

THE CALIFORNIA POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND IMPARTIAL STATEWIDE SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINION
ESTABLISHED AND OPERATED BY FIELD RESEARCH CORPORATION SINCE 1946

San Francisco Headquarters
145 Montgomery Street
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Mervin D. Field, Director
Robert Heyer, Editor

Release #437

For release WEDNESDAY, MAY 27, 1964

ROCKEFELLER NOW LEADS GOLDWATER BY SUBSTANTIAL MARGIN

by Mervin D. Field

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Governor Nelson Rockefeller has now moved into the lead in voter popularity for California's crucial 86 delegates to the Republican National Convention. He trailed Senator Barry Goldwater by a wide margin only three weeks ago.

In a dramatic turnabout, Rockefeller has jumped from 16 percentage points behind the Arizona Senator during the first week in May to a lead of 13 percentage points today according to the latest survey by The California Poll.

Following is a comparison of the two most recent surveys made among representative samples of Republicans throughout the state by The California Poll.

	Date of Survey:	
	May 20th to 23rd	May 4th to 9th
Rockefeller	46%	27%
Goldwater	33	43
Undecided	21	30

On May 15th, Rockefeller upset political prognostications by winning the Oregon "open" primary against Goldwater and other Republican candidates, including Henry Cabot Lodge, Richard Nixon, William Scranton, and Margaret Chase Smith. This unexpected development has undoubtedly contributed greatly to the dramatic shift among California voters.

Rockefeller First Choice

The California ballot will permit a vote only for Rockefeller or Goldwater. Earlier California Poll results had shown that in an "open" primary, Henry Cabot Lodge was the top choice, while Rockefeller was a poor fourth. Rockefeller's new surge of popularity in California is further demonstrated by the fact that he now has moved up to first position in popularity among seven other GOP hopefuls in an open choice situation.

(MORE)

The following figures show that early in May just 10% of the state's Republicans preferred Rockefeller over all others. Goldwater ranked second in this regard with 26% first choice votes. Today, Rockefeller's standing has moved up sharply and he now has more first choice votes than Lodge, who was the leader three weeks ago.

<u>First choice vote:</u>	<u>May 20th to 23rd</u>	<u>May 4th to 9th</u>
Rockefeller	26%	10%
Lodge	22	33
Goldwater	22	26
Nixon	19	18
Scranton	2	3
Romney	2	2
Smith	1	1
Stassen	*	*
Don't know, no choice	6	7

*Less than one-half of one per cent.

Objection Declines

Another indication of the far reaching changes in Republican voter attitude toward the Republican presidential contestants is the declining proportion of GOP voters objecting to Rockefeller while the number who would not like to see Goldwater a candidate has gone up during the past three weeks.

<u>Would not like to see nominated:</u>	<u>May 20th to 23rd</u>	<u>May 4th to 9th</u>
Goldwater	30%	27%
Smith	22	22
Stassen	18	20
Rockefeller	19	24
Nixon	15	16
Scranton	8	6
Romney	8	6
Lodge	6	5
Would not object to any of these candidates	30	22

(Percentages add to more than 100% because some Republican voters object to more than one candidate.)

Despite this upsurge in Rockefeller's popularity, there is no certainty that the tide running in his favor will continue to election day, when approximately 2.3 million out of the 2.9 million registered Republicans will go to the polls to vote. Until last week Goldwater had not campaigned extensively in California, and the margin separating Goldwater and Rockefeller today could be narrowed as campaigning reaches an intensified pitch during the final two weeks.

(MORE)

of the people into favor of Goldwater. The remaining undecided group could represent an important reservoir of Goldwater strength and could again provide him with a plurality of votes. On the other hand, if the remaining undecided Republican voters split in favor of Rockefeller, it could mean that Rockefeller's margin would be even larger than is indicated in this survey.

Neither candidate can afford to lose if he is to maintain his position in the presidential sweepstakes to be settled in mid-July when the 1308 delegates convene in San Francisco to select a nominee.

These results were obtained from a California Poll survey of a representative cross section of 503 registered Republican voters out of a total of 1314 registered voters interviewed statewide for the survey between May 20th and 23rd.

The results are confirmed by another special poll taken concurrently among a representative sample of 265 rank-and-file Republicans who had been interviewed as to their voting preferences the first week in May and were re-interviewed last week.

Tomorrow the California Poll will show how this dramatic new vote alignment occurred, and will analyze the strength of commitment to Goldwater and Rockefeller and other forces at work in this important campaign.

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Do Polls "Predict" Elections?

When a pre-election poll turns out to have been within a few percentage points of the final outcome in an election there is almost a universal tendency to credit the poll with a "good prediction." Conversely, should an election outcome differ from a pre-election poll, the usual interpretation is that the poll "missed" the election.

While the California Poll has been patted on the back much more often than it has been criticized during the 18 years it has been in operation, we have never claimed to have a crystal ball before an election, and we are uncomfortable about taking credit for having had one after the election.

We would be less than honest if we said we didn't benefit from the publicity that our poll brings, and we are frank to state that this is one of the main justifications we have for maintaining the California Poll. However, we feel that our own interests, and the interests of responsible journalism, are better served by discouraging the use of polls as an election eve "stunt" and placing them instead in the context of factual reports of voter sentiments as of the time they are taken.

Most of our final pre-election surveys have to be terminated a week or more before an election. A lot can happen in the closing days, not the closing hours, of a campaign. This is when electioneering typically reaches its peak and when candidate personalities, issues, and late hour events have a redoubled impact on voters who are entering the decision zone. Thus, any "prediction" that the poll results will hold up until election day involves the assumption that nothing important will happen in the closing week, days, or hours. Sometimes it doesn't, but often enough it does.

Furthermore, there is no precise formula for measuring such factors as election day turn-out, which can have a tremendous effect on an election outcome. Most systematic polls are representative of all voters, not just those who turn out and actually vote in the contest being measured.

Most major elections are decided by a majority amounting to something under eight percentage points. It is a statistical fact of life that sampling procedures are least precise in this mid-range. The samples that we use are subject to several percentage points tolerance in the 50-50 area, which means that we could easily be on the "wrong side" in a close race without going outside the limits of sampling variance.

Therefore, to make a flat "prediction" that an election result is going to come out precisely the way the survey comes out is simply a form of statistical Russian roulette. A prediction makes better headlines, but it is also a very dangerous way to live and it is not really the proper use of a poll.

If polls have any real value it is *not* for their last-hour prediction but for such things as their ability to further our understanding of voter behavior, their unique ability to provide timely readings of public opinion on issues in between elections, and their use as a testing ground for research techniques. True, the election outcome tends to test the validity of a poll, but for the reasons we have already stated we don't think the all or nothing evaluation does them justice. Polls don't need "proving" any more; what they need today is more sophisticated understanding and application.

The California Poll was founded in 1946 as a medium for promoting public opinion research. The California Poll is completely independent of all political parties and candidates. Its sole purpose is to report public opinion accurately and objectively. Most of the financial support for the Poll comes from newspapers and television stations that have exclusive rights within the city of publication. The Poll utilizes accepted scientific sampling and questioning procedures in obtaining the data reported in its releases. Representative samples of adults are interviewed at periodic intervals on election issues and other socially important questions of the day. Proportionate numbers of people of both sexes, from all parts of the state, from different sized communities, and of all age, economic, political, and occupation groups are included in the samples. Major surveys are made with samples of 1,200 or more respondents. Interim surveys sometimes are made with smaller samples but not less than 600 interviews.

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Undecideds Important

Twenty-one per cent of the Republicans are also still undecided. Their ranks may have been stripped of the people who favor Rockefeller, leaving a hard core who would not vote for the New York Governor. If so, the remaining undecided group could represent an important reservoir of Goldwater strength and could again provide him with a plurality of votes. On the other hand, if the remaining undecided Republican voters split in favor of Rockefeller, it could mean that Rockefeller's margin would be even larger than is indicated in this survey.

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