

Latest Survey

Nixon's Lead in California Poll

By Mervin D. Field

Virtually all recognized public opinion polls show Senator George McGovern trailing in voter support and his candidacy appears to be suffering from a decided lack of confidence among his supporters that he will win in November.

And McGovern's supporters do not take too pessimistic view of what might happen to the country should he lose the election. This may be an understandable attempt to minimize or rationalize their disappointment.

On the other hand, President Nixon's supporters are quite optimistic that he will be re-elected and, as an indication of the fervor of their commitment, many say they would consider it a disaster for the country should he lose.

MARGIN

The California Poll's latest statewide survey, completed before the Republican nominating convention, found that Mr. Nixon led McGovern by eight percentage points (49 percent to 41 percent). This margin, while sizable, is not by any means insurmountable.

For example, Mr. Nixon saw a 17 point lead over Hubert Humphrey melt to just six points in a matter of a few weeks during the closing days of the 1968 presidential campaign. And in 1962, Mr. Nixon started his California gubernatorial campaign holding a 17 percentage point lead which evaporated to a six percentage point deficit by election day. And in a classic election upset, Republican Thomas E. Dewey lost to Harry Truman in the 1948 presidential election after enjoying a 16 percentage point lead just five weeks before the election.

The degree of confidence that a candidate's supporters have in their man's eventually triumphing is not necessarily a controlling factor in the outcome. Un-

derdogs have won by running scared, and many candidates have gone down to defeat serenely confident that they had it won. However, confidence is a valuable ingredient for raising money and for recruiting and motivating campaign workers.

CONSEQUENCES

Just as crucial is the need for a candidate to create a believable impression that if he doesn't win, dire consequences would result. The fact that so many of McGovern's supporters today take a relatively detached view of the possibility of his losing is one of the hurdles he must overcome if he is to defeat Mr. Nixon.

"How do you feel about the chances that your presidential choice has of winning the election in November?"

"Suppose your man doesn't win, how would this affect the country?"

	Nixon Voters	McGovern Voters
As things now stand—		
I am quite confident that my choice will win	75%	17%
I am somewhat confident that my choice will win	20	34
I have doubts about whether my choice is going to win	4	38
I am afraid my choice will lose	*	9
Don't know	*	2
If my choice doesn't win—		
It would be one of the worst things that could happen to the country	20%	13%
It would be pretty bad for the country	39	31
It would not be too bad for the country	24	20
It would not make much difference to the country	15	30
Don't know	2	6

*Less than 1/2 of one percent.
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