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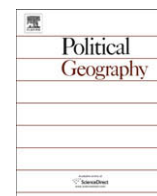
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## Guest Editorial

## Democratizing electoral geography: Visualizing votes and political neogeography

Making maps on-demand and online is a very recent and noteworthy development. The monopoly on cartographic tools that governments and professionals such as geographers, graphic designers and artists once maintained has all but disappeared. Similarly, the speed and ease with which it is possible to access and share maps and geospatial data is unprecedented. This rediscovery and democratization of geography and cartography is often referred to as *neogeography*, which according to Turner (2006), "...is about people using and creating their own maps, on their own terms and by combining elements of an existing toolset. Neogeography is about sharing location information with friends and visitors, helping shape context, and conveying understanding through knowledge of place." Whether or not this differs greatly from what professional geographers have practiced since the inception of the discipline is open to discussion and debate. What is indeed different is the fact that more people have access to the modes and means of map production and map consumption than ever before. Notwithstanding the digital divide that separates those who have access to digital information technology and those who do not (e.g., Warf, 2001), it is abundantly clear that both map production and map consumption have increased markedly since the turn of the 21st century.

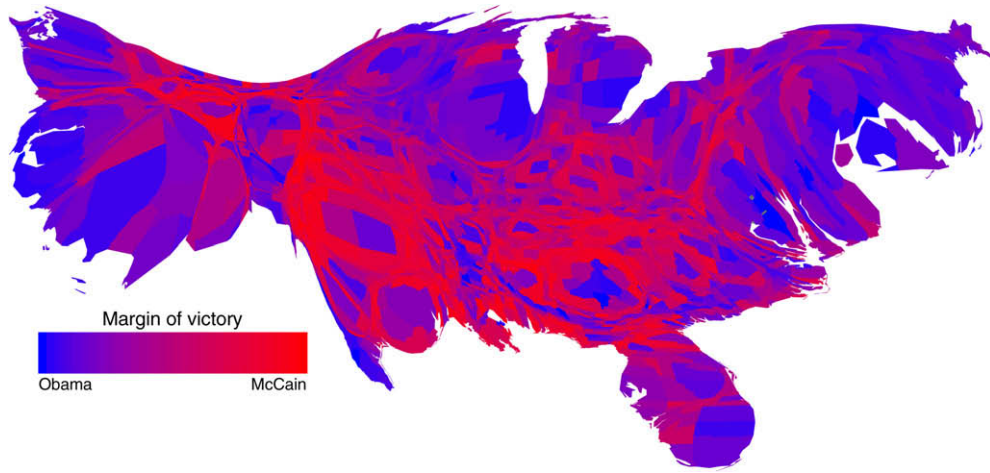
With this increase in cartographic production and consumption come several changes in awareness and expectations with regard to what is mapped and how it is mapped. These changes were readily apparent in the maps that appeared during the 2008 US presidential campaign and election, and can be traced back to the 2000 and 2004 US presidential contests. Fundamentally similar in terms of appearance to the maps created by electoral geography's founding father, André Siegfried (1949), in his *Géographie Électorale de L'Ar-dèche sous la III<sup>e</sup> République*, the modes and means of production and consumption of electoral maps have been turned on their head several times over in recent years.

For instance, in the days immediately following the closely contested 2000 election, *USA Today* published a color (i.e., red and blue) county-by-county map of election results. A map of election returns in itself is not necessarily revolutionary, but the combined scale and resolution of the *USA Today* map (i.e., all counties across the United States) was indeed noteworthy. In fact, rarely if ever had such a map of US presidential election results appeared in print or in such wide circulation, let alone in color. The day after the 2008 US presidential election, a color map of election returns for all of the counties in America was expected if not *de rigueur* for US newspapers with national or even regional circulation. Recent advances in web-based technology also permitted viewers to compare state-by-state and

county-by-county election results and projections over time and on-demand before a single ballot was cast. The ability to access and explore such maps, in conjunction with polling information, historical exit poll data and election returns freely (i.e., at very limited or no cost in terms of money, time or training) is noteworthy because it represents a permanent shift in the consumption of political and geographic information by many Americans.

Similarly, the widespread use of color in US electoral maps and the increased use of cartograms to visualize votes not only educated viewers, but again pushed forward awareness and perhaps expectations with regard to mapping elections. In the case of the former, the use of the colors red and blue not only stems from the rhetoric that surrounds contemporary partisan politics and political polarization in America (e.g., Klinkner, 2004), but also reinforces and reproduces this discourse and its associated electoral geography (Morrill, Knopp, & Brown, 2007). With regard to the latter, block cartograms linked to the US electoral college not only appeared in major American newspapers such as the *New York Times* in 2000, but also in UK dailies such as *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*. For British readers, many of whom were unfamiliar with the American political system, such cartograms were probably quite useful when making sense of the results. More complex cartograms have since appeared that simultaneously compensate for the bias of heavily populated states and counties, and recognize subtleties across the American electorate by using shades of purple (Vanderbei, 2008), the intermediary color between red and blue (see Fig. 1). Moreover, as more elections are held around the world, the world of electoral geography expands, as illustrated by the cartograms used to explain the results from the 2009 local elections in Iraq that recently appeared in the *New York Times* (see Fig. 2).

Just as the world of electoral geography broadens to include emerging democracies like Iraq, thanks to neogeography and neogeographers, and in particular to political neogeographers, it is also becoming more focused upon the individual. As geospatial information technology (e.g., GIS, GPS, mobile devices, web-based mapping) converges and becomes ubiquitous, and the scope, quantity and availability of georeferenced data expand, neogeographers have more opportunities to map such data, and perhaps more importantly, to share and distribute their maps. One area in which the work and maps of neogeographers is especially provocative concerns campaign contributions. For instance, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) of the United States requires presidential campaign contributions to be accompanied by the donor's name, zip code, occupation and employer's address, and makes all of this information public. Mapping donors by zip code and place of



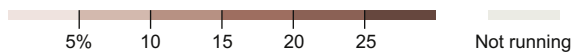
**Fig. 1.** Purple America. Blues denote large margins of victory for Barack Obama in the 2008 US presidential election, reds indicate large margins of victory for John McCain, and intermediate hues (i.e., purples) show where the margin of victory was smaller between the two candidates. Cartogram county size is based upon 2005 population using the Gastner and Newman (2004) method.

### Preliminary Results in Iraq's Provincial Elections

Iraq's electoral commission announced early results, which account for about 90 percent of the votes. In the maps below, each province is scaled according to the number of seats in its council.



**Percentage of votes won in each province**



**Dawa Party slate**

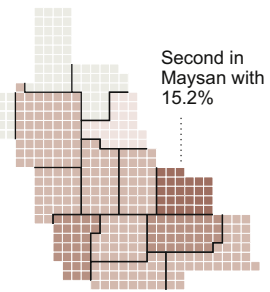
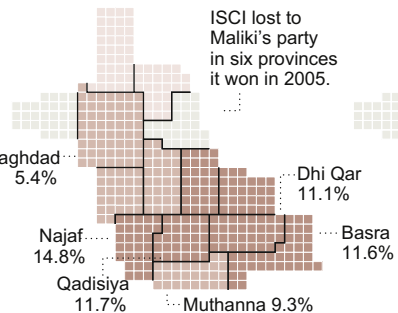
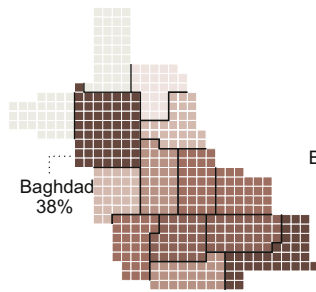
Shiite Islamist party of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki

**Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq**

Shiite Islamist party ally of Maliki, which lost ground.

**Sadrists**

Shiite Islamist lists backed by the cleric Moktada al-Sadr



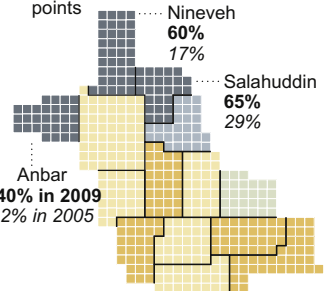
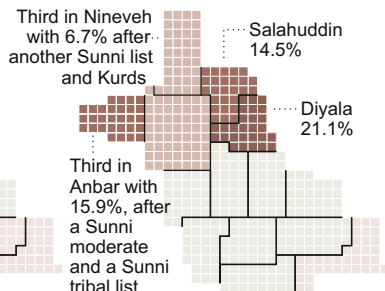
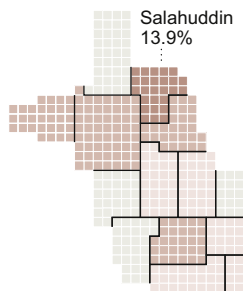
**Iraqiya**

Mixed moderate party of the secular leader Ayad Allawi

**Tawafiq and Iraqi Islamic Party**

Sunni Islamist coalition of Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi

**Change in turnout from 2005**



Sources: Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission

The New York Times

**Fig. 2.** Cartograms of provincial election results in Iraq, 2009. ©New York Times Graphics.

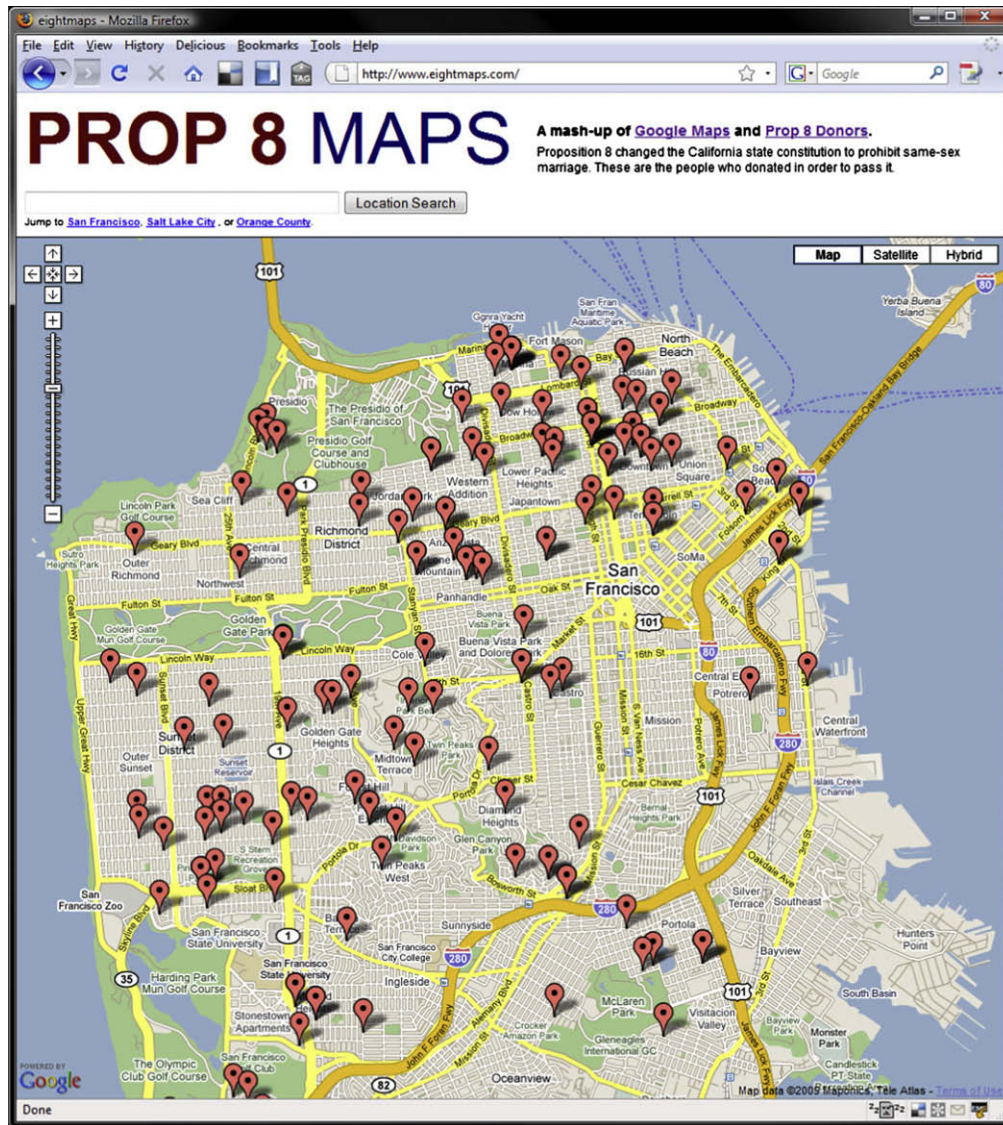


Fig. 3. Screenshot of <http://www.eightmaps.com>, an anonymously created website that maps the location of donors who supported California's Proposition 8.

employment is a relatively simple and straightforward task given the recent advances in web-based mapping technology. This is precisely what the website *FundRace* does using campaign contribution data from the 2004 and 2008 election (<http://fundrace.huffingtonpost.com>). Furthermore, the site actually encourages its users to spy on others, i.e., “FundRace makes it easy to search by name or address to see which presidential candidates your friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors are contributing to. Or you can see if your favorite celebrity is putting money where their mouth is.”

A similar but more contentious example of political neogeography concerns an anonymous website (<http://www.eightmaps.com/>) that maps information about donors who supported California's Proposition 8, a 2008 state ballot measure that banned same-sex marriage (see Fig. 3). Like FEC regulations, California state law makes a donor's name, zip code, occupation and place of employment a matter of public record. The web-based maps of approximate donor location and other information have arguably facilitated vandalism, harassment in the form of death threats and hate mail, and spurred the

boycott of local businesses (Abdollah, 2008; Lawrence, 2009; Stone, 2009). Also interesting from a political geographic perspective is the fact that the Proposition 8 initiative generated donations from at least one individual or group in each and every state in the US, Washington, D.C., as well as from overseas (Shin, 2009).

While professional geographers and other social scientists are required to go to great lengths to protect and to conceal the identities of their subjects, it is rather curious that in this new era of political neogeography, the exact opposite is occurring. Two competing arguments about these and similar maps can be made that are relevant to democracy at large. The first is that the freedom to make and distribute such maps is in itself a right of American democracy. Moreover, such maps discourage corruption and inform the electorate, which arguably improve the quality of democracy. The competing argument is that such mappings actually threaten democracy by discouraging participation and by violating privacy. The purpose of such maps is not explicitly pernicious, though they could be used to encourage or to direct harassment or retribution. Discouraging and punishing participation in the political arena are clearly



undemocratic. Notwithstanding the logic behind these arguments, such maps and the mapping technology behind them are likely to alter and redefine political behavior and democracy in the future. Political neogeographers are thus shaping the agenda and discussions about critical issues such as transparency and privacy, individual versus group rights, as well as what it means to be a citizen in a geospatially enabled, participatory techno-democracy.

For centuries, the toolset of the cartographer consisted of pen and paper. In the last twenty years, this analog mode of cartography has been replaced by entirely digital methods and techniques. It is clear that digital cartography has created incredible advances and efficiencies in cartographic production and the dissemination of maps, as the electoral maps discussed above illustrate. Whether or not and how these developments threaten, challenge or reinforce the principles of democracy remain open to discussion and debate, and merit further exploration and critical examination. In this respect, electoral geography is less about mapping elections, and more about how politics is made with maps. In the eight years since the appearance of *USA Today's* red and blue county-level map, election maps have appeared that ask viewers to literally re-view and rethink the electoral geography of the United States and other democracies (Kitchen & Dodge, 2007), and as in the case of the map of Proposition 8 donors, to reconsider some of the basic principles upon which democracy is founded. These new modes and means of production and consumption of political and geographic data and information, and the individual or collective responses to such visualizations, represent a renaissance of sorts for electoral geography that is changing the way people view and think about maps, geography, elections, politics, and even democracy itself.

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