

## Western Reserve Politics: An Historical Overview

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Over a span of two hundred years, Ohio's Western Reserve, once a unique part of America, developed into one of the nation's most representative regions. Its political life reflected this transformation. Throughout much of this period, ethnocultural patterns of voting behavior could be readily identified, but industrialism and urbanism created new complexities which, when added to shifting population patterns, made the assessment of voting behavior far less precise. Well into the twentieth century citizens of the Reserve were voting their economic interests as often as they voted their ethnocultural affiliations.

Politically, the Reserve has often been out of step with most of Ohio. It was more Federalist, National Republican, Whig and antislavery than most of the state. It made a strong, early commitment to the Republican Party in the Civil War era, and continued that commitment through the Age of Big Business. Ultimately a flood of new urban workers, successfully recruited to the Democratic Party, offset remaining pockets of rural and small town Republicanism. Since World War II, the counties dominated by large industrial cities have been Democratic strongholds, depended upon by that party to carry its hopes in national and statewide elections. It took all of Greater Cleveland to offset the strong Republican bent of Cincinnati and Columbus. Rural Ohio, including much of the Western Reserve, maintained its conservative tradition first in the Democratic Party, but after the "McKinley Revolution," in the Republican Party.

Until very recent years, residents of the Reserve failed to receive their proportionate share of political spoils. Not until the 1962 Supreme Court decision in *Baker V. Carr*, mandating the one man, one vote principle, would this most populous region of Ohio begin to enjoy parity in the apportionment of political rewards. Even though the Reserve now gets a larger share of offices than before, there is a severe disparity *within* the Reserve with Cleveland and Cuyahoga County monopolizing the rewards.

Current population shifts and economic conditions within Ohio may presage further modifications in political behavior, although, for the immediate future, it appears that recent patterns might persist.