

Bloc Voting ^[1]

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by W. Lee Johnston Jr., 2006

See also: [Helms-Hunt Senate Race](#) ^[2]; [Smith-Graham Senate Race](#) ^[3].

Bloc voting generally refers to a clique or coalition of legislators who vote similarly on issues, such as the farm vote or the big-city vote. In North Carolina, and elsewhere in the South, it also refers to factions or groups of the general electorate that vote in mass with a high degree of cohesiveness. Historically, some white candidates in the state have used the term in a derogatory way to describe the cohesiveness of Black voters in support of particular candidates.

In the late New Deal era, as urban Black citizens began to identify with the civil rights stance of the national [Democratic Party](#) ^[4] and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, they switched their allegiance from the [Republican Party](#) ^[5] to the Democratic Party. To elect their candidate into office, Black voters began voting in "bloc" for the Democrats. One of the most famous instances of bloc voting in North Carolina politics occurred in the racially charged Democratic senatorial primary of 1950 between [Frank Porter Graham and Willis Smith](#) ^[3]. Smith supporters used the term to describe and explain Graham's showing in [Durham](#) ^[6] precincts with large numbers of Black voters. Smith's forces successfully used race as an attack issue at the end of the first primary and extensively in the run-off primary, especially in the east, to present Graham as "one who favors mixing the races." Smith won in the runoff.

In 1964 bloc voting reemerged as an issue in the Democratic gubernatorial run-off primary [Dan Moore](#) ^[7], a moderate conservative, said that his opponent Richardson Preyer, a progressive, "owed his first primary lead and the major part of his entire vote to the bloc of Negro votes . . . and this vote hangs like a millstone around his neck." On the Monday after the first primary, then-TV editorialist Jesse Helms used his nightly [Viewpoint](#) ^[8] editorial, broadcast across the east on [WRAL-TV](#) ^[9], to claim that if it had not been for the Black ballot, Preyer would have received fewer votes than Moore or [segregationist](#) ^[10] candidate I. Beverly Lake Sr. The tactic worked again, as Moore easily defeated Preyer in the run-off primary. Decrying the Black bloc vote was used by Helms himself in his 1984 U.S. Senate [campaign](#) ^[2] against Governor [James B. Hunt Jr.](#) ^[11], as well as his 1990 Senate campaign against Harvey Gantt, former Black mayor of [Charlotte](#) ^[12].

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[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[17]

1 January 2006 | Johnston, W. Lee, Jr.

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