

Harris Memo Foresaw Swing to Republicans

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WALTHAM, Mass., Jan. 26—In a memorandum to President Kennedy in November, 1962, poll-taker Louis Harris gave a remarkably prescient analysis of changes in the American electorate which would ultimately provide the basis for the victories by President Nixon in 1968 and 1972.

Harris gave his analysis of the political status of the nation after the 1962 congressional elections.

At a time in late 1962 when it appeared the Democrats had registered gains in voting just completed, Harris adopted a very pessimistic tone and talked openly of Republican trends in the South and the erosion of the "ethnic" vote from Democrats in the cities.

The Nov. 19, 1962, memorandum is one of several from Harris to President Kennedy found among 140,000 documents in the newly opened President's office files at the Kennedy Library.

Kennedy used Harris extensively for polling during the 1960 presidential campaign.

Harris' interpretation of the 1962 elections stressed that Democratic gains were in mostly rural states and in areas where Republican governors fell prey to a general trend against incumbents.

In the cities, Harris said, there was a definite trend against Democrats. He noted swings of 4 per cent among Catholics, 4 per cent among Polish voters, 4.5 per cent among Irish voters and 5.6 per cent among Italian voters as compared with 1960 election results.

Harris told Kennedy:

"1. You did receive an abnormally high Catholic vote in 1960, unlikely to be duplicated again. Normal attrition could be expected.

"2. The Irish who have now gone back to the Republican line are not likely to return in our time. They have been leaving the Democrats since 1940, and this

long-term trend will undoubtedly continue. . . .

"Observation: Irish voters have turned conservative for good and this now means Republican with a vengeance. I know of nothing that will bring them back.

"3. The Poles and Italians are another story, and require immediate and hard work. . . .

"Both groups simply did not have the bread and butter issues front and center this time as they did in 1960. Rather, they were beset with two other problems. Both Polish and Italian workers belong to the lower scales of the economic ladder. They are highly unionized. Yet they are not well represented in the craft unions. They were deeply resentful of the soaring wages for the craft workers which they got no part of. For them, there was a wage slump, relatively speaking.

"Added to this is that in their jobs and in their housing, those Italians and Poles are beset in city after city with incursions from new-found Negro competition. They feel that the Negroes have been the beneficiaries of the Kennedy administration. All they have received is a crowding out.

"Observation: You are enormously popular with these Italians and Poles, but I would not for one minute count on their solid support for 1964. They must be fought for furiously. . . ."

Harris noted the upsurge of Republican support in the South, and accurately forecast the end of Democratic control in the region. The reason, he said, was the development of a large number of moderate or liberally oriented young politicians in the South at the time.

"With this change to a more liberal outlook among Democrats in the South, a large vacuum has been left on the conservative side. The Republicans are filling this vacuum up, and will to

a larger and larger extent in 1964 and 1966. But this will be an ultra-rightwing GOP in the South, based in the heart of the Goldwater spectrum," Harris said.

Another memo indicated Kennedy's desire to appoint the son of former Secretary of State Dean Acheson U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia.

In a memo to staff aide Kenneth O'Donnell dated Feb. 15, 1961, the President said:

"I understand that Dean Acheson is interested in having his son appointed district attorney of Washington. Will you talk to Byron White about this? Find out the prospects. If it can be done and he is good I would like to do it. If it can't be done I would like to know about it."

White was then deputy under Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. He later was appointed an associate justice on the Supreme Court.

The prospects of the Acheson appointment apparently were good, since David Campion Acheson was nominated by President Kennedy on April 5, 1961, and served as U.S. attorney for the District until August, 1965.

A graduate of Yale University and Harvard law school, Acheson had been a member of the Washington law firm of Covington and Burling before his appointment as U.S. attorney. In 1965 he was named a special assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury and in 1967 became vice president of and general counsel to the Communications Satellite Corp.