

Nixon 'New Majority' Appears Shattered for Him and the G.O.P

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WASHINGTON — At his second inauguration a year ago, President Nixon still enjoyed being compared with Franklin Delano Roosevelt as a coalition builder, an architect of realignment in American politics.

The importance of 1972, he had told Theodore H. White, the campaign chronicler, was that it had "shifted allegiances" in the South, among workingmen and Catholics. He had won unusual Republican majorities among union members, manual workers and voters with grade-school educations — the rank and file of Mr. Nixon's middle America. "The new majority," the President told Mr. White, "was what this election was all about."

Now, at the start of a new election year, the new majority appears shattered by White House scandals, inflation and the oil shortage. It is gone, clearly, not only for President Nixon, whose popularity has dropped 41 points in the Gallup Poll since the start of 1973, but also for his party — the choice now of less than a quarter of the American electorate.

The new-majority converts to the Nixon coalition in 1972 were the first to leave it in 1973. Most of them still call themselves Democrats. And most of them are inclined to vote Democratic this year in what pollsters project as a historic sweep of Congressional races, if the current mood holds.

Straw Poll

The puzzle for analysts is a national straw poll by Louis Harris late last month that showed Gerald R. Ford, the Republican Vice President, leading Democratic Senators Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts and Henry M. Jackson of Washington in soundings about the 1976 Presidential campaign.

Does that mean, as some Republicans argue, that the new majority is intact, in hiding? Does the poll reflect rather the political harmony and favorable publicity that attended Mr. Ford's confirmation last fall? Is it more important that Mr. Ford's voting record through 25 years in the House of Representatives was conservative, or little known? Most important, does Mr. Ford symbolize continuity with Nixon Administration policies or a departure from Nixon scandals?

Those are the questions confronting political strategists trying to discover whether a "new" new majority will emerge in Presidential politics. But there is a base of evidence that the "old" new majority is dead.

First, with respect to Mr. Nixon, the decline of his popularity is steepest among the new-majority groups he courted and won in 1972. The Gallup Poll found that among Catholics, approval of Mr. Nixon dropped from 71 per cent to 22 per cent during 1973—down almost to the small share of the Catholic vote that Mr. Nixon

won in 1960 against John F. Kennedy, the nation's first Catholic President.

Among labor union members and their families, another new-majority target in 1972, Mr. Nixon's approval has dropped from 61 per cent to 20 per cent in the last year. George Meany, the labor leader, who was neutral in the President's last campaign, is now calling for Mr. Nixon's impeachment.

And among independent voters, a mobile, rapidly growing group that includes conservative former Democrats and liberal former Republicans, Mr. Nixon's approval has dropped from 73 per cent to 25 per cent.

Second, with respect to party identification, the Gallup Poll has reported that voters who call themselves Republicans are down, after a four-point drop last year, to 24 per cent of the electorate, the smallest share for a major party in this century.

Far from "The emerging Republican majority" that Kevin P. Phillips, a conservative analyst, divined in the Nixon victory of 1968, the Republican party now seems to be contracting on an aging, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant base.

In Illinois, for example, in the latest examination by Market Opinion Research of Detroit, a polling company that works mainly for Republican candidates, only 22 per cent of a statewide sample labeled itself Republican.

Among those Republicans, according to Robert M. Teeter, president of the research agency, a quarter are over 65 years old; half are over 50; three-quarters are over 40. By race, 98.5 per cent are white. In contrast, 87 per cent of the electorate are white. Only 27 per cent belong to union-member families. About 80 per cent are Protestants (58 per cent is the statewide figure) and about 80 per cent are homeowners, 9 points higher than the state total.

Third, with respect to political choices, voters appear to be turning sharply against the Republicans.

A Gallup Poll late last year found that Democrats were favored over Republicans for election to Congress by 58 per

cent to 30 per cent. A national survey by Louis Harris found a 53 to 31 per cent split in favor of Democratic candidates for Congress, the largest margin in a decade of Harris surveys.

"If all the members of the House were coming up for reelection at this time," Dr. George Gallup said recently, "Republican candidates would poll the lowest percentage of the total vote in the entire history of our organization," a span of nearly 40 years.

Survival of the Nixon "new majority" in Presidential politics is debatable. To some of the Republican tacticians who organized the "new majority" campaigns of 1970 and 1972, Vice President Ford's lead in the Harris straw poll confirms their old analysis that, as one said: "If we have an attractive candidate who's conservative on the social issue, the new middle-class, traditionally Democratic vote will go Republican."

In the White House, Patrick J. Buchanan, a speech writer, says, "It's oversimplifying it to say the new majority was adding Southern Protestants and Northern Catholics to the solid Republican base, but that's a significant portion of it, and it's still out there."

Opposition to Abortion

Charles W. Colson concurs, and if he were shaping Gerald Ford's appeal to that new majority, as he did for President Nixon, he would urge the Vice President to stress his opposition to abortion and his support for aid to parochial schools, as Mr. Nixon did in 1972.

To many other analysts, including Robert Teeter, who did the polling for the Nixon campaign in 1972, the "new majority" was a dubious description to begin with and is unlikely to be reconstituted a political coalition.

Presidential races will mostly be close battles between "two minority parties" over a volatile middle group of voters, contends Richard M. Scammon, the political statistician and writer. Even if the second Nixon term had prospered, Mr. Scammon believes the class identification with the Democratic party would have prevented Mr. Nixon from consolidating a new majority for the Republicans.

Louis Harris, the pollster, is sure that the Nixon majority in 1972 was never the "new majority," as described. Mr. Nixon's strongest appeal, the Harris surveys found, was in foreign policy where the emphasis of Mr. Nixon's trip to China and détente with the Russians was change, not conservatism. On economics and the "social issue," including forced school busing, Mr. Nixon did not have majority approval at election time, Mr. Harris asserts.

Mr. Harris adds that "new majority" elements, like union members and aging ethnics, are shrinking fractions. Union members that formed 23 per cent of the vote in 1968 will be only 15 per cent of the vote in 1976, he writes in his new book, "The Anguish of Change."

Mr. Harris believes that a year of Watergate shocks has hastened the rearrangement of symbols and issues in American politics. "When a candidate runs a law-and-order campaign today, people think: 'chances are he'll turn out to be a crook.'"

"In 1967," Mr. Harris observed in an interview, "substantial majorities of our sample—60 to 75 per cent—thought the following people were 'dangerous or harmful to the country': people who didn't believe in God, black militants, student demonstrators, prostitutes, homosexuals. In the fall of 1975 we couldn't find a majority to say that any one of

those groups was dangerous.

"Today," he continued, "the people considered 'dangerous' by a majority of Americans are these: people who hire political spies (52 per cent); generals who conduct secret bombing raids (67 per cent); politicians who engage in secret wiretapping (71 per cent); businessmen who make illegal political contributions (81 per cent); and politicians who try to use the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Secret Service for political purposes or to try to restrict freedom (88 per cent). "That," Mr. Harris said, "is what has happened in America."