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Popular Nixon landslide little hard to believe

WASHINGTON — The polls tell us that President Nixon is going to win, which is easy to believe, and that the American people are going to give him the greatest popular election victory of this century, which is much harder to believe.

For in order to believe in the paradox of an unpopular landslide, you not only have to believe that all politics is based on the indifference of the majority, but you also have to believe in the following propositions, or most of them.

— The Democratic party, which has dominated American presidential politics, for 28 out of the last 40 years, has not only declined, which is obvious, but that it has virtually collapsed.

— The Republican party, which is out-registered by the Democrats three to two, has suddenly put together a "new majority" of the South, the suburbs, the farmers, the big labor union leaders, the Catholics, and the Wallace blue-collar workers, and that this new coalition has broken all the normal voting patterns and political allegiances of the last 40 years.

— The Democratic years from Roosevelt and Truman to Kennedy and Johnson created a vast new middle class in America, which is now a majority of the voters, who have moved to the suburbs, are now property owners, and care more about keeping taxes down and keeping the blacks out than they do about the poor who have been left behind. Never mind the past or who helped us out of our misery; we got ours, so let them get theirs.

Corruption accepted?

— Beyond this, you must also believe that the American people regret corruption, but have accepted it as an unavoidable part of American life, and don't really care about all those millions of dollars given to the Republican party by a few rich men and women, all the secret funds, and the bugging and burglary of the Democratic party, and the fake letters and political sabotage, and the guerrilla warfare used in this campaign.

— Also, that it's all right for the President to seek four more years in the White House without defining his programs for the next four years, without debating the opposition candidate, or answering questions from the press, or even campaigning before the people until the last few days of the election.

A major offensive

— In addition, that the American people don't mind or haven't noticed that presidential power is now unbalancing the whole American system of a government of equal

and separate powers, and that this President has consciously and effectively dominated the Congress on the war, changed the balance of the Supreme Court by his appointments, and mounted a major offensive against the press whenever it has questioned his tactics and policies.

Well, maybe the American people will swallow all this without protest. George Gallup and Louis Harris are probably right that

James Reston

Nixon is going to win, but the thought that the American people are going to give Nixon and his policies and anonymous hucksters and twisters in the White House a landslide popular victory, and maybe even a Republican Congress to enhance his power for four more years, is a little hard to imagine.

A sad campaign

Altogether, it has been a sad and in some ways even a disgraceful campaign. It has declined to the point where McGovern and Shriver have compared the President to Hitler and charged that we now have the most corrupt administration in the history of the Republic, which is obvious and wicked nonsense.

Also the administration has portrayed the Democratic ticket as a radical and even unpatriotic alternative, neo-Communist, neo-isolationist, and grossly incompetent, which is equally unworthy and even silly.

Margin of victory

Fortunately we are not faced with a choice between wicked or incompetent men, but the margin of victory could be very important.

For if the secret devices used by the Republicans to finance this campaign and sabotage the Democrats, win by a landslide, you can be sure that these techniques of espionage and underground warfare will become part of the political arsenal of the future in American politics, and that the public discourse will decline even more than it has in this election.

It is hard to believe that the American people, even if they prefer Nixon to McGovern, will be indifferent to the consequences of giving a vast popular mandate to the President after this squalid campaign.

Actually, the mood of the country is one of disillusion with both parties and both candidates, and the logic of this is not a landslide, but at least a narrower Nixon victory than the polls are now predicting.