

STATISTICS

Independents Key Nov. 4

Survey of voting population shows that Republican party appeals most to educated, prosperous and middle-aged who tend to be independent; needs more to win.

► THE REPUBLICANS have a better chance of appealing to the so-called "independent" vote, but they need many more independents than do the Democrats to win.

This is the implication of a detailed study of the independents in the voting population recently completed at the Social Research Center of the University of Michigan. The study was based on a nation-wide sampling of the 1948 electorate. It was prepared by Dr. Samuel J. Eldersveld.

The figures, the study says, "suggest two important strategic facts: the party which has most appeal to certain social and demographic groups—the educated, prosperous, middle-aged—will presumably have more success in attracting independents; the party, on the other hand, which secures the support of other groups—the poorly educated, those of low economic status, the young—will find less trouble in maintaining partisanship."

Independent voters were divided into seven categories, according to how accessible they are to appeals to vote. On a theoretical formula, the study shows, the Democrats need concentrate only on the most accessible of these categories, while the Republicans will have to dip farther into the barrel to win.

According to the formula, in 1948, 17.5% of the adult population eligible to vote were definite Democrats who always vote. Another 10% were independents who always vote and who tend to be Democrats. This makes 27.5%, or more than half of the 52% who actually voted for either of the two major parties. But for the Republicans to have won in 1948, on a theoretical basis, they would not only have had to get the votes of the definite Republicans who always vote and the independents tending Republican who always vote, but also the

votes of all the definite Republicans who usually vote.

What actually happened in 1948? The report says this: "The 1948 election may well have been decided for the Democrats by their surprising success in getting out the vote of the independents tending to be Democrats who admit to voting infrequently. Most of these were late deciders."

This represented 2,400,000 votes, or 250,000 votes more than the popular vote difference between the two major parties. The Republicans failed in getting out the independents who tend Republican and who infrequently vote. The Republicans received the large bulk of their votes from two groups: definite Republicans who always vote, and independents who always vote.

The independent vote is estimated in the study as being more than one-third of the potential electorate. Two-thirds of these independents are accessible to partisan appeals and vote quite regularly.

The most accessible independents are those who always vote, who tend to be in favor of one of the two parties and who make their voting decision late in the campaign. This group is 18.5% of all independents, 13% of all regular voters and 7% of all eligible adults. The least accessible, according to the study, are the apathetic. They never vote. This group is just about half the size of the most accessible group.

"It seems clear," the study says, "that the chances of both parties must be computed in terms of the voting behavior of these independents. Not all independents, but certainly a few categories of independents, do indeed hold the balance of electoral power."

The report was made to the American Political Science Association.

Science News Letter, November 1, 1952

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