

## WAS I RIGHT ABOUT ROOSEVELT?

by DR. GEORGE GALLUP



### *The Director of the Institute of Public Opinion Speaks His Mind on the Nation's Most Significant Election*

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HE AMERICAN Institute of Public Opinion's poll on the 1940 election was the most accurate state-by-state poll in history. The deviation between the poll figures and the actual election results averaged only 2½ per cent in the forty-eight states.

But the fact that sampling polls can achieve a high degree of accuracy—within 2½ per cent—is not nearly as important as another fact revealed by the Institute's election survey: the fact that class lines in this country are more accentuated in 1940 than they were in 1936. *The poor and the rich are farther apart in their political thinking today than ever before.* The trend of this class cleavage, a cleavage which may have grave import for this democratic nation, will be traced further on. First let us examine the poll more closely.

The Institute gave Roosevelt 52 per cent of the national popular vote, or 2.6 per cent less than he received. In 26 states the poll error was 2 per cent or less, and in only four states did the error exceed the 4 per cent margin normally allowed for in sampling work. The poll gave Willkie eight sure states and he carried ten. It gave Roosevelt a maximum of 472 electoral votes and he received 449. So much for the asset side. What were the poll's chief shortcomings?

Its main fault lay in under-predicting, by a small margin, the Roosevelt popular vote. Owing to this fact, and to the closeness of the election, eight states which the Institute showed leaning to Willkie actually went to Roosevelt by a small majority. All in all, the Institute under-predicted

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Roosevelt's popular vote in 34 states, over-predicted it in 9 states, and was exactly right in the other five.

**THE QUESTION** naturally arises as to why the Roosevelt vote was under-estimated. An exhaustive analysis is now being made. At this point, it appears that the Roosevelt figure was brought up by two factors.

First, there was a greater increase in the vote of women this year than in previous elections, an increase not fully reflected in the poll. In the last days of the campaign the Institute found women voters to be more for Roosevelt than for Willkie. This was an unusual situation. Polls have demonstrated that women ordinarily vote for the more conservative candidate. Their tendency this year to be more Democratic than usual, and to turn out at the polls in greater numbers than usual, undoubtedly contributed to the under-prediction of the President's strength.

Second, there was a slightly higher turn-out of voters in the low income levels in contrast to the higher. Our analysis of the vote after the 1936 campaign showed that the upper income levels voted, in comparison with the lower income levels, in a ratio of 6 to 5. A study of the present election figures will probably indicate that the proportion of turn-out has increased to a ratio of 6 to 5.5.

Another possible cause of the Institute's error was its over-zealous attempt to measure sentiment up to the last minute. A telegraphic poll was taken on the Saturday and Sunday before election. The staff of field reporters, 1,100 in number, who conduct all Institute polls, was instructed to do the bulk of the interviewing on Sunday as a precaution against eleventh-hour shifts of opinion. However, this gave the interviewing staff insufficient time to do a careful and accurate job before telegraphing in their results.

There is nothing wrong with the idea of a quick poll; in some cases it is absolutely necessary. But Sunday, as we were to discover, is not a good day for concentrated interviewing. On the basis of this Sunday poll the Roosevelt figure was reduced from 54 per cent to 52 per cent.

The Institute's results would

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have been more accurate if this quick poll had never been taken. As a matter of fact, the most accurate survey of the whole campaign was one conducted by the Institute in late October and reported October 27, eight days before the election. This gave Roosevelt 54.5 per cent of the popular vote, 36 states and 410 electoral votes. Had the Institute stopped polling there, the results would have been accurate within one tenth of one per cent on the national vote!

**EVERY** election turns up some new trend in public thinking. This year, from the cold election statistics alone, one cannot grasp the extent of class divisions in America, for election figures are not reported by income groups. But the sampling surveys, performing one of their most useful functions, are in a position to find out how the various classes actually did vote. They can show how the people in the lower income group (those earning \$20 a week or less) lined up both this year and in 1936, and how their vote compares with those in the middle group (\$20 to \$50 a week) and the upper group (over \$50 a week).

It has been common knowledge for some years that the poor voters are for Roosevelt and the well-to-do are against him. But the Institute's researches into the 1940 election point to something not so well known—that the class split along political lines not only shows no signs of healing but has actually become aggravated. While the political attitude of the lower income class has remained virtually unchanged since 1936, the upper class is more anti-Roosevelt than before, thus widening the class cleavage. Here's the trend, as revealed by comparative figures for 1936 and 1940, the latter being based on preliminary returns:

#### *Per Cent for Roosevelt*

	1936	1940
Upper Income Voters	42	29
Middle Income Voters	60	52
Lower Income Voters	76	68

What makes this class division in democratic America even more remarkable is its contrast with England. Despite the centuries of sharp social class distinctions among the British, polls in Eng-

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land by the British Institute of Public Opinion have never found anything like the political disagreement along economic lines that exists in the United States today. Winston Churchill's popularity is fairly even throughout all income levels, and the differences over Neville Chamberlain when he was Prime Minister were never as pronounced by classes as the disagreements in this country have been over Roosevelt.

**THE ELECTION** revealed other curious trends. One is that state lines were not sharply drawn in the voting on November 5th. Whole areas containing many states tended to vote for the two candidates in almost the same proportion.

A man could travel, for example, from Boston down the Atlantic seaboard to New Jersey, cut west through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota and not find the proportion of Willkie voters and Roosevelt voters changing by more than 3 to 4 per cent. The remarkable similarity in the vote of states in this area is shown by the following percentages which represent the vote for Roosevelt—Massachusetts 53, New York 52, New Jersey 52, Pennsylvania 53, Ohio 52, Indiana 49, Illinois 51, Michigan 49, Wisconsin 51, Minnesota 52. Moreover, much the same situation prevailed in the 1936 election in most of those states.

This fact gives rise to two interesting speculations.

Are we witnessing the development of what might be called the "Solid North"? There was a greater agreement in the ten Northern states listed above than in the thirteen states of the Solid South.

Second, the apparent obliteration of state lines in the North raises the question of just how effective the political machines are. It may mean that they are much less effective than is commonly supposed.

A state with a strong Democratic machine should presumably produce a higher Democratic vote than an adjoining state with a weak Democratic machine, unless one makes the rather untenable assumption that the machines of the two parties exactly cancel each other in every state. Yet the ten states named above, all with

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machines of varying strength, voted in about the same way.

Take Illinois and Wisconsin, for example. Illinois has the powerful Kelly-Nash machine in Chicago, and the state administration was also in Democratic hands at the time of the election. Yet Illinois' vote for Roosevelt was exactly the same—51 per cent—as the vote for Roosevelt in the adjoining state of Wisconsin, where political machines are certainly far less organized and powerful than in Illinois.

**THE ELECTION** this year murdered the hoary old theory that voters are stampeded into a bandwagon movement. The evidence shows, on the contrary, that voters climbed off the Roosevelt bandwagon instead of aboard it in the closing weeks of the campaign.

At one time, in early October, the Institute was showing Roosevelt with 56 per cent of the popular vote, and a huge majority in the electoral college. According to the bandwagon theory, this figure should have either remained where it was or actually increased as wavering or undecided voters joined the crowd under the bandwagon influence. The opposite happened, as the final Roosevelt vote of 54.6 per cent testifies.

There has been much discussion as to what sort of mandate the people gave President Roosevelt in this election. One thing is certain. It was most emphatically not a blanket vote of confidence in the *domestic* program of the New Deal *per se*. Proof lies in the result of one of the Institute's most interesting studies during the campaign. When this survey asked voters which candidate they would prefer if there were no war in Europe, a majority of 53 per cent said they would prefer *Willkie*. For his third term Roosevelt can thank the blitzkrieg.

