

The Man Who Isn't There

ABSENT FROM Miami Beach is the man more crucial to President Nixon than even the Democratic Party's presidential choice.

That absent man is Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama.

PRECISELY 73,210,163 people voted in 1968. Nixon's Gallup poll high was on Aug. 24. He never varied more than three points below this, although he had two slight dips in mid-September and mid-October. No other record equals that for steadiness, neither up nor down.

Hubert Humphrey had only a scant and frightening 30 percent presidential preference in the Gallup poll at the time he was nominated in Chicago. He hit his Gallup low, 28, on Sept. 22. Humphrey did not reach even his Chicago convention level again until Oct. 1.

Then he climbed steadily from 30 to 42 by the election weekend. In the final week, with Nixon down and Humphrey up, this nation-wide index rated them even. And so they were.

Nixon won with 42.1 percent of the national vote. Of 37 presidential elections this was the 15th time in which the President was elected with less than a majority, usually because of third and fourth parties.

George Wallace got 13.6 percent of the 1968 national vote. That was more than twice the combined totals won by Progressive Party candidate Henry A. Wallace and Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond in 1948. It was the

largest third-party vote since Robert La Follette's 17 percent in 1924. And it won him five states: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi — with one electoral vote from North Carolina.

President Nixon needs 270 electoral votes for re-election. With Wallace in the 1968 race the Democrats all but wrote off the South. And now with Wallace out in 1972, a latest Gallup poll has Nixon ranking like a Salvation Army tambourine.

Wallace once privately told me that Humphrey, behind closed doors, had insisted to him that he took more 1968 votes from him than he took from Nixon. But Dr. Gallup has asked declared 1972 Wallace voters whether they would now vote for Nixon or McGovern. They chose Nixon, 2-1. In every major population group Nixon was the beneficiary of Wallace's absence.

Thus Nixon believes he can sweep the South. He includes Texas (a Humphrey win in 1968), where he has the welcomed support of former Treasury Secretary John S. Connally. Texas has 26 vital electoral votes.

IF NIXON can sweep the South, that presents some 130 Southern and Border state electoral votes — very nearly half the 270 total President Nixon needs to defeat McGovern.

The man absent from the Republican convention that the Nixons can thank — and thank mightily — for one important possibility is George C. Wallace.