

June, 1958



*Dear Friend:*

About the time of the last national election you were good enough to talk with one of our interviewers and to express your opinions on the campaign. We are writing to thank you again for your help and to report to you some of the more interesting results of our study.

Your interview was one of hundreds from all parts of the country to come into our office at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. As the interviews arrived, the information was coded and transferred to punched cards which permitted us to analyze it by the use of electronic machines. In this way, we were able to get a good picture of the way the entire country looked at the campaign and felt about some of the issues.

We are often asked, "How accurate is your description of the American electorate?" In this election study we interviewed about 1800 people picked by chance from all parts of the country. In answer to the question asked before the election, "How do you think you will vote in the next election?" 42.6% of our respondents said they planned to vote for Stevenson. The actual vote for Stevenson was 42.2%. The percentage planning to vote for Eisenhower was 57.4% and the actual vote for Eisenhower was 57.8%. As you can see, our sample on this study was accurate within one-half of one per cent.





The purpose of our study, however, was not to predict the election. The University of Michigan is not in the prediction business. Rather, as social scientists, we feel that a serious study of how people vote, why they vote as they do, and why they react to political issues as they do, is an essential part of understanding our system of government.

Voting behavior is a difficult subject for study. We have found that the personal interview survey is the most effective tool we have available to study the attitudes and acts of the general public. The personal interview survey as conducted by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan is scientifically accurate in its approach and is based on direct contact with the American electorate, rather than on theoretical speculation.

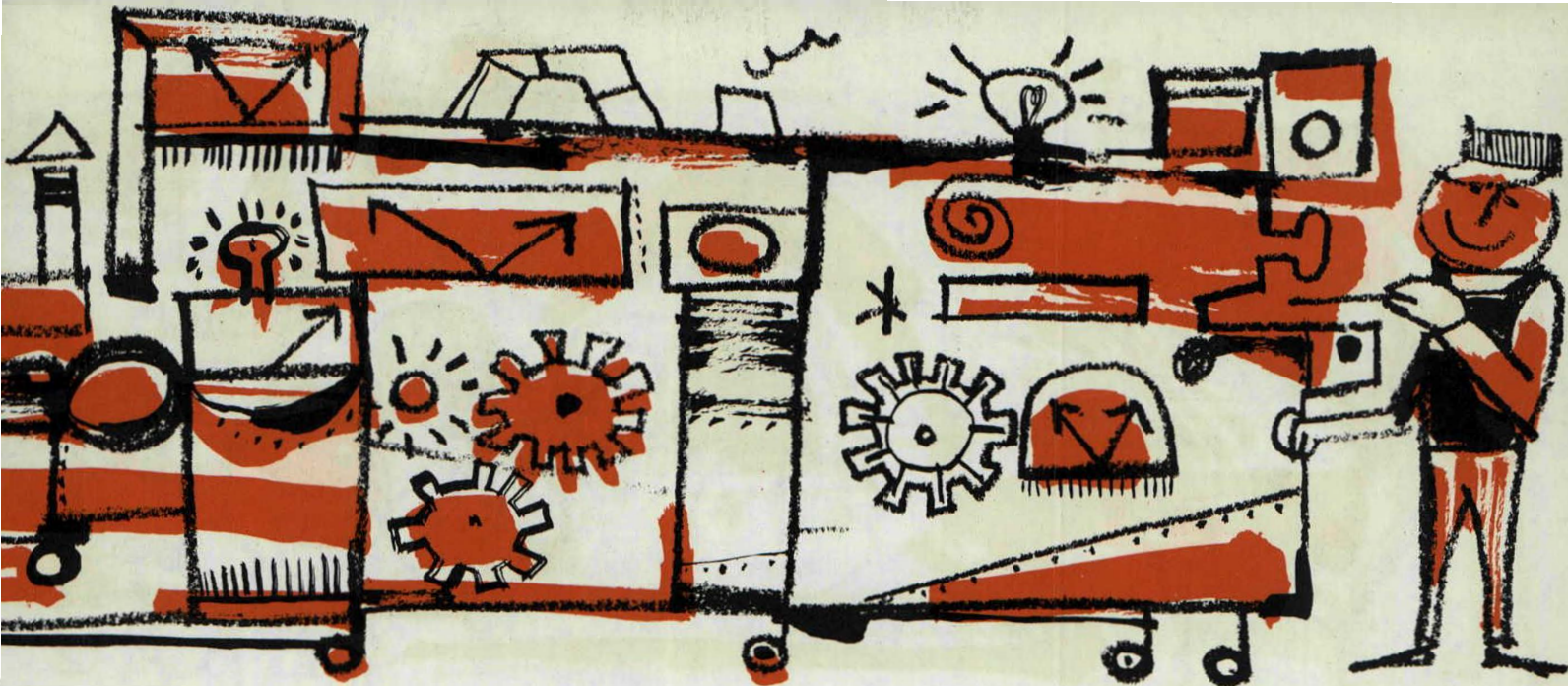
The 1956 election is the third presidential campaign to be studied by the Center. The results of these studies have been read with great interest by people in government, labor, business, and politics. Most of the results of these studies have appeared in professional journals such as the *American Political Science Review* and *Scientific American*. Accounts have also been published in newspapers and news magazines. We enclose a copy of one column based on the information you gave us in 1956.

What are some of the other findings from the last study in which you participated?

### VOTERS' IMPRESSIONS OF THE CANDIDATES

For one thing, there was a change between 1952 and 1956 in the way voters saw the winning presidential candidate. In both 1952 and 1956 the majority of opinions toward Eisenhower was favorable, but in 1952 the people talked a good deal about his qualities as a leader, especially concerning foreign affairs, while in 1956 they talked more about his attractive personality and his friendliness and sincerity.





Eisenhower's appeal, already strong in 1952, became the important item in the Republican victory in 1956. The voters were critical of Eisenhower only on two points. First, many felt that he was a part-time president; and second, many people commented about his health. In 1952 some people were worried about electing a military man to the White House but in 1956 the importance of this had diminished and was replaced by reactions to Mr. Eisenhower's personal qualities, his integrity, his sense of duty, his virtue as a family man, and his likeableness. A typical comment was: "President Eisenhower is a wonderful man. He has such a nice family, and I like to watch him when he talks on television. I think he is making a great president. I certainly am going to vote for him again." Or, as another respondent said, "I think he has done a great job for the country. It's too bad that he has been so sick. I think that being president is just too big a strain for him after all his troubles."

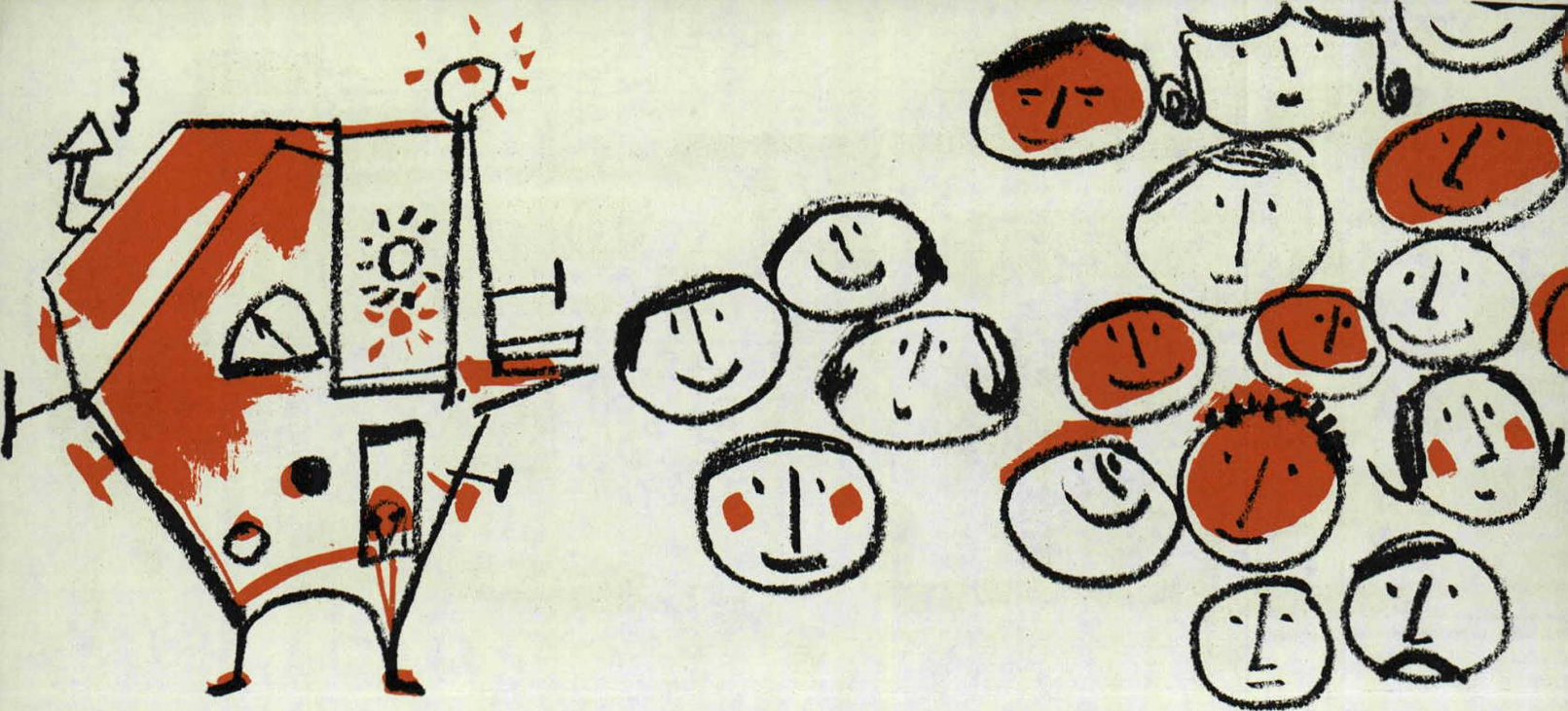
### *OPINIONS OF NONVOTERS*

Many Americans don't vote. The only way to find out how they feel about an election is to go out and talk to them—as our interviewers did in 1956. We have found that people who don't vote often have rather strong feelings about the candidates. In 1956 almost four out of five of the nonvoters told us they would have voted for Eisenhower if they had voted. In other words, if they had all gone to the polls, Eisenhower would have won an even larger majority than he actually received.

### *NEWS SOURCES DURING THE CAMPAIGN*

In regard to the question of where voters get their information about a political campaign, the differences in answers between 1952 and 1956 are interesting. As we all know, a much larger number of people had television sets in 1956 than in 1952. For the first time in the history of political campaigns, the newspaper gave way to television as the main source of political information. The change was most spectacular in the South where





television watching increased greatly between 1952 and 1956.

This fall, the SRC will conduct another political study—this time of a congressional instead of a presidential election. This will give us a chance to talk to some of you again. With each new study we are able to check more of our ideas and add to the existing body of scientific knowledge in the field of political science.

We are now preparing a book which compares the political campaigns and elections of 1952 and 1956. We are also writing articles and giving talks on our research. If you would like to see more results from these studies, please mail us a card. We will be happy to send you more detailed articles.

*Thank you once more for your cooperation in this research.*

Cordially,

*Angus Campbell*

*Director, Survey Research Center*

