

'New Majority' Seen Drifting to Democrats

By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer

This year the election is being decided on the fundamental issues. Because it is, we are seeing the birth of a new American majority.

—Richard Nixon radio address, Oct. 28, 1972.

The emerging Republican majority is drifting back to the Democrats.

Data compiled by the Gallup polling organization shows that the key Democratic element of this supposed new majority—the peripheral urban ethnic—celebrated by the Committee for the Re-election of the President—would today vote far more overwhelmingly Democratic for congressional candidates than in 1972, possibly giving the Democrats a two-thirds majority in the House.

I'm sure it's the Watergate ruboff," says George Gallup Jr. They want to take it out on the Republicans wherever they can lay hands on them. That's what our evidence seems to show."

This view was documented Nov. 6 at the ballot box in New Jersey, where voters swept out Republicans and gave the Democrats their best party-ticket vote in a century.

Two other respected political public opinion takers, Republican pollster Bob Teeter and Democratic pollster Pat Cadell, also confirm a Watergate-related Republican decline. Cadell says that the crime and social issues which were help-

ful to Mr. Nixon in the 1972 election are no longer "voting issues" favoring Republicans.

The voters who are now turning away from the Republican Party because of diminished confidence in Mr. Nixon are, in many cases, the Democrats who turned away from Democratic presidential nominee George McGovern in 1972. This target group was defined in August, 1972, by Mr. Nixon's then-deputy campaign manager Jeb Stuart Magruder in words that owe a heavy debt to GOP theoretician Kevin Phillips:

"The target voter is ethnic in the East less ethnic in the West. He is blue-collar and lives around the cities, is Catholic in most places and Eastern Orthodox in some. He makes \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year and probably his wife works. He belongs to a labor union. He's anti-welfare or at least he thinks that he doesn't get a proper share for his own efforts. He's not a hawk on the war—nobody is anymore—but he doesn't want a bug out, either. Mostly, he feels comfortable with his country."

Despite the re-election committee's widely advertised hopes of attracting young voters, most of these target voters were over 30. Many were over 50 years old.

The voters described by Magruder in many cases split their tickets in 1972, giving their votes to Mr. Nixon and to

See MAJORITY, A8, Col. 1

independents rather than to the Democratic Party."

This latter development is reflected in Gallup's figures. The number of Americans who consider themselves Republicans has now sunk to a 25-year low of 24 per cent compared to 43 per cent for the Democrats and 33 per cent who consider themselves independents. The Democratic figure has remained almost constant since 1940 except for an upsurge in the mid-1960s.

Congressional Vote

Overall, Gallup's figures

show that 56 per cent of the electorate would now vote for Democratic congressional candidates compared to 28 per cent for the Republicans and 16 per cent undecided. The figures in October, 1972, were 51, 37 and 12.

Gallup says that these figures overstate the Democratic lead by a point or two, since they include all potential voters and not just a registered voters. Even so, the congressional measurement has been Gallup's most accurate, showing only a 2 per cent deviation from the actual results in nine elections going back to 1938.

Republican pollster Teeter of the Detroit-based Market Opinion Research Corp. generally supports these findings. But Teeter doubts whether the "new majority" ever existed in the first place.

"I never subscribed to the peripheral urban ethnic theory," says Teeter. "I never felt that the demographic characteristics of those groups had anything to do with the way they were voting. The whole business about the 'new majority' was really a description of Eastern cities. The same class of person decided for Nixon in Los Angeles as in the East, but he wasn't Italian or Polish there, maybe not even Catholic. He was a person who had moved up in class and had a vote, a cottage, two cars, two kids."

MAJORITY, From A1

the Democratic congressional nominees. But Democratic congressional candidates would do even better today among urban ethnic voters.

Among Catholics,—what Gallup calls "the most volatile of all groups in the last two years"—Democratic congressional candidates were favored 62 to 27 in an October, 1972, survey, with

the remaining 11 per cent undecided. The figures today are 69 per cent for the Democrats, 16 per cent for the Republicans and 15 per cent undecided.

The other groups cited by Magruder in his "target voter" assessment also show a similar turning away from the Republican Party.

Manual workers, which in Gallup's classification include skilled and unskilled workers and is the largest single group in the population, favored Democratic congressional candidates by a percentage margin of 55 to 31 in the October, 1972, sur-

vey, with the remainder undecided.

Today the figure is 63 to 20. Persons in the \$10,000 to \$15,000 income category gave Democratic congressional candidates a 52 to 35 preference in 1972; now it is 57 to 30.

Dramatic Shift

The most dramatic change to a straight ticket comes in the 50-and-over category, where Democrats in 1972 were favored only 47 to 42 among congressional candidates. The 1973 figures are 57 to 29. Among voters 30 to 49 the shift is less pronounced but still favorable to the Democrats: the 1972 survey percentages were 53 to 35 now they are 56 to 27.

"These people are residual Democrats," says Republican strategist Charles McWhorter. "Wake them up in the middle of the night and they're Democrats."

What has awakened these Democrats is Watergate. Gallup's polls show that the improved showing of Democratic candidates among the peripheral urban ethnic electorate in every case par-

allels a declining confidence in Mr. Nixon's conduct and truthfulness in the Watergate scandal.

Among Catholics, for instance, 18 per cent believed in June that the President had no prior knowledge about Watergate and acted as soon as he was informed. Today that figure has fallen to 8 per cent.

Similar declines in this truthfulness-of-the-President index occur in every category of voters and in every region, although less significantly in the South.

But it is voters with historic Democratic allegiance who seem to be returning to the political faith of their fathers.

"These are traditionally Democratic groups and therefore much more susceptible to influence," says Gallup. "I would presume that the President has lost some of his support on the issues of crime and drugs that led these groups to Nixon. Many of the Republicans, on the other hand, are going into the ranks of the

In Teeter's view, Mr. Nixon won his big victory in 1972 because he had gained the voters of the two great groups of ticket-splitters in the American electorate. The first group is Republican leaning, urban, white, upper middle class and, while conservative on economic issues, is "the group that turned around on the war." Many of these voters now have an independent affiliation in Gallup's polls.

The second group, which conforms somewhat to Magruder's "target voter" description, is Democratic-leaning and upper blue collar or lower white collar. This is the group that voted straight Democratic in New Jersey last month and now gives Democratic congressional candidates their top-heavy margin in the Gallup survey.

"The one clearly definable characteristic common to both groups is that they included people who have moved up a full social class or one-half a social class in their lifetimes," says Teeter. "They were ticket splitters in 1972, not members of a new Republican majority, and they split their tickets for Nixon. They may vote Democratic in 1974, but that doesn't mean they'll stay Democratic anymore than their vote in 1972 meant they would stay Republican."

Teeter polls only for Republicans in partisan elec-

tions. Cadell, who polls only for Democrats, agrees with his counterpart that the new majority as envisioned by the Committee for the Re-election of the President was "largely mythological."

Primary Dangers

Cadell, however, believes that it is possible for Democrats to misread Watergate, the 1973 elections and the recent Gallup surveys. He points out that Congress is held in low regard by the electorate and that Democratic incumbents, particularly the older ones, may find themselves vulnerable in primary races.

"I'm not convinced that if I were a Democratic incumbent, I'd be jumping for joy," says Cadell. "They have not distinguished themselves in the eyes of the country. It's conceivable we may have a lot of fresh faces."

One bright spot for the Republicans in the current voter opinion surveys is that GOP candidates who enjoy a reputation of independence and integrity seem to be improving in voter favor. A recent Teeter poll in Michigan, for instance, found that incumbent Republican Gov. William Milliken was at a high point of popularity, even while Watergate was growing as a voter concern.

On the other hand, politicians in Michigan and other industrial states are worried that any upward surge in

joblessness triggered by the energy shortage will accentuate party-line Democratic voting on economic issues and wipe out many Republican officeholders.

Up to now, if Gallup's surveys are a guide, the Republican decline has been directly linked to two issues: Watergate and the high cost of living.

The latter issue was far ahead of all the others as the No. 1 problem facing the nation in Gallup surveys taken before the President's first announcement of the energy crisis. "Lack of trust in government" was No. 2 followed by "Watergate and corruption in government."

The overall effect of Mr. Nixon's decline, in the view of conservative Republican strategist F. Clifton White, has been to retard the political realignment that was taking place in the United States.

"We lost the new majority," says White, looking back in dismay on the New Jersey campaign he masterminded for defeated Republican gubernatorial candidate Charles Sandman. "The peripheral urban ethnics voted for every Democrat in sight."

Gallup's surveys suggest that these voters are planning to follow the same course in the 1974 congressional elections that they did in New Jersey. If they do, the emerging "new majority" will be solidly Democratic.