

Causes of the Defeat of the Republican Party in the Presidential Election of 1964

Why the voters recorded at the polls in November of 1964 that they wanted a Democratic President is a question with many answers. The original predispositions of the voters towards the political parties are one factor, the personality of the candidates is another. The fact that the ultimate vote was one of the most lopsided in recent history does not cover up the difficulties of explaining it. A landslide may be as difficult to understand as a trickle of pebbles.

In the United States, since the time of the New Deal, the electorate has become increasingly Democratic by party affiliation. Every observer and student of the American political scene agrees to this fact. In 1940 a survey showed a 42% to 38% split between Democrats and Republicans in the population. In 1950 the figures were 45% and 33%. In 1960 the figures were 47% and 30%, and in 1962, 50% and 28%. And finally in the beginning of 1964, the latest presidential election year, the adults of the country were divided by party affiliation as 53% Democratic and 25% Republican.

The reasons for this go back to a slow attrition of the sources of support of the Republican Party. Like the Whigs of a century earlier, the Republican did not fully appreciate what was happening to them, that the country was changing, that people in the country who had but little place and power before were in need of a new party but did not feel themselves party of the old Republican tradition.

The Democrats meanwhile enjoyed to the full the twelve years they possessed under Roosevelt and built the greatest national machine of the twentieth century. They put a whole generation of officials into a great bureaucracy. They dominated completely the cities, at a time when Republicans were still thinking in terms of a rural America, so that the cities, which have grown to dominate completely the society of the country, whatever the women's magazines say, are solidly Democratic. Studies have even shown the Democrats to have had more children than the Republicans over the last generation or so, and since affiliations in politics begin in the

household; more Democrats were sheerly created.

With the exception of Senator Bob Taft of Ohio, the Republicans did not produce within this whole period a single man whose vision was equal to the task of reforming the Republican Party. Senator Taft, unfortunately, died before he could work out the means of achieving the new Republican Party beneath the umbrella of the administration of President Eisenhower.

Not until the early sixties did another man come upon the scene who offered to try to rethink ways of American Republicanism. Then it was Barry Goldwater, always himself completely modest about his mission, who carried forward the principles of a new Republicanism. Let us not at this point say that Barry Goldwater achieved the formula of the future. Let us only say that more ~~than~~ any of those who were present, available, and contending for principles, he was the man.

Still, even if some process of regeneration of the Grand Old Party of the Republic had begun by the beginning of 1964, it had not gotten far. The American people ~~was~~ overwhelmingly Democrat. It had heard no "Message." It was already voting in its own mind Democrat by a majority greater than that finally achieved by President Johnson! This was in the beginning of the election year.

Yet there was one important characteristic of the American people that has not been fully appreciated by the critics of our Party or the public at large. Even while predisposed to vote Democratic, the voters are predisposed^{to} think conservatively. Various straw polls of recent years confirm this. In a poll following the 1964 election, to cite just several of a number of studies of opinion in this regard, substantial majorities or pluralities of the American people declared themselves on the conservative side of major public policy issues.

Thus 55% of the Americans sample wished less government spending for welfare programs; a plurality believes the federal government is getting too big; a majority thinks the federal government is taking over things that should be handled by State and local governments; a majority favors less labor union influence in government policies; a plurality prefers less government restrictions on big business; a great majority be-

believes in moderation in enforcing the new civil rights law, a majority desires a firmer stand towards Russia, and believes our foreign aid funds have not helped win Allies. Moreover, most people want government to encourage more self-help and do not want medical care fully socialized. Those with opinions stand two to one for a more conservative Johnson administration.

Under such circumstances, is it not reasonable to suppose that a candidate who might offer the American voter a conservative position to choose would be successful? It was not mere whimsy, nor an ignorance of the American mind, nor an extreme insistence upon an ideological position at the cost of possible victory at the polls that motivated the Republican Party in 1964 to decide to fight behind the banners of principled conservatism.

The cry for a choice was not necessarily the voice of obstinacy. It was backed by what was known to be a set of sentiments and opinions of the American electorate. It was possible to see in the conservative cause, all other things being equal, a victorious contender for the votes of the people.

Matters did not work out the Republican way. When the final showdown came, the voters preferred the Democratic Party label over the conservatism of the Republican Party. Now the question becomes: did the voters do so because their Democratic affiliation was stronger than their feelings about correct governmental policies? Are they more predisposed to a party than to principle? Did their liking for the Democrat Party or disliking of the Republican Party take precedence over their liking for conservative fiscal, social, and foreign policies?

The evidence indicates that such was not the case. It is possible that the Democratic inclination only sufficed to neutralize the conservative arguments, at least as the arguments were put in the campaign to the voters, and in the years preceding as well. (For one year cannot be enough to develop a full set of principles and drive them home into the minds of many millions of people.) Still, the Democratic label was probably only a factor working towards cancelling the conservative tendency.

The active factors in the campaign, which prevented

the shifting of the population from its normal Democratic Party base were several and different. These have to do with the candidates themselves. They have to do with the issues of the campaign both the outspoken issues and the silent issues. They have to do with the conduct of the campaign, that is, the expertness of the tactics, ^{and} the capacity of the workers and managers of the campaign.

First let us examine the situation with respect to the candidates. As 1963 drew to a close, Barry Goldwater was the outstanding contender for the Republican nomination for President. No one came close to him. One objective poll of late 1963 showed that Goldwater possessed already nearly half of the choices of Republican voters: No other candidate of the moment had nearly as many. Tests of sentiment throughout the country showed that the Kennedy administration was unpopular, compared with the showing of incumbent presidents of previous times. We shall not go into the question why: as is usual, some of the reasons for its unpopularity were justified; others were not. Certainly the South was intensely opposed to him. It is apparent, too, in retrospect that the business community was strongly antagonistic to his administration; and a considerable anti-Kennedy sentiment was to be found among Negro voters.

In sum, the Presidential campaign was already under way one full year before the final elections of 1964, and the Republican Party had a strong candidate in Barry Goldwater. But the first presidential campaign of 1964 ended in November of 1963 when a madman assassinated the President. In the days subsequent to that tragic event, every American can be proud of the words, manner, and bearing of the Republican leader, Barry Goldwater.

But then the second presidential campaign of 1964 began. Literally overnight popular sentiment shifted. In the electorate as a whole, the popularity of Barry Goldwater declined abruptly. Among Republicans, the percent who preferred Goldwater as their candidate dropped ^{by} fifty percent! The assassination of President Kennedy had a greater effect on the American presidential elections of 1964 than any other factor. There are several reasons why this was so.

In the first place, a new President took office who was strongly appealing to the South by previous voting record, ethnic origin, religion, and birthplace.

Furthermore, Barry Goldwater, who was the leader of the opposition to the Kennedy administration, became the scapegoat of millions of Americans. The full ex-

tent of this disaster is still not appreciated. It is part and parcel of the American way of government to have a constitutional opposition to the incumbent President and all other officials. Yet it cannot be denied that when a President is stricken, and especially when he is killed, many millions of Americans feel some guilt that they have not been as understanding and kind to the deceased President as they ought to have been. This is a perfectly natural human emotion, felt many times in the course of a person's lifetime as acquaintances pass from the earthly scene.

It is just as natural, though most unfortunate and unwholesome for the nation, that this uneasy sense of guilt is transferred along to someone else who has been the leader of the opposition, regardless of his complete innocence, and he is blamed in some sense for a senseless tragedy. There is no other way of accounting for the precipitous decline in popularity of Barry Goldwater immediately after the assassination of President Kennedy: he was the scapegoat for a lot of uncomfortable and guilty feelings which people had about their President being killed, even when they did not fathom their own emotions.

By the same token, the assassination of the President affected the Democrats. Many of them too were aroused, even more intensely perhaps, because to their feelings of guilt (less strong than in the case of the opposition public but nevertheless sensed simply as any responsible parent will feel guilty for whatever bad may happen to her or his child) was added the deep hostilities stirred among those who liked President Kennedy very much.

Understandly, but still unfortunately, they blindly struck about at any target that was convenient to let out their rage and hostility after the assassination. We shall never know how many of these people discovered as a result that the Republican leader, despite his complete innocence, could be abused and attacked and smeared in every way possible.

Let me put in another way: the assassination of President Kennedy was the signal for a lot of people to launch a bitter attack upon the Republican candidate that somehow they felt was completely justified. The betrayals, the abuse, the quitting, the resignations, and the shifts of voting that took place in the forms just described were on a large scale and constituted the largest factor in the campaign.

Related to this sudden reversal of events was the defection of the so-called Organization Man. The Republican candidate was abandoned by the men of many Executive Suites around the country. Until the death of President Kennedy, the upper level executives of American enterprise were largely and heartily behind Barry Goldwater for President. They held this position despite the fact that much sentiment existed in top financial and banking circles in the East for a local political leader as candidate, and despite the ^{entire} Goldwater opinions that were continuously expressed out of those circles. But beginning in early 1964, the onslaught against Goldwater from these key financial circles began in earnest. Taking a cue from the Democrats, they spared no adjectives, no matter how vile, to describe the leading contender for their Party's nomination.

A strange underground association of ideas began to take form -- the association of the disastrous slaying of the former President, the general popular anxiety over uncertainty in the leadership of the government, and the assertions and feelings that Goldwater was somehow associated with the causes of this anxiety and hostility, and that therefore his character, which would be called bold and resourceful under other circumstances, could now by distortion be made to appear rash, reckless and extreme. No more than Kennedy, either, could Goldwater be called the Executive Suite's choice. He was a westerner, from a small state, had a largely amateur and voluntary following, was not an insider to the large corporation or the large banking interests or the intellectual circles of the East.

So the Executive Suites around the nation, catching their cues from the general anxiety and hostility in the population and from their Eastern banking and corporate board connections, and through the university network that is becoming so important an element of the American political leadership, decamped from the main body of Republican grass roots leadership.

This large-scale defection proved to be highly damaging to the Republican cause in 1964. It made of Barry Goldwater more and more the image of an outsider, a stranger to the affairs of the nation. The press of the nation, with many notable exceptions, felt the wind of events and joined the anti-Goldwater campaign. I doubt that recent history will record as abusive and personal a campaign as certain of the most respectable portions of the press engaged in against Barry Goldwater.

We have to mention, in this connection, still another silent issue of the campaign. While the New York press that is ordinarily so ready to discern and combat, as it should, anti-semitism whenever it appears and in whatever form, it was too busy attacking the Republican candidate's character to notice that he was in some quarters of the country being attacked for being a Jew. Someone will someday look into the underground press and the not-so-underground press, and the feelings behind the bland polling questions, and he will find many an instance of what, for example, happened in Los Angeles in the California presidential primary, when the largest Negro newspaper in the West headlined on the front page the amazing lie that the Jew Goldwater promised Israel to go to war against Egypt if elected.

And, as often happens, those people who were so sure that a lot of prejudiced whites would vote for Goldwater because they erroneously thought he was prejudiced against Negroes, forgot to see that these same types of persons would vote against Goldwater because of his Jewish-sounding name and partly Jewish background.

It is a mistake to think that because Barry Goldwater is not Jewish, ~~that~~ many people would not harbor anti-Semitic feelings against him. Time after time, our workers found this to be true. They found anti-Catholic feelings against Vice-Presidential candidate Miller too, by the way, and this, too, was no mean problem to contend with. It is a mistake of the same kind, to believe that, because persons who regarded themselves as Jews voted overwhelmingly against Goldwater, there was not also a sizeable body of people who cast a vote against what they thought was a Jewish candidate. Some experts estimate that John Kennedy lost a net total of two and a half million votes in 1960 for being Catholic. Someone should now estimate scientifically the number of votes that Barry Goldwater lost in 1964 for appearing to some people as being Jewish.

These facts are not pleasant to discuss. But candor is absolutely necessary. The great silent issues of the 1964 campaign -- the assassination of the President, the defection of the Organization Man, and anti-Semitism all reinforced one another and contributed to reducing the Republican candidate's capacity to present the voters with a reasoned statement of the case for federalism, decentralization, voluntarism, strength in foreign affairs, and honesty in government. That is, the massive non-rational psychological forces operating against the Republican candidate in the 1964 campaign prevented the issue of conservatism to be put before the electorate in any constructive form.

Having seen how a combination of events and acts succeeded in making of the Republican candidate an outsider, without ^{seemingly} the organizational basis or following to grasp and operate the machinery of government, it is simple to comprehend how the so-called open issues of the campaign were handled.

First to the question of peace. A great many intellectuals of the country, full of anxieties and hostilities of the kind I have already referred to, became hysterical over the idea that the Republican candidate would bring about war. They not only forgot which Party in this century had been the party of war, but they were unwilling to grant to the Republican candidate the slightest decent impulse in this direction.

And their views infected the press and a great many persons of the general public. Once a man is cut off from what are supposed to be the more solid kinds of his support, and those supporters even coin the slogans with which he is to be attacked, such as "extremism", he is laid open to all sorts of allegations that he is irresponsible, and reckless.

It was a constant problem during the campaign to stave off, as well as the Party could, the innumerable charges of recklessness, instability, and lack of self-control of the candidate. Every historical and current incident of the most indefinite and minute kind was twisted and turned in order to show the Republican candidate in this light. Hundreds of psychiatrists even answered an unscientific questionnaire coming to them by mail from a stranger, a convict on obscenity charges, and, without seeing the person they were judging, went on to record that he was psychologically unfit to be President! And all the while, elements of the respectable right, middle and left of the nation stood about, watching the ordeal.

Nor should we exclude from consideration as an effective influence in the campaign the international press. Newspapers in Sweden, Germany, Italy, England, and other parts of the world contributed everything in their power to influencing the movements of opinion in the United States. Their views were faithfully reflected in large components of the American press too, so that the impression was abroad in this land that the world overseas was watching the American elections with great anxiety and fervent hope that Barry Goldwater would be defeated in the cause of peace and the welfare state. Irresponsible journalism permitted most of these attacks to be relayed back home without questioning the competence and sources of these foreign reports or the underlying motives behind the foreign opposition to Goldwater.

The disadvantages suffered from the start by the Party were numerous, it is plain to see. In the context that the beginning phases established, everything was believed. The Republican Party was said to be against social security. A decline in the Republican proportion of the vote of the elderly is visible as a result. Obviously, the Republican candidate and Party never had much of a chance to explain -- though perhaps some fault lies in the campaign managers for this -- that the question was how to obtain better old age security, not how to abandon the aged to their fate.

So too with the racial issue. The doors of the Negro world slammed shut on Barry Goldwater with his vote against the Civil Rights Act, no matter what his explanation for the vote. And once the doors were shut, they could never open. Probably never in American history has a group in the country voted so solidly against a candidate as did the Negro voters against Goldwater. By contrast, the vote in the South favoring secessionist leaders in 1860 was much less united.

Is there no question whatsoever as to the motives and reasoning of the Republican candidate in this regard? There is much question, of course. His position was fairly plain. It could be supported, of course, by bigots, as can most positions and candidates on most issues. But he had in mind a fuller explanation than was offered, or could be offered.

And this was probably a mistake of the campaign: it might well have been better to debate the question of the legitimate aspirations of Negro Americans and how to obtain them with the least loss of liberties and benefits for all. Agreeing to close off debate on the issue did not really close off debate but only led to a complete solidifying of the Negro vote and swaying a great many white voters against the Republican candidate.

In the same way, the issue of corruption could not be well debated. Rarely does a candidate have such seemingly difficult explanations to make as President Johnson had to make in the cases of Robert Baker, Jenkins, and the Johnson commercial enterprises. The working press simply did not exert the pressure for these explanations that it did in other times. Actually, the issue of honesty in Washington did begin to get through to the public mind in the later stages of the campaign and a noticeable vote was cast for Goldwater on this issue.

The campaign can now be summed up. The causes of

Republican defeat are fairly plain if we take into account not only the obvious surface indications, but also the evidence of the silent issues. Barry Goldwater suffered defeat because the basic Democrat party disposition of the electorate was not shifted. The biggest force that might have caused the shift, granted the absence of a universally admired personality such as General Eisenhower as a candidate, was the predisposition of the electorate to prefer conservative views, all things being equal.

But the innate conservatism of the American people could not be brought to bear on the election outcome for several reasons. The assassination of President Kennedy hung over the campaign like a dense cloud, preventing rational thought and debate. The loss of support from many business managers owing to the conduct of one segment of the Party was manifestly important. Millions of votes are ultimately involved in this network. Anti-semitism was working against the candidate of the Party. The vote of American Negroes was to all intents and purposes cast as a single bloc against the Republican candidate.

The candidate was discovered without adequate defenses in one vulnerable area and that area, opened up by the above mentioned incidents and defections, was on the question of rashness and instability of behavior. Since these allegations were tied up by many millions of anxious persons directly to the comic-book notion of what starts a war, there was a veritable hysteria and panic of opinion to contend with. Issues such as social security, the welfare state, centralization, and the powers of the Supreme Court over the other branches of the government and the States could not even be discussed except in the most fragmentary way.

The result could easily be foretold, even without mention of one of the most potent factors of all in a contemporary American presidential campaign. I mean the power of the incumbent President to cause himself to be re-elected.

It has long been known that, once in office, a man acquires great powers to perpetuate himself so long as the basic constitutional law allows. Yet, owing to a suspicious lack of concern with the matter on the part of political scientists, who seem to have studied everything else no matter how small, there has been no major effort to tally up the precise, detailed advantages that the incumbent brings to bear in a campaign. Nor has Congress attempted to equalize or get rid of that advantage, except in the case of those laws that are supposed to neutralize politically the civil service.

So it is that there is no estimating precisely the public subsidy that the Democratic Candidate possessed in the waging of the election campaign of 1964. I will offer only a single collected figure in dollars to indicate what an opposition party faces in trying to achieve office. The incumbent has a large personal staff paid from the Treasury and committed to his election. He commands thousands of appointees who do likewise. He has a near monopoly of the press by virtue of the ability of his office to create news. He can with the stroke of a pen put his name to a great number of permitted, ~~rule-making~~, ^{sure} benefit-giving, or promissory actions that affect many millions of Americans under the Civil Service, the aged, the teachers, businessmen, farmers, indeed every section of the American population.

In the year of a presidential campaign, there is in fact no part of the voting public that cannot be reached and given some temporary indulgence by the incumbent President. He can tempt the whole American people, divided into their many groupings, to forget at least for the time being, their more stable and enduring convictions.

I calculate a figure of \$60,000,000 as the monetary contribution of incumbency to the presidential candidate. Actually, some of the advantages are incalculably large. Under the circumstances, it is no wonder that more and more the experts on such matters are coming to believe that an incumbent President is automatically elected to a second term. More and more too, he is in a position, if he wills, to select his successor.

The severe defeat of the Republican Party in 1964 can therefore be explained. In explaining it, it becomes apparent that no candidate would have done much better in 1964. Certainly no other available person would have won. Each and every man available to the Republican Party had serious disabilities in the public eye. Perhaps, under the best of conditions, the vote might have been carried up to the 45% mark.

The questions before the Party in deciding its future is therefore not who could have won the election for the party, but rather, did the party emerge from the election in a better or worse position to capture the elections of 1966 and 1968? Furthermore, did the presidential candidate help or hinder those candidates of his party who were sharing his party designation?

Concerning the latter question, the answer is unfor-

unately clear. Some excellent candidates of the Republican Party suffered defeat because some voters, in rejecting the presidential candidate, rejected them too, automatically, in almost all cases without rancor or dislike. I mention the last fact because these same candidates might come back soon and do extremely well.

Against the loss of some leading lights of the Republican Party can be measured some gains. These are not commonly believed or understood. First of all, the Republican Party, in its worse defeat, took great strides towards that heterogeneity of composition that has so often won victory for the Democrats. With the serious exception of the Negro vote --- whose future must remain of great concern, the Republican Party vote of 1964 was probably composed of the best cross-section of the American population it has received since the days of McKinley, when it was ~~both~~ a workingman's and businessman's and a farmer's party. Sooner or later, the Party had to break with its losing position as the preferred party only of those who think of America only in rural and small-town and northern terms. The Party has a vigorous grass roots constituency today that ramifies throughout the college centers, towns and urban areas of the whole country. Here is the basis for a surprising -- and what is more important -- enduring expansion.

Secondly, a grass roots organization of the modern type, second to none in the recent history of the Party, is available to the leaders of the Party. It may be evident that the election, regarded as the counting of noses, was lost. It is not so clear that the Republican candidate amassed and retained dedicated voluntary workers in unparalleled numbers.

Thirdly, there is a record of campaign positions on issues, which at least some members of the Party feel will go on working for the Party in the years ahead. The record of the campaign is that the principal positions of the Party on welfare, foreign aid, bureaucracy, incorruptibility, self-rule, and individual freedom did not lose votes but, on the contrary gained them and was to continue to gain them up to the very end of the campaign. Unencumbered by the atmosphere of panic and hysteria of the last year, these same principles may continue to gather strength.

The Republican Party, for these several reasons that emerge from the voting record and campaign history, may be able to spring from its compressed position of the moment to new heights.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Arthur M. Frazier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "A".