is a need for a large number of female workers in these offices. Often, married women fill these office positions and thereby enable many households to have two full-time adult wage earners.

This extremely high per household income should not suggest to the readers of this thesis that all the residents of Lewis and Clark

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6 Mr. Walter Murfitt, Lewis and Clark County Republican Central Committee Chairman. Private Interview. Helena, Montana. March 12, 1969.


County live in luxury; however, it does show that a well-established upper middle-class group lives here. Since the middle-class forms the backbone of America's political structure, they are extremely important in establishing political trends. This is especially true in this district where the upper middle-class seems to be the most evident and powerful group.

The existence of the state government in Helena provides capitol city voters with a tremendous advantage over other Montana voters, because they can often judge at first hand many of the candidates running for state offices and the issues involved in these elections. By having this personal knowledge of these candidates and issues, the electorate of this county often determines for themselves the attributes of certain candidates, and therefore they do not have to rely on campaign propaganda provided by the candidates. Even if the voters of this district are unable to obtain first-hand knowledge of a candidate, they still have the potential to be the best informed voter in the state because of the second-hand knowledge available to them. Second-hand or printed knowledge of a candidate is very evident here in Helena because of the good coverage the news media give to the activities of our state political institutions. Being the capitol city, Helena also qualifies as the political convention center of the state. The voters of Helena receive constant news coverage of the year-around operations of the state government, of the bi-annual state legislature, and of the numerous state political gatherings that occur in Helena. Knowledge of these events is provided by the major news services as well as a daily paper and a weekly paper.

*Lewis and Clark County Welfare Office's 1968 child welfare records indicate that for a county this size, there is a relatively high percentage of children on welfare roles. Helena, Montana. March, 1969*
which is known for its liberal stance when concerned with political events. All of these news media give a wide and divergent view of the candidates and issues involved in state elections. Whether a Helena voter possesses first- or second-hand knowledge, he does have the opportunity to be the best informed voter in the state.

The number of registered voters in Lewis and Clark County listed for the 1968 general election was 16,859. Out of this number, 14,686 actually voted in this last general election. This represents approximately 87.1 percent of those registered to vote, a percentage much higher than the national average which is approximately sixty-six percent. The best reason provided for this high turnout at the polls can be attributed to the fact that the residents of this district are among the best informed and most conscientious voters in the state.

To summarize then, Lewis and Clark is a large county, basically urban-oriented, and greatly dominated by the Helena-East Helena area. Besides being the home of Montana's state government, Helena is also the central location of many business and financial firms. The county's residents are predominantly middle-class oriented people who do enjoy a high per household income. Its voters have the opportunity to become the best informed since they are able to obtain both first- and second-hand knowledge of candidates. These factors will be given considerable attention in the further analysis of political characteristics exhibited by the voters of Lewis and Clark County.

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10 These being the United Press, the Associated Press, Helena Independent Record and People's Voice.

11 Lewis and Clark County Clerk and Recorder's Office, 1968 general election vote totals.
CHAPTER II: A CONSERVATIVE COUNTY

If a general hypothesis were to be made concerning which political party is the most dominant in Lewis and Clark County, it would indicate a small but important plurality of Republican voters living here. What this small majority of Republican voters signifies is this: it is possible for a Republican from this district to receive all the Republican votes and win an election; however, it would be impossible for a Democratic candidate to receive only all the Democratic votes and win an election. The Democratic candidate, to be victorious, must receive some Republican votes. This theory is based on the assumption that third party or independent voters will divide their votes evenly among both major parties. The existence of the Republican plurality of voters in this district over the last twenty years can be verified by both an analysis of the county's voting records and by general consensus of local leaders of both parties. These leaders feel that without a doubt most voters are Republican-oriented. The voting results for state legislative candidates from 1948 to 1968 will indicate how strong the tendency is for this district to vote for Republican candidates for the legislature. (See Table 1.)
TABLE 1

Republican orientation in Montana State Legislature
In District 21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State Senators</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>State Representatives</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1966</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1968</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1Lewis and Clark County Clerk and Recorder's Office. 1948-1968 general election of State legislators.

*Reapportionment went into effect in 1965. This allowed District twenty-one to have two senators and four representatives.
Although these results help to confirm the existence of a Republican plurality, one might ask how the Democrats were able to capture a majority in the Montana House of Representatives in 1950, 1958, and 1964, from District 21. The 1950 election will be discussed in a later chapter in the analysis of state government. The 1958 and 1964 general elections, which provided the unusual plurality of Democrats in the state House of Representatives can be attributed to three important factors. They are:

1. The ability of the Democrats in 1958 to attract two candidates who were well-known residents of the Helena area.2

2. The national ticket in 1964 was highlighted by the presidential elections. This election has since come to be known as the "Johnson Landslide of 1964." The national upsurge in Democratic votes was felt to help both state and local candidates.

3. The 1958 and 1964 state ticket were headed by the very popular U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D.-Mont.). Senator Mansfield’s name was able to convince many independents to vote Democratic in these two election years. Senator Mansfield, himself, received a very large vote in this district, both in 1958 when he received 8,047 votes and in 1964, when his vote total was 8,506.3

The results of the 1950, 1958, and 1964 elections illustrate the variability of local politics, and the seemingly small but important factors that can interrupt the continuity of established voting trends.

Why the majority of this county's voters tend to vote for Republican candidates above the county level is a complex question. The most valid thought concerns the domination of the district by sixteen consecutive years of Republican administrations in the Montana statehouse. It is

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2 These two Democrats were James Casey and George McGuffick. Lewis and Clark County Clerk and Recorder's Office, 1958 general election.

3 Lewis and Clark County Clerk and Recorder's Office, 1958 general elections.
generally agreed that the party which controls the governor's chair has the advantage in the county since many members of the party in power do reside here. They fill many of the top administrative positions in the state government. Closely associated with this is the strong middle-class atmosphere which exists in Helena. A leading member of the Republican party in the county feels that Helena is not so Republican as it is just generally conservative in its outlook. His belief is, "the Republican party is not that large in itself; however, many state employees who are not committed to any political party tend to be conservative, and thus cast their vote Republican. This makes Helena seem more strongly Republican than it actually is." Another factor this astute gentleman pointed out was his classification of Helena as a "well-established upper middle-class town which also reflects upon the conservative and consequently Republican nature of Helena." This statement was qualified and did not associate political conservatism and Republican voting as being synonymous terms, because conservatives are not necessarily Republicans, nor are Republicans necessarily conservative. Nonetheless, in Montana politics, there is a closer relationship between conservative voters and being a Republican, than, say, in being conservative and being labeled a Democrat. Also, it should be noted that the nature of conservatism in the county in most cases is related to "financial conservatives" and is not associated with radical causes.

An association between what has been classified as the upper middle-class, and a tendency for them to vote Republican can be made through an analysis of some key Republican precincts in Helena. A look at the

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4Mr. Walter Murfitt. March 12, 1969.
5Tbid.
map of Helena (see Illustration 2) reveals the location of Republican strongholds to be in Helena's older but still highly fashionable upper central side, and in the newly developing residential areas on both the east and west sides of Helena. Most of the rural areas of the county follow the pattern set by Helena voters, since they also tend to be mostly Republican or at least conservative.  

An unusual contradiction of the Republican voting trend exists in certain precincts of Helena. An analysis of the 1968 primary election of gubernatorial candidates reveals a strong following for the Democratic candidates. In the 1968 primary election, the total number of persons who voted for Democratic gubernatorial candidates was 6,014, while 5,326 voted for the Republican candidates for governor. This was not an election in which there was a cross over of voters, that is, persons who belonged to one party but voted for candidates of the other party in order to enhance the positions of their own party candidates in the general election. Since there were two leading candidates in both parties vying for their party's gubernatorial nomination, it was believed that the voters followed their party lines. A look at Illustration 3 shows a much larger area of Democratic strength than one would find from viewing Illustration 2. This paradoxical situation complicates any clear understanding that might result from an analysis of voting trends in both primary and general election returns.

The only areas of consistent Democratic strength seem to be in the northern and southern sections of Helena. Although it is not shown

6 Lewis and Clark County Clerk and Recorder's Office. 1968 general elections.

7 Ibid., 1968 primary election, Governor's Office, District 21.
MAP OF HELENA MONTANA

KEY:
Red: Republican Areas
Yellow: Democratic Areas
Blue: Even Areas
Illustration 3

MAP OF HELENA MONTANA

KEY:
Red: Republican Areas
Yellow: Democratic Areas
on either of the maps of Helena, the real stronghold of the Democratic party is in East Helena, where a strong organized labor vote exists.

A look at the precinct vote count for the 1968 general election of state legislators from District 21 will show the strength of the Republican vote. Based on the results of that election, the county's thirty-eight precincts may be labeled as being Strongly Democrat, Slightly Democrat, Strongly Republican, Slightly Republican or Even Precincts. The Republican voting can be seen clearly. The results of this classification are:

1. Strongly Republican 18 precincts
2. Slightly Republican 7 precincts
3. Strongly Democrat 3 precincts
4. Slightly Democrat 3 precincts
5. Even Precincts 7 precincts

The lack of a strong Democratic vote in this district can, like the Republican vote, be traced to the economic and sociological make up of the county. The basis for the traditional Democratic voting strength is the labor vote of blue collar workers. The best example of this in Montana, and possibly in the nation, can be seen in the political make up of Silver Bow and Deer Lodge counties. In these two counties, a strong organized labor vote has greatly contributed to the strength of the Democratic party in Montana, and especially in the Western Congressional District. As stated earlier, there are few large industries in Lewis and

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8 These categories were created by labeling a precinct where the four candidates of one party received the top four vote totals as being Strongly Democratic or Strongly Republican. Where three of the four top vote getters were of one party, it was labeled Slightly Democratic or Slightly Republican. When the precincts were split between two Democrats and two Republicans being the top vote getters, it was labeled an even precinct. Lewis and Clark County Clerk and Recorder's Office, 1968 general election of state representatives.

9 Ibid.
Clark County, which itself explains why it is not a highly unionized or Democratic county. The major exception again to this is East Helena, where the location of the two smelting companies enables it to be a strong union and Democratic community. The current state director of Montana's AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education, or C.O.P.E., as it is more commonly known, summed up this situation quite well when he stated:

"We have to face the facts: Helena is not a strong union town as it lacks the industry, which in turn hurts the Democrat candidates here."\(^{10}\)

The assessment by this labor leader can be verified by the fact that at no time during the twenty-year period covered in this thesis has there been elected a candidate from this district with close ties to organized labor. Although the Democrats have elected candidates from this county who have usually supported labor union causes, they have not been known to have completely adopted a pro-labor position.\(^{11}\) This situation even exists with the current governor, Forrest H. Anderson, a native of Helena who got his political start here, as an article in the Helena Independent Record reports, "even within his own party, Anderson has only lukewarm relations with the main Democratic power groups: organized labor, represented by the AFL-CIO, the farmers, centered around the Farmers' Union.\(^{12}\) Part of Governor Anderson's not being committed to labor groups relates to the conservative nature of Helena voters. It again shows that a Democratic candidate, in trying to win an election in

\(^{10}\) Mr. James Murry, State Director of the Montana AFL-CIO. Private Interview. Helena, Montana. November 7, 1968.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.

Lewis and Clark County, cannot closely align himself with any liberal organization. Organized labor in Montana is usually classified as being liberals-oriented. The Democratic candidate, as stated before, must capture some Republican votes to win here, and as a result, he must express moderate views to appeal to his mostly conservative constituency. 

So far, this paper has concentrated on the election of personnel to state offices from this district. An analysis of elected officials in county offices does show a reversal of the Republican voting trend: most county offices are now, as they have been for quite a few years, predominantly Democrat-controlled. The current county auditor, a seemingly permanently elected Democrat official, attributes this to the fact that most people are not vitally concerned with county offices. He believes that "most of the county offices actually have a non-partisan base as they are concerned with administrative procedure more than with policy creation; however, because they are public officials, and since political parties need a base of operations, these offices are associated with a partisan political party. It is usually the case of the person involved in the administration of county offices being more important than the few policies they must decide."¹³

The mark of a well-organized political party is its ability to attract independent voters to its side. The independent or non-committed voter must be captured in crucial or close elections. From viewing Illustrations 2 and 3, it becomes apparent that the Republican state legislature from District 21 was able to capture in the general election many votes of independent voters who tended to vote Democratic in the primary

elections. One of the best means used to attract the independent voters is through voter registration drives. This could be especially important for the Democrats, since it is generally agreed that seven out of ten non-registered voters would, if registered, vote Democratic. Since most Republican voters are felt to be more articulate and conscientious voters than their Democratic counterparts, they are the ones most likely to be registered to vote. A concerted voter registration effort would in this district, then, probably be most beneficial to the Democrats.

A brief summation of this chapter will reinforce the idea that District 21 tends to be politically conservative and therefore, Republican candidates above the county level prevail in most elections. The conservative mood of Helena is based primarily on its being a government town, and also because of its upper middle-class classification. Since most of Helena and the county is not highly industrialized, and consequently not very unionized, the Democrats lack their traditional basis for support in urban areas. The final unique characteristic of this county is the ability of the Democrats to control the county offices.

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CHAPTER III: PERSONALITIES OF CANDIDATES

As tremendously valuable as a party label is for running for a political office, the electorate often seems to ignore it and express a greater concern over who a candidate is and what he does, than in what he stands for. The 1968 general election of state legislators from this district shows that the men who ran for these offices held rather prominent social positions in Helena. These candidates are employed in what might also be referred to as highly professional jobs. Two of the candidates, Hibbard and Patrick, are bankers.¹ Three are lawyers (Erickson, Harrison, and Loble), one is a doctor (Cashmore), another is a college professor (Clinch). There is also a businessman (Corey), an insurance agent (Small), and a retired rancher (Adair). From these ten candidates, the five men elected were the two bankers, two of the lawyers (Harrison and Loble), and the doctor. One might refer to these men as being part of an imaginary political establishment because they all share a sort of sameness in their professional status. This political establishment is non-existent in any real form; however, what the election of these state legislators does indicate is that fairly professional personnel do dominate the politics of this district. The existence of highly professional personnel in elected bodies is not unusual for this county. It reflects a trend prominent in most state legislatures, and even in our national legislature. The trend is this: the elected legislators on all

¹Henry Hibbard also has ranching interests. 1969 City of Helena Directory.
levels of government are men mostly from self-employed professions (lawyers, businessmen, ranchers, doctors, and even bankers fit into this classification), who have the time and opportunity to devote to politics. Another factor which accounts for the large number of personnel from self-employed professions in politics is the social contact these professions have. Most self-employed persons outwardly serve the public, and, thus, are able to become well-known, which in turn greatly enhances their chances of being elected.

As far as the caliber of these men is concerned, most are, because of their position, well-educated and well-trained persons who are quite capable of conducting the business of government. Since the biggest decisions made in state legislatures are often concerned with financial problems, it stands to reason that business-minded persons are best qualified to solve them. As has been suggested, though, the biggest weakness of always having representatives who come from a highly professional background is the possibility that they would primarily represent the interests of their own constituents, and as a result, the interests of those not quite as professional in job or social position might not receive the consideration due them.

Another characteristic which has proven to be greatly beneficial to a candidate in this county is the previous appearance of his last name before the voters. Of the ten candidates who ran for the state legislature from this county in 1968, four were men whose names, because of their fathers or other relatives, were familiar to the voters.

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2 1969 City of Helena Directory.

3 Mr. Joe Stewart.
The familiar names among the Democrats were Adair, Erickson and Loble, while Harrison was the only Republican associated with a family name. Although only two of these men were elected, a familiar name is still important: it did help all the candidates in the 1968 primary elections. The best example of the popular name theory in use in the county can be seen in the Loble family. A recent article in the Helena Independent Record referred to the Loble’s as "a three generation family of lawmakers, possibly the only such living trio in the nation." The Loble family consists of the grandfather, District Judge Lester H. Loble, who served in the Montana House of Representatives in 1923, and 1925, and was minority leader during the 1925 session. His son, Henry, served in the 1949, 1951, and 1953 House assemblies. He was majority leader in 1951, and minority leader in 1953. Judge Loble’s grandson, Lester Loble II, is at present a representative from District 21 in the 1969 legislative session. All three Loble’s are Helena attorneys. Although the familiar name theory does not mean a person can get elected only on his name, it should suggest that it usually is an enormous advantage to a candidate if his last name has previously appeared on the election ballot.

Although most voters from this county do tend to vote with one particular party, most still vote for the personal characteristics of a

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4 Albert Adair’s brother is Hugh Adair, a long-time justice of the Montana Supreme Court. He retired in 1968.
Lief “Bert” Erickson’s father, Lief Erickson, ran for both Governor of Montana, and U.S. Senator.
Lester Loble II’s father was a state legislator and his grandfather was a district judge. See footnotes 5 and 6.
James T. Harrison, Jr.’s father is the current Chief Justice of the Montana Supreme Court. 1969 City of Helena Directory.


6 Ibid.
candidate rather than the issues a candidate or his party might advocate. The 1968 general election can be used as one example where personalities were more important than the issues. During the 1968 general election, the big issue in Montana was whether the 1969 state legislature should adopt a three per cent sales tax on most of the commodities sold in the state. The sales tax was fully endorsed by the incumbent governor, Tim Babcock, and was an official part of the 1968 Montana Republican party platform. Yet few of the Republican candidates for state legislature from this district openly supported the sales tax in their campaigns. In this same election, the Democrats endorsed an anti-sales tax position as part of their party platform. Even though most voters in the state rejected the sales tax by failing to re-elect as governor its chief sponsor, the incumbent Tim Babcock, the voters in Lewis and Clark County did manage to send a majority of Republicans back to the state legislature. The conclusion reached from this is that many voters do not associate issues with candidates, and many candidates do not associate themselves with issues developed by their own party when they might prove unpopular with the voters.

An accurate sketch can now be drawn of the candidate most likely to win an elective office from this district. A Democrat has the best


8Mr. Walter Murfitt. March 12, 1969.


chances of winning a county office, although much depends on how well-known his Republican opponent is. The District 21 candidate most likely to enter a successful bid for the state legislature would be a Republican with slightly conservative leanings. It would help if he had a professional job, which enabled him to make valuable social contacts. Also, if possible, a familiar name will help him at least to get through the primary election. If the candidate for the state legislative body were a Democrat, his two greatest assets would be a popular name, and the ability to do some hard campaigning. The door to door campaign by the candidate would be the best approach. It has proven to be the most successful for the last two Democrats who were elected from this district.\footnote{According to Mr. William Manning, February 19, 1969.}

If a good impression can be created by a Democrat on television, this too would be a worthwhile campaign practice. For the Helena native interested in winning a higher state office, it would be, following past traditions, to his advantage to be labeled a Democrat. It would help if he had a winning record in this county, although this is not an absolute necessity, since many Helena residents do win state offices, but lose this district. It is unusual that the Democrats from this district do so well in state-wide elections. One would think that Helena, and therefore Lewis and Clark County, being as conservative and Republican-thinking as they are, would promote Republican candidates for state offices; however, a reversal of this situation is the actuality.

This unique characteristic can be traced to the dominance of the state governor's chair by Republicans for the last sixteen years. As much as this helps the local Republican candidates in winning state legislative positions, it might have hindered them from going on to higher
state offices. It can also be considered simply as one of the peculiarities of local political trends.
CHAPTER IV: IMPACT OF STATE GOVERNMENT

In the beginning of this thesis it was noted that the primary reason for analyzing Lewis and Clark County was to study the impact of state government on local politics. Without any exceptions, every person interviewed for background material for this paper expressed the belief that the key to understanding politics in this district was to understand the nature of the state government and the personnel employed by it. There is estimated to be about 3,000 full-time state employees who reside in or around Helena.\(^1\) Assuming that almost all of these employees are eligible to vote, and also assuming that a large majority of them are married, creates the possibility of having 5,000 to 6,000 votes which could be directly associated with the state government.\(^2\) One more assumption which must be made to clarify this situation concerns the theory that a husband and wife will vote for the same candidate for the benefit of the whole family. It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of votes cast by those associated with the state government; however, if close to 6,000 out of the 14,686 votes actually cast in the 1968 general election were associated with state employees, the influence they could have on local politics would be tremendous.\(^3\)

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\(^1\)Mr. Walter Murfitt.

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Lewis and Clark County Clerk and Recorder's Office. Vote totals, 1968.
The candidates who run for elective office from this district must often structure their campaigns to appeal to this large concentration of state employees.

A local Democratic official feels that at least 1,000 votes in this county are a direct result of what might be known as the "administration in power" or "status quo" theory. This theory carries with it the belief that during a gubernatorial election, this significant number of state employees would, because of loyalty to the present administration or because of fear of job security, vote for an incumbent governor if he were up for re-election. To validate this theory, the voting records of the last six gubernatorial elections from this district were examined. We go back first to the 1948 general election, which was, before the 1968 general election, the last time a Democratic candidate had captured the governor's chair. The strength of the incumbent becomes very evident. See Table 2 for clarification.

These figures reveal that in every election, except the 1952 election, the incumbent governor, in trying for re-election, was able to carry the county by close to, or over 1,000 votes. The only exception to this was former Governor John W. Bonner, the only incumbent Democrat, who lost this county by thirty-five votes in his 1952 bid for re-election; however, he did increase his total vote count in the 1952 election by more than 1,000 votes from his initial vote total four years previous. Even though the incumbent governors have faired well in Lewis and Clark County, they have on these occasions, been defeated by the voters of the rest of the state. This occurred in 1948, when the incumbent

\[Mr. \, Dan \, Newman\]
TABLE 2

Gubernatorial Races: 1948 through 1968

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Votes Received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948:</td>
<td>John W. Bonner (D.)</td>
<td>4,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Sam C. Ford (R.)</td>
<td>6,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952:</td>
<td>*John W. Bonner (D.)</td>
<td>6,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J. Hugo Aronson (R.)</td>
<td>6,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956:</td>
<td>*J. Hugo Aronson (R.)</td>
<td>7,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arnold H. Olson (D.)</td>
<td>5,323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960:</td>
<td>Donald G. Nutter (R.)</td>
<td>8,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paul T. Cannon (D.)</td>
<td>4,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964:</td>
<td>*Tim Babcock (R.)</td>
<td>7,545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roland R. Renne (D.)</td>
<td>6,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968:</td>
<td>*Tim Babcock (R.)</td>
<td>7,491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forrest H. Anderson (D.)</td>
<td>6,398</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Indicates incumbent governor.

+Tim Babcock was the incumbent governor in 1964, succeeding Governor Donald Nutter upon his death in 1962.
Governor Sam Ford lost to John W. Bonner by 26,475 votes\(^6\), but carried Lewis and Clark County, in 1952 when the then incumbent Governor John W. Bonner lost to J. Hugo Aronson by 5,056 votes but won in Lewis and Clark County\(^7\), and in 1968, when Governor Tim Babcock lost to Forrest H. Anderson by 34,049 votes\(^8\), although he won in this county. These figures indicate the ability of the incumbents to almost always gain a plurality of votes in the county.

It can definitely be seen that the state employees do have some say in the outcome of gubernatorial races. The 1968 general election especially gives great emphasis to this phenomenon in Montana politics. The election in 1968 of Montana's governor and lieutenant governor shows just how influential the last sixteen years of Republican administration in Helena have been in the make up of the county's politics. Both the current Governor, Forrest H. Anderson, and the present Lieutenant Governor, Tom Judge, are Democrats and Helena natives, who have previously been elected to public offices. Governor Anderson served as Montana's Attorney General from 1957 to 1968. Each time he was re-elected to that office, the electorate of Lewis and Clark County presented him with a plurality of votes; however, in his bid for the governor's office in 1968, which is a more powerful and influential position than the attorney general's office, he failed to carry this county: he lost to incumbent Governor Tim Babcock by a little over 1,000 votes.\(^9\)

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\(^7\)*Ibid.*, p. 357.

\(^8\)*Montana Secretary of State's Office. 1968 general election. Helena, Montana.*

\(^9\)*Ibid.*
The same circumstance surrounded Lieutenant Governor Tom Judge, who had served three sessions in the Montana House of Representatives, and one term in the state Senate. The last three times he has run for office, he was the top vote getter for his elected office from this district. However, he too failed by almost 1,000 votes to carry District 21, his home district, in his otherwise successful bid for the lieutenant governor's office.\(^{10}\)

The hypothesis formed from the administration in power theory has been substantiated, not only by the voting results, but by a general consensus of the leaders of both political parties in Helena. The next question that might be asked is whether this status quo vote of some state employees filters down even to candidates for the state legislature from this county. A general consensus of Republican and Democratic leaders here has determined that the local Republican party's organization and its candidates for the state legislature have benefited from the existence of Republican administrations in Helena over the last sixteen years. Earlier in this thesis it was mentioned that one of the years during the last twenty in which the Democrats gained a plurality in state representation from the district was 1950.\(^{11}\) This off-year election came during the last Democratic administration in Helena before the present one. John W. Bonner was governor during this time, and it was felt that his Democratic organization did help to strengthen the local Democratic organization, which in turn was instrumental in the election of the two Democrats to the state House of Representatives.\(^{12}\)

\(^{10}\)Ibid.

\(^{11}\)See Chapter II, Table 1, footnote 1.

\(^{12}\)Mr. Dan Newman.
The ability of the Democrats to pick up more legislative seats from this county in the next two to four years will show how valid is the theory that some state employees will vote a complete Democratic ticket. It can logically be assumed that with a Democratic governor in office until 1972, the employees of his administration, although officially un-committed to any party, would tend to vote Democratic. If all the Democratic candidates for the state legislature from this district do increase their vote counts substantially in the next two elections, then this theory might be considered reliable.

A brief summary of this chapter reinforces the underlying theme of this paper that state government employees do have a tremendous impact on political trends in District 21, especially concerning the election of candidates to the top state offices. The validity of the "status quo" theory makes it an important characteristic which all candidates for state offices must take into consideration. The influence of one party's heading the administration of state government also helps the local party organization which in turn can be of help to its candidates for the legislative assembly from this county.
CHAPTER V: CHANGES TO COME

There are three possible courses that the political make up of Lewis and Clark County might take in the near future. This first is for it to continue on the same course it has been following for the past twenty years, this being to maintain a majority of Republican officials with Democrats only occasionally entering the picture. The second course that might be followed is for the county to become slightly more conservative because of the possibility of income and property taxes rising sharply. Property taxes are likely to increase substantially because of the closure of parochial schools in the Helena area. This might encourage many voters to vote for a candidate who would support a sales tax which called for decreases in property taxes. The candidates who would support a sales tax in future elections, would most likely be Republicans, since it was the Republican party which strongly supported the sales tax measure in the last general election. Also, it is likely that the residents of Helena, being a strongly middle-class group, might join what was seen last year as a national trend toward more conservative goals.

The third possible change which might occur is more favorable to the Democratic party and its candidates running for the state legislature. In the 1970 and 1972 general elections, there is an excellent possibility for the Democrats to capture a plurality in state legislature seats from this district.

The grounds for these possibilities are:

1 Mr. Dan Newman.
1. The present Democratic state administration will undoubtedly have some impact on increasing the vote total of Democratic candidates.

2. With a Democratic administration in the statehouse, it will have the opportunity to strengthen the county Democratic organization and thereby help all local Democratic candidates.

3. In 1970, U.S. Senator Mike Mansfield (D.-Mont.) will be up for re-election. If Senator Mansfield, who is very popular in the county and state, runs for office again, his name will help even local Democratic candidates in their election bids. 1958 and 1964, the last two years in which Senator Mansfield was re-elected, were also the last two times in which the Democrats from Lewis and Clark County were able to gain a plurality among the state representatives.²

4. If a constitutional amendment lowering the voting age in Montana to nineteen is ratified by the electorate in the next general election, it will enhance the Democrats' chances to gain more seats because it is felt that young voters tend to vote more liberally than older voters, and would therefore tend to vote Democratic.

5. The increased emphasis given to low income groups to participate in government anti-poverty programs has also increased the potential for them to participate in our political process. It is felt that since these low income groups have benefited from liberal programs, they would most likely vote for liberal candidates, who in the county are predominantly Democrats.

These five possible projections on how District 21 might reverse its political situation and become more Democratic-oriented in the future are at the most mere speculation. Yet they remain justifiable possibilities, for knowing the traditions of this county and its ability to change, enables one to recognize the Democratic potential here.

²See Chapter II, footnote 3.
I hope that this paper has achieved the objectives set forth in the introduction: to review Lewis and Clark County's political heritage of the last twenty years in hopes of better understanding the political trends most prominent in it today; and also to provide a projection of which trends might be important in the near future. In the beginning, I stated that District 21 was an unusual political district, and it is. In our country, federalism has distributed governing powers to all three levels of government: federal, state, and county. When two of these governing bodies are located in the same city, it is bound to create a unique political situation. This is what has happened in Helena, and Lewis and Clark County. It is hoped that this thesis did bring out the very important fact that Helena is a government town, and as such, it has a character all its own on the Montana political scene.

It is hoped that this analysis of the last twenty years of political trends in Lewis and Clark County has shown it to be truly a unique, colorful and important Montana political district. I would hope that it always remains so.
I. Interviews


II. Public Records

   "1948-1968 General Elections, Governor's Office, District 21"
   "1968 Primary Elections, Governor's Office, District 21"
   "1958-1964 General Elections, U.S. Senator, District 21"
   "1948-1968 General Elections, State Legislature, District 21"
   "1968 General Elections, State Legislature, District 21, Precinct Vote"

   "Size of Lewis and Clark County"

   "1968 Child Welfare Records"
   "1968 General Election. National and State Offices from all Montana's Districts"

III. Newspaper References


IV. Pamphlets


V. Books


VI. Miscellaneous References
