

# Public's Opinion of Wallace Is Returning to the Negative

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The latest Harris Survey on Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace indicated that voters are returning to the negative attitudes most held about him before the attempt on his life in May, 1972.

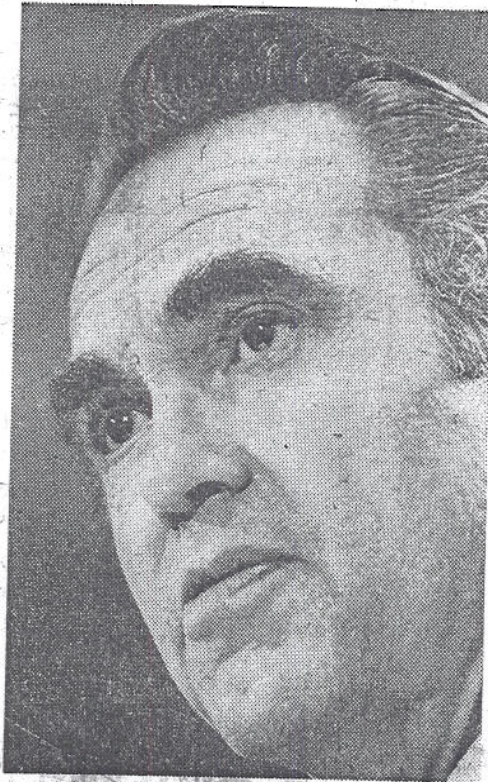
Most of those who expressed an opinion in a sampling of 1,314 "likely voters" May 16 to 23 once again said they consider him an extremist who would divide the country and would not maintain law and order—all views of Wallace in Harris Surveys of 1972 or earlier.

A year ago, however, pollster Louis Harris reported that Wallace had turned these perceptions around. Harris found that 61 per cent of those surveyed said they considered Wallace "a man of high integrity," compared with 40 per cent who said they thought so just before he was shot.

The latest Harris Survey shows that this "integrity" figure has dropped back to 49 per cent, and more voters (53 per cent) now consider Wallace an extremist than said he was (51 per cent) in 1968 and in 1972 (44 per cent). A year ago, only 37 per cent said they thought he was.

The latest Survey also says the public's perception of Wallace as a potentially divisive President has returned after an interlude in 1974. Now the voters, by 41 to 34 percent, have told Harris that "if elected President, Wallace would divide the

See HARRIS, A6, Col. 1



GEORGE C. WALLACE  
... considered divisive

HARRIS, From A1

country and could not rule it," reversing last year's Harris finding that 33 per cent believed he would be divisive, to 48 per cent who didn't.

And as a preserver of law and order, after receiving a favorable Harris rating (50 to 31 per cent) in June, 1974, Wallace gets a negative rating (36 to 41 per cent) now, approaching the unfavorable statistics on this question (30 to 48 per cent) in 1972.

According to Harris, the shift represents a return by the public to an examination of Wallace as a political candidate, after a period of sympathetic reaction to the attempted assassination against him and the personal trials he endured and survived in his long recovery.

The negative reaction is nearly the same among Democrats and independents, Harris reported. Of the Democrats who responded, he said, 55 per cent said they considered Wallace an extremist, 40 per cent said they thought he would be divisive and 39 per cent saw him as an effective enforcer of law and order.

Equally significant, Harris said in an interview, are statistics from an April survey, not released at the time, showing that 39 per cent of all likely voters polled said they could not vote for Wallace.

Finally, the latest Harris Survey nearly duplicates a voter preference of last November of 2 to 1 for President Ford over Wallace when the choice is offered between the two.

In a Gallup Poll released three weeks ago, in which 675 adult Democrats were asked to choose the party's nominee as their choice for the party's nomination, Wallace ran second behind Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), who said last September that he will not be a candidate. Kennedy was the first choice of 36 per cent of those surveyed, Wallace of 15 per cent and Sen. Hubert H.

Humphrey (D-Minn.) of 9 per cent.

It is Wallace's strength among Democrats, rather than among all voters, that will be the critical factor for him in national politics between now and the July, 1976, Democrats National Convention. A year ago, a similar Harris Survey showed Wallace to be the first choice of 20 per cent of Democrats polled, behind Kennedy with 43 per cent.

Although the negative atti-

tudes about Wallace in the latest Harris Survey suggest slippage in his public support, the large size of the field of declared and undeclared Democratic presidential candidates continues to make him a factor in the 1976 picture.

That is, in certain multi-candidate primaries, it is possible for a candidate with a low plurality of votes cast to win the bulk of a state's Democratic convention delegates.