

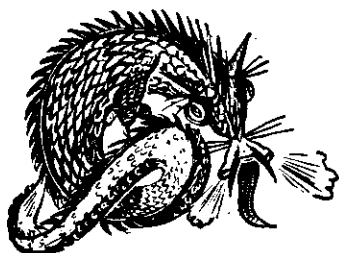
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POLLS AND PUBLIC OPINION

(continued from previous page)

greater success lay in the fact that he—unlike Gallup—made two serious miscalculations which cancelled themselves out, so bringing him luckily almost exactly on to the mark.

Variable Factors

In view of past success, why did the polls suddenly fail so miserably in the last presidential elections? Until there is more information available it is impossible to do more than speculate on the possible causes, but there are certain factors to which attention can be drawn. First, as Gallup and others have always pointed out—the very statistical procedures that underlie the polling technique and assure a certain degree of accuracy 95 times in 100 also imply the possibility that five times in 100 the polls may be wrong. This is especially important in close elections. Secondly, while elections are the only objective check on the accuracy of public opinion measurement they are unsatisfactory as indications of accuracy for several reasons. Prediction in any field implies that all other factors remain constant. A chemist mixing one chemical with another can predict the result of the interaction only providing no one else had added other chemicals unknown to him. In polling elections there are certain factors that cannot be held constant. A wet day, for example, may upset prediction by lessening the number of votes cast in rural areas in a greater proportion than in urban areas. The election is thus not necessarily an altogether fair check on accuracy in opinion measurement.

There are various possible reasons for the failure. Perhaps some new factor entered American politics which had not been allowed for in stratifying the sample; perhaps an inadequate knowledge of the processes of public opinion prevented appreciation of the point where the "bandwagon" effect which was apparently carrying Mr. Dewey to victory, began to work against his interests by removing the incentive to vote from his supporters; or perhaps it was just that the polls by many small deficiencies are not yet sufficiently developed to cope with such an election. It is impossible to say. The polling organisation and the public opinion research centres are the only ones with the material and the machinery to find out the cause of the debacle.

Some Value Even in Failure

There will no doubt be some who will no longer place any faith in the results of the polling organisations, but such an attitude is as ill-advised as one of uncritical acceptance. The polls still remain the most important way by which we can really find out what public opinion is on an issue, the most important way by which the areas of public ignorance can be defined, and thus remedied, the most important way by which we can gain information on the processes of public opinion, and an important way of clarifying issues and



DR. GEORGE GALLUP

"Five times in a hundred the polls may be wrong"

stimulating thought about those issues. Though the technique of public opinion polling is already one of the most important techniques in the social sciences, it is young and has much to learn. The recent failure may result, on the one hand, in the loss temporarily of some public support, but is unlikely to affect the polls adversely to any serious degree. On the other hand, the election results may give the general public a more healthily critical attitude towards the polls, and provide the experts with material, which when analysed may yield a great deal of valuable information regarding the processes of public opinion and the technique of its measurement.

SHORTWAVE HIGHLIGHTS

THE Australian Interstate and National programmes are broadcast on shortwave in the 19-, 31-, and 48-metre bands and are being received at quite fair strength at present, although occasionally reception of these stations is marred by interference.

Stations, Frequencies, Wavelengths, and Times of Transmission: VLQ, 9.66 mc/s., 31.06 metres (8.0 a.m.-2.0 a.m.); VLH5, 15.23, 19.69 (11.30 a.m.-8.15 p.m.); VLH3, 9.58, 31.32 (8.30 p.m.-2.0 a.m.); VLR2, 6.15, 48.78 (8.45 p.m.-2.0 a.m.).

Headlines in the Programmes: Community Hymn Singing, 8.30 p.m., Sunday, VLQ; Guest of Honour, 9.30 p.m., Sunday, VLQ; Australian Walkabout, 10.0 p.m., Sunday, VLQ; Wilfrid Thomas Show, 9.15 p.m., Monday, VLH3; Radio Repertory, 9.30 p.m., Monday, VLR2; ABC Hit Parade, 9.15 p.m., Wednesday, VLQ; Orchestral Concert, 10.0 p.m., Wednesday, VLQ; Racing Acceptances, 10.50 p.m., Thursday, VLQ; Bob Dyer's Country Store, 9.15 p.m., Friday, VLQ; Radio Rodeo, 10.0 p.m., Friday, VLQ; National Theatre of the Air, 11.30 p.m., Friday, VLQ; Over to Youth, 10.30 p.m., Friday, VLR2; Variety Billboard, 9.15 p.m., Saturday, VLQ; Saturday Night Concert, 10.0 p.m., Saturday, VLQ; Village Glee Club, 11.15 p.m., Saturday, VLQ; Week-end Magazine, 9.15 p.m., Saturday, VLR3.

"Sporting Round-up" is broadcast daily, except Sunday, at 8.30 p.m., and gives the day's activities in the field of sport. Programme summaries may be heard at 8.50 p.m. on VLQ (9.66 mc/s.), and at 8.57 p.m. on VLR2 (6.15 mc/s.).