

Emory University

The Relationship Between Education Level and Votes in 1980 Election

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Abstract

Level of education, as a significant category in many studies, behaves interestingly during presidency election. We analyze 1980 presidency election, which Ronald Reagan beat Jimmy Carter, to demonstrate a relationship between voters' level of education and their choice to the candidates. From the survey data in 1980 NES Panel Study, we build a cross-tabulation table between level of education and votes. The tables generate an interesting result that high educated people tends to vote for Reagan rather than Carter. From the role of education, we believe that education motivated people to understand the social concept, enable them to solve the problem and achieve their goal better with their own rights. In the election, high educated people can more easily see the nature of a social problem and they are more eager to solve the problem with their suffrage right. Under the circumstance of bad economy and hostage crisis, it is not surprisingly that high educated people realized the problem and voted for a president who lead the nation to a better future.

The presidential election of 1980, is one of the most consequential election in United states history. Almost every people believe it would be a highly fierce competition between Carter and Reagan before the election. Surprisingly, the final result turns out to be a one-side dominance. Reagan beat Carter for almost 10% more votes and Republican gained control of Congress for the first time in 28 years. To deeply delve the election, we analyze the relationship between voter's education level and their votes for the candidates from the survey of 1980 NES Panel Study. Interestingly, Carter did not gain enough support from the high educated class. High educated voters for Carter is much fewer than Reagan's supporters or even compare with Carter's own low educated supporters.

In our Survey data, Carter's supporters from high-level education people is far behind the those for Reagan. The relationship in the table 1 is between voters' education level and their choices of president. The variable education level is measured by the years of education range from 0 to 17. we categorized the level of education into two classes at 12 years, which is the time interval of high school education. From the table 1, we could see that the reason why Reagan win the election is that he gained more support in the higher education level voters. As it seen in table 1, Reagan and Carter have about same percentage of support from voters with high school education or lower. Reagan's 51.495% of support contrast with Carter's 48.505% of support did not result in a significant difference that leads to the Reagan's victory. However, Carter's support in the higher education level is dramatically lower than the Reagan's support directly caused Carter's loss. From our data, 68.692% of high educational people vote for Reagan and only 31.308% tends to vote for Carter. More than 30% of difference, which cause Carter loss the election, allows us to pose the question that why education level had a such big influence on Carter's election polls.

(Insert table 1 here.)

To see the problem from another perspective, we could also generate the same problem analyze education level within both candidates' voters. In table 2, it is clear that 51.325% of lower education level voters and 48.675% of higher education level constituted the Reagan's voter group. The average distribution of voters suggests that Reagan has a fairly good election strategy. In Contrast, Carter's voter group has a tremendous gap between lower education level people and higher education level people. People, who voted for Carter, are mostly from lower education level. 68.545% of them has high school or lower education and only 31.455% of them are from higher education level. The imbalance for Carter's supporter implies a same conclusion as our table 1 analysis, that Carter's policy did poorly in the higher education level people relative to lower education level citizens. In both of our data analysis about relationship between education level and votes, the chi-square test p-values only the value equal to 0.00009415. The very small p-value allow us be confident that education level has a significant relationship with the votes result in 1980 election.

(Insert table 2 here.)

People with more schooling are more involved in the political process than those with less schooling. From years of education, people can be more easily for solving the complexity and abstraction of political ideas. It is not difficult for a highly educated person to observe the economic trend and related it to the matching political policy. When participating the election,

well educated people choose a president that can promote the economic development, which in turn also provides individual benefits. At Carter's first term of presidency, the economy was in a bad situation, with high inflation and interest rate. People with less education might not have fully understanding about the complex relationship between inflation rate and politics. While, well educated people saw the defects of Carter's political proposition relevant to economy and looked for a new proposition that can stimulate the economy. During the election, Carter showed a comparatively pessimistic about economic with fiscal discipline instead of an economic recovery plan. On the same time, Reagan gave people an optimistic position and implement a supply-side economic policy. When the whole country dissatisfied with economy, high educated people realize the pivot to the problem and viewed Reagan as a solution to the problem. They turn their favor to Reagan instead of Carter because they knew how to use their rights to contribute to the country. Their knowledge helped them to get a better understanding of social problem and allowed them to make a choice to solve the problem.

Besides the ability to analysis the political problem, highly educated people are more likely to express a sense of citizen duty than less educated people. During the time of Carter's first term, the nation faced the problem of hostage crisis in Iran. 50 Americans had been held by Islamic militants. Even though Carter tried many ways to negotiation, his attitude to the hostage problem was so powerless that incurred plenty of criticism. Highly educated people, with a strong felt of citizenship, anticipated a potent solution to rescue the hostage. However, in April, a failed rescue action, leaded people to suspect whether Carter is a competent leader. Reagan, on the other hand, showed a relative bellicose attitude to the foreign policy. With a stronger duty of citizen, high educated people could be triggered more by the hostage crisis. During the election,

they will concern about the issue and vote for a candidate that in accord to their own judgment for the issue.

Based on the above two point, we observe that high educated people, who tend to understand the political policy behind the social phenomena and eager to show their duty of citizenship, have a greater possibility to unsatisfied with Carter's political proposition and vote for Reagan to look for an innovation. Carter's political proposition pay too much attention on detail while Reagan provides people with a greater blueprint that nourish hopes for people even in a bad situation. High educated people know what they think is good for the nation and are willing to use their suffrage right to vote during election. As a result, statistic for high educated people, show a significant trend favor of Reagan than Carter.

The education level often has a proportional relationship with income. The lower education level often means a relatively low income while higher education leads to make more money. To demonstrate our observation through an indirect perspective. We also examine the relationship between voters' income and their choice of candidates. Not surprisingly, Reagan and Carter has a comparatively same percentage of voter from lower income. In lower income class, as seen in table 3, 46.961% of them support Reagan and 53.039% of them vote for Carter. Despites the final result, we can see that Cater even had some advantage in lower income voters. But for the higher income level, Reagan gained 66.783% support and Carter only had 33.21% of support. The 33% difference overturn Carter's advantage in lower income class and lead to Reagan's victory. Our observation for the relationship between education level and votes in 1980 election can be also reflected by this point for view.

(insert table 3 here)

From all of our analysis, education is a very important factor that affect people's voting behavior in 1980 presidency election. High educated people prone to vote for Reagan is not a coincidence but is based on their understanding of social problem and their strong duty of citizenship. Their voting overturned the election that originally been thought as a tie and caused the dominant victory for Reagan.

Table 1: Education by Vote between candidates, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

	Reagan	Carter	
High	155 51.495%	146 48.505%	301 58.447%
Low	147 68.692%	67 31.308%	214 41.553%
	302 58.641%	213 41.359%	515

Pearson's Chi-squared test: $\chi^2 = 15.25052$ d.f. = 1 p = 0.0000941507

Table 2: Education by Vote within each candidate, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

	Reagan	Carter	
High	155 51.325%	146 68.545%	301 58.447%
Low	147 48.675%	67 31.355%	214 41.553%
	302 58.641%	213 41.359%	515

Pearson's Chi-squared test: $\chi^2 = 15.25052$ d.f. = 1 p = 0.0000941507

Table 3: Income by Vote, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

	Reagan	Carter	
High	85 46.961%	96 53.039%	181 38.758%
Low	191 66.783%	95 33.217%	286 61.242%
	276 59.101%	191 40.899%	467

Pearson's Chi-squared test: $\chi^2 = 18.01811$ d.f. = 1 p = 0.00002188136