



CENTER FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH
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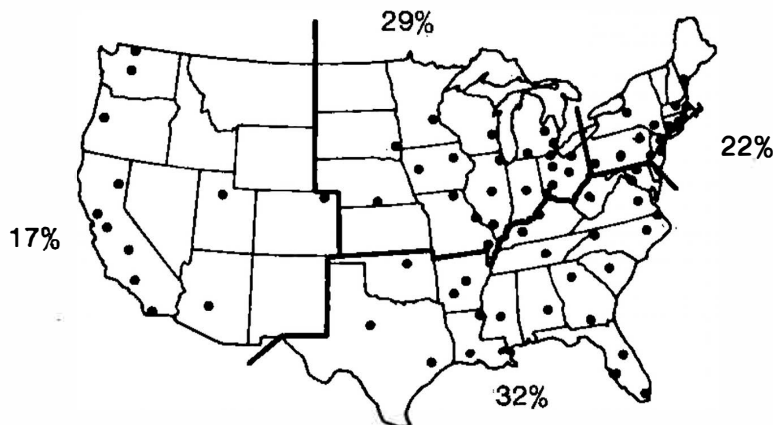
REPORT TO RESPONDENTS

1976 NATIONAL ELECTION STUDY

The Center for Political Studies has long been interested in the voting behavior of the American electorate. In our most recent attempt to determine how and why people vote the way they do, we enlisted your help. In the fall of 1976, several weeks before the presidential election, one of our interviewers was sent to talk to you about your opinions on a variety of topics and issues. Our interviewer then returned after the election for a second conversation. Our survey resulted in many interesting and informative findings, not only pertaining to the candidates and the election, but also to your social, political and economic attitudes. In appreciation for your time and assistance, we would like to share with you some of the results of our study.

CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR RESPONDENTS

You were part of a carefully drawn sample of 2,800 Americans selected to represent the full adult population of the United States. The map below indicates the seventy-four locations around the country from which we draw our sample. Twenty-two percent of our respondents live in the East, 32% in the South, 29% in the Midwest and 17% in the West. Approximately 62% of our sample are married, while another 25% are divorced, separated or widowed, and about 13% are single. Family size continues to be small, with over half of our respondents having no more than two children. From your responses on education we found that more than two-thirds of you have a high school diploma and one-third have attended college. Slightly more than half of our sample reported an annual income of \$11,000 or less, one-third make \$6,000 or less and approximately one in four make over \$15,000. Such information indicates the wide variety of backgrounds among the people of this country.



POLITICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Another aspect of our survey was concerned with your political characteristics, the nature and extent of your political activities and your attitudes towards government. Many of you draw an interesting distinction between the national and local government. On the national level we found indications that political activities such as working for the candidates, attending rallies or meetings, or joining organizations dealing with national problems are confined to a small segment of the population; less than 8% of our respondents took part in these activities. Yet, your responses on the local level reveal considerably more involvement. For example, City Council meetings are attended by 18%, 19% of our respondents have contacted local officials about community problems, and 21% joined organizations working on community problems. As one might expect, considering the greater participation at local levels, our findings show that more of you place most faith in local government, 35%, as opposed to 29% who have greatest faith in the federal government. Your responses also supported extending more power and influence to government at the local level; 40% were in favor while, only 18% recommended more power and influence for the federal government. This distinction also appeared in your evaluations of whether or not each level of government was doing a good job, with 31% responding positively on the local level while other 15% responded positively on the federal level.

Since there has been a great deal of public concern over trust in government during the past years, you were asked a series of questions in order to ascertain which government institutions you trusted and which you did not. The Supreme Court was rated as "most trustworthy" by 39% of our respondents, while political parties ranked lowest, with only 2% saying they were most trustworthy. Congress and the President were scaled closely together with 29% and 30% respectively. Almost two-thirds of our respondents felt they could trust the government in Washington to do what is right *only some of the time*. This lack of trust in government was also reflected in the opinion of 74% of our respondents who believed that the government is run for a few big interests rather than for the benefit of everyone. Other responses to our questions support the conclusion that your distrust is provoked more by the individuals in office than by the government itself; nevertheless, 25% of you felt that some real change was needed in our form of government.

When our interview turned to a discussion of national issues, most people ranked unemployment and inflation as the most pressing problems facing the nation. Your dissatisfaction with the general economic situation was also reflected in your appraisal of your own financial situation. One-third of you felt that your personal financial situation was worse in 1976 than it had been in 1975; and two-thirds anticipated a continuation or a worsening of your financial situation during the present year. Almost 90% expressed concern over the government's handling of unemployment and inflation, labeling the government's performance "only fair" or "poor." Along with economic conditions, other issues cited as the most important problems facing the country were crime, energy and dishonesty in government.

FOLLOWING THE CAMPAIGN THROUGH THE MEDIA

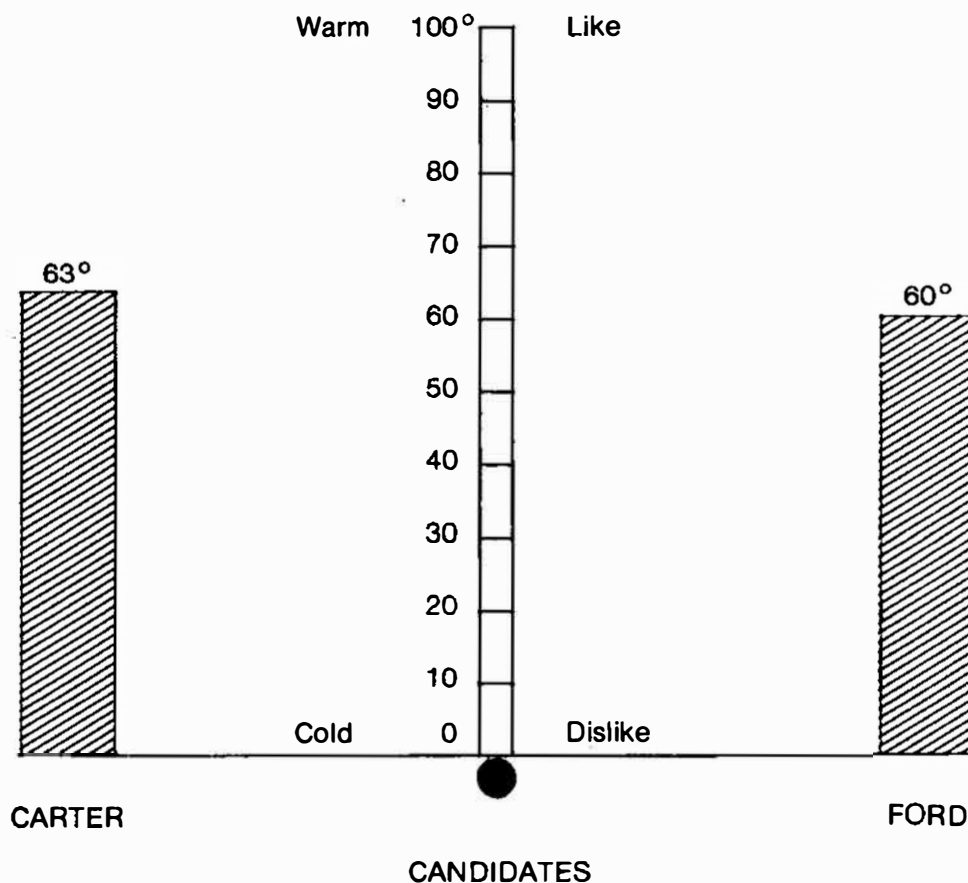
Our interviewers also sought to discover how much attention our respondents paid to the "76" campaign, and a series of questions was asked in an attempt to determine the impact of the media. Almost half of our respondents paid close attention to radio programs and magazine articles that focused on the campaign. Newspapers were more important than either radio programs or magazines; 73% of you followed the newspapers for campaign related information. The most widely used media source was television. Nearly 90% of our sample watched television programs about the campaign. Eighty percent of our respondents regularly watched one of the three national evening news broadcasts and two-thirds of you rely on television for news about politics and current events.

The popularity of television was enhanced by the presidential debates. Eighty-three percent of our respondents watched at least one debate and 90% expressed interest in this form of political activity. The content of your responses dealing with what you learned from the debates suggests that the candidates' general appearance of competence in the debates made a deeper impression than did the candidates' discussion of the issues. Perceptions of President Ford were altered by the debates; he was viewed as more competent after the debates. Mr. Carter's overall debate performance was also favorably received. Our findings indicated that as people watched more debates, they were able to differentiate more clearly between the candidates. While it is difficult to determine exactly what influences on voting behavior can be attributed to the debates, it is clear that they served to increase the level of general information about both candidates.

EVALUATING THE CANDIDATES

We all know that Mr. Carter won the election, but what specifically did the '76 electorate like about him? Our interviewers asked you to evaluate the candidates two months before the election. While you did not perceive a sharp difference between the candidates' personalities, Mr. Carter was given a 3 to 2 edge over then President Ford with regard to his ability to bring moral leadership to the country. Our respondents also thought that Governor Carter would do a better job than Mr. Ford in curbing inflation, unemployment, and limiting the size of government. As you can see from the average ratings on the feeling thermometer, below, overall our respondents felt slightly warmer towards Mr. Carter than toward Mr. Ford.

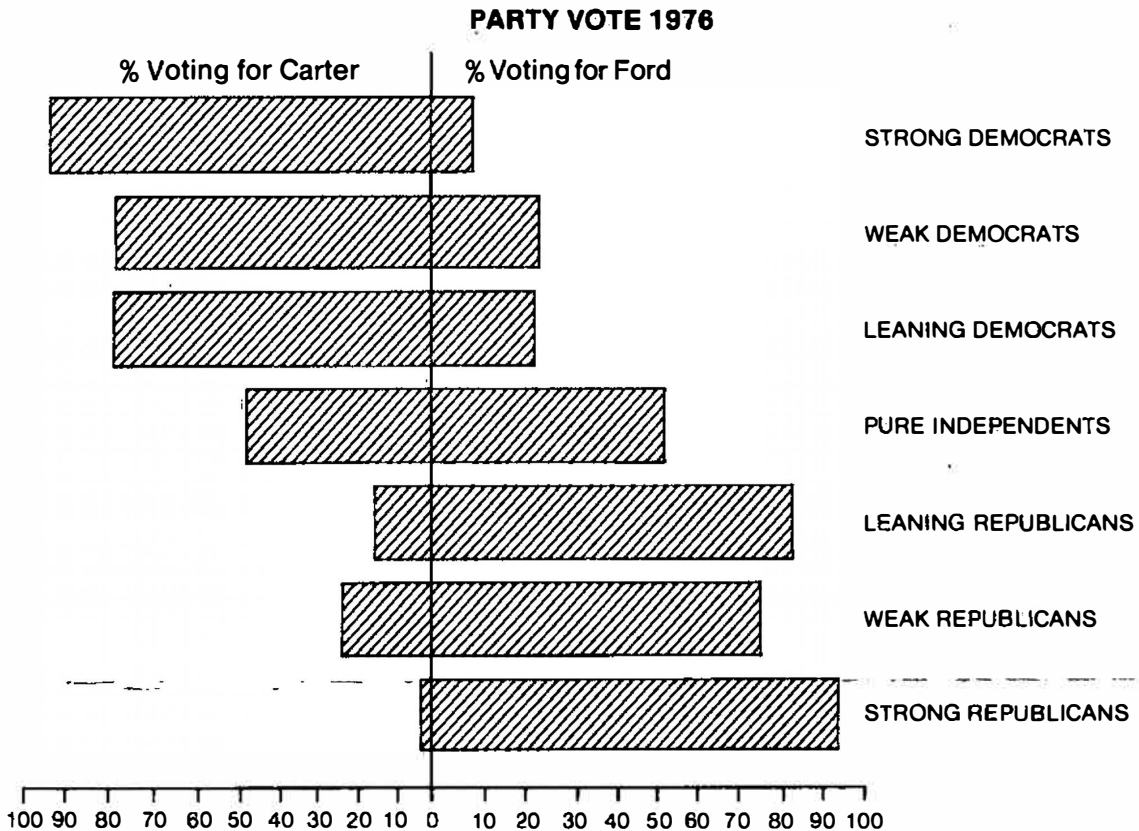
FEELING THERMOMETER 1976



EXPLANATIONS FOR THE ELECTION OUTCOME

Your opinions regarding Mr. Ford's two and one-half year term as president also influenced the outcome of the election. Of the two-thirds of our sample that approved of his performance as president, 75% cast their votes for him. Of the one-third of our sample that disapproved of Mr. Ford's performance, 92% voted for Mr. Carter. The impact of Mr. Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon was also reflected in the vote. We found that out of the 58% of you who disapproved of the pardon, 75% of you gave your vote to Governor Carter.

Perhaps the most important single factor related to the vote is Party Identification. In our interviews we asked all of you which political party you belonged to and how strongly you identified with that party. From these questions we derived the seven categories displayed on the graph below. For example, this graph tells us that approximately 91% of you who identify yourselves as strong Democrats, voted for Mr. Carter, while 97% of all strong Republican identifiers who voted did so for Mr. Ford. The graph also shows that, as has been the case in the past, there was a larger number of defections among Democrats than Republicans. Some 20% of those who generally favor the Democrats crossed-over and voted for President Ford, whereas only 14% of the Republican supporters voted for Mr. Carter. Independents, on the other hand were almost equally split between the two candidates, thus helping to make the election outcome very close.



The preceding has been a brief review highlighting some of the results of our survey. We would again like to thank you for your time and assistance. Without your cooperation such a study would not have been possible. If you would like any additional information or if you have any questions please feel free to contact us. We would be happy to answer and requests.

If you wish any further information you may contact:

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