

PSYCHOLOGY

What Sways the Voter

Some are greatly influenced by family and friends, while others vote according to political tradition. These are the uncertain few at whom political campaigns are aimed.

By MARJORIE VAN DE WATER

► HOW WILL you vote on election day?

If you are like the majority of American voters, you already know. Maybe you knew last May even before the candidates were nominated. Before Wallace started a third party. Before the Dixiecrats first organized.

All the flood of impassioned campaign oratory you have been listening to, the newspaper editorials, the television programs, the handbills and airplane sky writing have not actually changed many votes.

What the campaign propaganda has done, mostly, is to make the Truman supporters more enthusiastic about their choice and to make the Dewey fans more than ever determined to put a Republican president in office. And that is important. The voter likes to be bolstered in his political faith. He likes to know that others think as he does. And he likes to be provided with good logical reasons for his beliefs.

About half the voters, in general, know how they are going to vote long before the formal campaign opens. But there are a few who do not make up their minds until the morning of election day, or who change their minds—perhaps several times—before the moment arrives to drop the ballot in the box.

Uncertain Voters

Those few—the uncertain, the “independent voters,” the fickle who change with the weather—those are the ones to whom all the high pressure campaign “salesmanship” is directed.

Why are some uncertain? What causes a man to change his vote? Repeated interviews with voters during the months before presidential elections have provided the basis for a psychological study of this.

The uncertain voter is likely to be the man who is driven by various pressures working at cross purposes, it was found in one study conducted by Dr. Paul F. Lazarsfeld of New York and his associates. Their findings are described in a new book, *THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE* (Columbia University Press).

The man in this election, for example, who has always voted the straight Democratic ticket and who has always been a firm defender of states' rights, found himself faced with a difficult decision when Truman was nominated.

In other cases, political traditional choice may conflict with religious prejudice or either may interfere with a desire to elect a man from a favored part of the country.

People are greatly influenced by their family and close friends. But sometimes there is disagreement among these so that a person may be persuaded in one direction by a brother and in the opposite way by a friend.

In fact, whether you vote for Truman, Dewey, Wallace, Thurmond or Thomas, the chances are you will do so because you have always been a Democrat, Republican, “liberal,” Southerner or Socialist or else because your family, friends or the members of an organization you belong to plan to vote the same way.

That is what Dr. Lazarsfeld found in his intensive study of voters in Erie County, Pa.

Campaign Speeches

If you listened last night to a campaign speech, and were influenced by what was said, it was probably because you were already prejudiced in favor of the speaker. If you were prejudiced strongly against the candidate when you tuned in the station or went to the auditorium, it is likely that you came away even more strongly determined to vote against him.

So you are a much better campaigner for your favorite candidate than is the candidate himself.

Suggestions dropped at the family dinner table, or by a neighbor over the back fence or in the grocery are much more likely, it seems, to swing a vote at the last minute, than is the carefully planned election propaganda.

Voters are also influenced more by the personality of the man running for President than by other party action. Dr. Lazarsfeld questioned voters who had waited until after the party conventions to make up their minds how to vote. Only a few said that they made their choice on the basis of the party platform. Not many were swayed one way or the other by the choice of vice-presidential nominee.

If you think of the election as a great national drama in which the actors include all the voters, then it is the candidate for President who is the leading star—the hero of the play.

And that is, actually, the psychological mechanism employed by the wise political strategist, according to Robert C. Myers, social psychologist of Princeton University.

Not only in his speeches but in all the activities of the campaign, the handshaking, baby kissing, the tours of the grassroots—the successful campaigner tries to get the voter to think of him as the great lover of

the people. This naturally puts each voter into the part of the other lead, the lady in distress who, if she only puts her trust in the candidate, will be saved from danger and evil.

The villain? The campaigner is sure to pick at least one. Preferably it is one that the voters already hate and fear. It may be capitalism, communist labor organizations, bureaucracy, war, interference with individual rights, boss politics, Russia or dreamy idealism.

Psychological Aspect

Next step in the psychological vote gathering is to identify the political opponents with the appropriate villain in the minds of the voters. This is the name-calling, mudslinging aspect of campaigning. It is an important part because hate is fluid; it can easily be diverted from one object to another through this kind of association. If the political leader can succeed in causing the voters to hate his opponent, he may win because it is very common for people to vote against the candidates they dislike rather than voting for anyone.

But if the campaigner is not skillful, he can work himself into a pretty predicament in this way, Mr. Myers points out. He has cast the voter in a role that is not very



PRESSURE CAMPAIGN — Badges and buttons, displayed by a dealer in Americana, are a part of the traditional campaign. They may help swing votes—if they are worn by the right people.



PERSUASIVE ARGUMENTS—A “bull session” may swing more votes than a campaign address. Your vote tends to be influenced more by friends and relatives than by the candidates’ oratory.

active. He may have too much faith in the leader. He may be too sure that his favorite will win and thus save the day. He may just stay home on election day and not vote at all.

The “band-wagon” appeal may now be brought into play. It is a characteristic of the American voter that he likes to be on the winning side.

But all of the appeals of the experienced and talented campaigner may pale into insignificance in the face of some moving world event.

If America is plunged into war on the eye of election, it could change thousands of votes. The choice of a war leader might be entirely different from the person voters would pick to handle pressing domestic problems, avert an economic depression, “crack down on labor,” or reduce taxes.

A break in the stock market bringing a great business depression is usually the cause of great swings in the political tide. These ups and downs of public sentiment have been charted by Louis H. Bean, statistician of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, who, more or less as a hobby, has made a specialty of predicting elections. He found a clear relation between the business cycle and the political cycle.

A business crisis is more important in swinging votes than an international crisis, he found. That is because a depression affects voters all over the country alike. The international crisis is likely to cause division among the voters and raise issues which separate East from Midwest, for example, or one group from another. Dr.

Bean reports his studies in *HOW TO PREDICT ELECTIONS* (Knopf).

Economic bad times work to the disadvantage of whatever political party is in power at the time. The League of Nations issue is generally held responsible for the defeat of the Democrats in 1920, but Mr. Bean considers that the fact that the prices farmers received for their products had declined 20% between May and election day, was certainly a major factor.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was a depression-created President, Mr. Bean points out, and the New Deal began to wane in popularity with the decline in business activity and agricultural prices in 1938. Harding, McKinley and Cleveland in 1884 were also depression elected.

Influence of Calamities

Droughts and other natural calamities are also likely to bring about a change in the political point of view. Whenever men are unhappy or in distress, the natural tendency is to want to change things. It is not possible to change the weather at will, but you can change your vote and hope for better days.

But whoever you vote for, when election day is over you are likely to find that you and all your neighbors are more favorably disposed toward the man who wins. If you voted for him, you will be more staunch than ever in his support. If you were uncertain whether to vote for him or not, you will probably be won over. If you voted against him, you will be less down on him than you were during the heat of the cam-

“The whole world is queer except thee and me, and sometimes even thee seems a little queer”

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Do You Know?

The dusky *salamander*, the most common type along streams in the eastern part of the United States, lays from 20 to 40 eggs beneath a stone near a spring and stays with them for two months until they hatch.

Frederick the Great is said to be responsible for promoting *potato culture* in Prussia; a little over two centuries ago he had seed potatoes distributed free and compelled the peasants to cultivate them.

In making *asbestos cloth*, a certain amount of cotton fiber is often used to give a firmer construction; the fireproof asbestos fibers are slippery and do not hold together as well as when a cotton mixture is used.

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paign. When he is inaugurated in January, everybody will be cheering.

Americans like to climb on the band wagon. They also have a way of swinging in the direction of the most popular choice. This is what gives democracy in this coun-

MEDICINE

Greater Hope for TB

➤ GREATER HOPE is now held by medical authorities that tuberculosis of the bones and joints and genitourinary tract will be improved by streptomycin treatment.

In the future, also, there may be fewer undesirable reactions to the drug since it has been found that the daily dosage can be cut in half without affecting the results.

These conclusions were contained in the second annual progress report on the effects of streptomycin treatment in all types of tuberculosis which appeared in the JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (Oct. 23). Dr. Austin Smith, secretary of the Association's Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry, states that the conclusions are based on a study made of 2,780 patients with all types of tuberculosis treated with the drug since June, 1946. The Veterans Administration and the Army and Navy have cooperated in this investigation.

Types of tuberculosis and their response to treatment are as follows:

In 943 patients with tuberculosis of the lungs 77% to 83% showed improvement. Moreover, 75% of the patients who were becoming worse prior to streptomycin treat-

MEDICINE

Drug Relieves Gas Pains

➤ ONE of the common distressing after-effects of operations, abdominal distention, or "gas pains," can be prevented or quickly relieved in many patients by a chemical called urecholine.

The good results with this medicine were reported by Dr. Clarence E. Stafford of the College of Medical Evangelists School of Medicine and Drs. Alexander Dederer and Arthur I. Kugel of Los Angeles at the meeting of the American College of Surgeons.

About half of a group of 41 patients had good results from lozenges of the drug put under the tongue three times a day, and another third so treated had only slight or moderate discomfort from distention or cramping. Some of those who got no relief when the drug was given under the tongue were then given a small dose by injection into the skin. This brought relief within about five minutes.

The drug must not be given by injection into the muscles or veins, the doctors cau-

try its stability, psychologists believe. It is what makes it possible for us to go on having hotly contested elections and then, after all the bets are paid off, settling down to business again satisfied with the result.

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ment, improved during treatment, "a reversal in trend which is regarded as especially significant," according to the report. The improvement, however, is partial and only rarely complete and there is a high rate of relapses, Dr. Smith points out.

In 112 patients with involvement of the windpipe and its branches, and 166 patients with tuberculosis of the larynx or voice organ, there was from 80% to 90% improvement. These two types "compose one of the most favorable fields for streptomycin therapy," Dr. Smith states.

In 368 patients with TB-produced open sores and ulcers of the skin, nearly four out of five, or 78% of the sites of infection were healed.

In 192 patients with TB of the bones and joints, 91% showed improvement in that there was a reduction in inflammation, pain and swelling.

In 112 patients with TB of the genitourinary tract, there was an 80% improvement.

Favorable results were also obtained in small numbers of patients with TB of the alimentary tract, TB of the lymph glands, peritonitis, and inflammation of the middle ear.

Science News Letter, October 30, 1948

tioned, because then it may cause a drop in blood pressure and collapse. The dose, they also pointed out, should be adjusted for each patient.

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