

Lazarsfeld,
Berelson, and
Gaudet (1948)
(parts)

Preface to the Second Edition

During the recent war, social scientists had an unprecedented opportunity to contribute their skills and knowledge. Sociologists were called on to study soldier morale, so that the Army could modify attitudes and situations which limited the effectiveness of its operations. Social psychologists were asked to examine propaganda reaching the American public so that that emanating from agencies in our government could be improved, and that disseminated by the enemy counteracted. Anthropologists drew on their knowledge of diverse cultures to advise military governors in ways of avoiding or minimizing frictions in dealing with the Japanese, or the Solomon Islanders, or the Koreans. Economists constantly studied price and production trends in order to determine what price controls and tax policies were necessary.

The success of these researches and the recommendations in which they resulted has enhanced the prestige of the social sciences. More and more frequently government administrators, industry, and labor turn to the social scientist for advice. Postwar events have indeed sharpened this trend. The atom bomb has made us realize how far discoveries in the physical sciences have outrun our ability to integrate them into our social system. The possibility of a third world war, despite universal desires for peace, has made many people wonder to what extent social events are within the control of the various individuals who make up society. In domestic affairs we face problems which seem to require for their solution collective action rather than the free play of competitive forces. Housing

and labor relations are only two of the more conspicuous examples. Here again, it is now quite generally accepted that the social sciences can and should make their contribution.

These great expectations place an increased responsibility upon social scientists. If their work is to yield useful and usable knowledge, they must focus their attention on areas of central significance, and they must, at the same time, approach their problems through techniques which lead to empirical facts.

Such requirements mean that three general research problems must be considered. The first relates to the integration of facts and theories. A proper integration of factual materials and theoretical formulations is basic to the existence and development of any science. No one can make use of a mass of unrelated facts; but, conversely, no social action can be based on general speculations about the "nature" of society, if such theories cannot be systematically tested in concrete situations.

Just as empirical research and social theory must be integrated, so actual research findings must also be related to each other. Until recently the social sciences exhibited an unfortunate tendency to conduct a survey here and an experiment there, and to let it go at that. Ph.D. candidates, for example, prided themselves on not repeating a study "which had already been done." Actually, the opposite trend should prevail. Results should be checked and rechecked under both identical and varying conditions. The complexity of social life requires that the same problems be studied many times before basic uniformities can be differentiated from transitory social occurrences.

In the third place the kinds of problems to be studied require careful delineation. In the early history of sociology there were many grandiose schemes for understanding the whole history of mankind. Even at the beginning of this century, when social scientists became more modest, there was still a feeling that "the causes of war" and "methods of preventing crime" could be discovered quickly and easily. Attempts to solve such vast and complex problems soon met opposition.

Causes and changes should not be investigated, it was asserted; social phenomena should merely be described. This position led to a predilection for static, census-like studies which "surveyed" the field but which did not yield findings which could be transferred to social actions.

The way out of this dilemma seems to lie in a compromise, perhaps only temporary. A disciplined and limited kind of dynamic research, focused on social events and developments lasting several months or, at most, several years, appears at the present time to hold most promise. Systematic analyses of political campaigns, of crisis situations, of the development of new communities, of the reactions of different ethnic groups coming into close contact for the first time are most likely to produce the kinds of information on which the future developments of the social sciences depend.

In this Foreword to the second edition of *The People's Choice*, an edition made possible by the Columbia University Press, we shall elaborate these three points. We hope thereby to accomplish two things. First of all, we hope to clarify the major trends in contemporary social research. But we also believe that the reader will find the present study more useful if he reads it with these general developments in mind.

Our discussion of these points will refer to data and observations which either were not included in the original report, or which have been collected in more recent studies.

Let us take up each of these points in reverse order, considering first the need for a type of social research which can study social changes: their origin, nature, and duration.

Dynamic Social Research

Public opinion research is frequently misunderstood at the present time. From poll findings published in magazines and newspapers, laymen, and even colleagues in other social science fields, have gained the impression that such research is content to describe how people feel about a given issue at a particular time. Actually, the scope of this new discipline is much broader

Social scientists want to know the processes by which the various sectors of public opinion influence legislative action and other decision-making in government. Furthermore, we are eager to discover in what ways attitudes themselves are formed. *The People's Choice* focused its attention on this latter problem, the formation, change and development of public opinion.

A group of social scientists remained in Erie County, Ohio, from May until November, 1940, in order to observe the progress and effect of the presidential campaign in that community. A large number of people were interviewed, but the study centered around a panel of 600 respondents who were questioned every month for a period of seven months.

The panel subjects fell into two main groups: those who did not change their political opinion during the period of the study and those who changed in any of a variety of ways. Some shifted their party allegiance, others could not make a decision until the end of the campaign, and still others claimed a definite vote intention but did not go to the polls. These various types of changers and shifters were the central interest of the study, for they were the people in whom the processes of attitude formation and change could be observed. They were compared with the "constant" people. Their personal characteristics, their contacts with other people, and their exposure to radio and newspapers were carefully examined. The reasons they gave for their changes were related to their objective social-economic positions. The opinions they had at one time were contrasted with what they stated at both previous and subsequent interviews. In other words, we did not describe opinion; we studied it *in the making*.

Now let us consider one phase of this dynamic analysis in order to discover its essential elements. The panel was interviewed for the sixth time during October and for the seventh and final time immediately after the election. Thus we know how these people intended to vote shortly before the election and for whom they actually voted. The results are as follows:

VOTE INTENTION IN OCTOBER					
			Don't Know	Don't Expect to Vote	
Actual Vote	Rep.	Dem.			Total
Republican	215	7	4	6	232
Democrat	4	144	12	0	160
Didn't vote	10	16	6	59	91
Total persons	229	167	22	65	483

This simple table has a surprising number of implications. Let us assume for a moment that the interviews in October and November had been conducted with different people, rather than with the same people, as was actually the case. Then, the findings would have read as follows: in October 42 percent (167 out of 396) of those who had a vote intention meant to vote for the Democratic Party; in November 41 percent (160 out of 392) voted for it. This would have given the impression of great constancy in political attitudes. Actually, however, only the people in the major diagonal of the table remained unchanged: 418 out of 483 respondents did what they intended to do; 13 percent changed their minds one way or another.

This 13 percent represents the turnover which took place in the few weeks before the election. The concept of turnover is basic for analysis of opinion formation. If the turnover is large, it indicates that the opinion or behavior is unstable. We know that people feel uncertain and that propaganda may be effective, or that clarification and education are required.

If such dynamic research is conducted more frequently in the future, it may be possible to classify social events according to the following dimensions: What types of events show a small or large turnover as they develop? Does the turnover tend to become smaller as the events run their course? At what point is a minimum turnover reached and what is likely to increase it again? Under what conditions do we have a balanced turnover, as in this case, where the changes in various directions seem to cancel each other? When does turnover occur with a shift in "marginal distributions"?

Answers to such questions, however, would give only a rough picture of different social events. We can be more precise. Turnover is the result of changes which come about in the intentions, expectations and behavior of individual persons. Three broad questions can be raised in this connection:

- (a) What kind of people are likely to shift?
- (b) Under what influences do these shifts come about?
- (c) In what directions are the shifts made?

Question (a) can be answered in a variety of ways. Let us concentrate here on the "crystallizers," those people who had no definite vote intention in October but who went to the polls in November. Long before they had reached a decision we could predict rather successfully what they would do: They would decide finally to vote in the same way as did people with similar social characteristics who had made up their minds earlier in the campaign. For example, it is a familiar fact of contemporary American politics, corroborated in this study, that urban people are more likely than rural people to vote for the Democratic Party, and Catholics vote Democratic more frequently than Protestants. If we predict, therefore, that urban, Catholic "Don't knows" will vote for the Democratic Party, we shall be correct in a considerable number of cases, and post-election interviews will verify our predictions.

Such "external correlations" sometimes evoke expressions of disappointment. Turnover analysis, however, permits us to go "inside the situation." We can pick out a variety of psychological mediators which connect the social situation and the individual decision. In each interview, for example, respondents were asked who, in their opinion, would win the election. Even among those who had not yet formed a vote intention, there were many individuals with a definite expectation. And, significantly enough, the expectations expressed by the undecided were not haphazard ones, but instead were usually those prevailing in their own social environments. Following the process one step further, it turned out that expectations foreshadowed final decision: many people voted for the candidate

they had previously picked as the winner. Thus these expectations were one of the "intervening" variables which helped in explaining the development of vote decisions. (The details of this analysis are discussed in Chapter XII.)

The table on page xi also suggests answers to questions about the specific influences which produce changes in attitudes or behavior. Again let us focus our attention on one group, those who said in October that they did not intend to vote. It will be noted that the large majority of this group fitted their actions to their words: 59 of the 65 actually did not vote in November. But the six changers, those who shifted from an intention of inaction to an actual vote, all cast their ballots for the Republican candidates. The influences which produced this change were not hard to discover. The field staff in Erie County had observed that, in this election at least, the Republican machine was much more active and efficient than the Democratic. And, indeed, when the six changers were asked what had made them go to the polls, all stated that they had been visited at the last moment by a Republican party worker who had persuaded them to vote.

Thus, by studying the different groups which contribute to the turnover, we can analyze the influences which operate to bring about changes in behavior. This, in itself, provides a large field for investigation. We can record what people read and listen to, and relate such exposure in a twofold way to changes in mind. Some people were aware that they had been influenced by a specific reading or listening experience, and they told us so in the special interviews conducted with all changers. In other cases, a more intricate statistical analysis was necessary to trace the more unconscious influences. (These techniques have been more elaborately discussed in a recent publication.)¹

In the present study, face-to-face contacts turned out to be the most important influences stimulating opinion change. To

¹ Hans Zeisel, *Say It with Figures* (New York, Harper and Bros., 1947), Chapter X.

the worker in a political machine this is probably not surprising, but to the social scientist it is a challenge. The discovery of the conditions under which attitudes or modes of behavior are particularly accessible to personal influence, the classification of types of personal influence most effective in modifying opinion, the examination of situations in which the more formal influences of mass media seem to produce change, all these are typical problems for what we have called dynamic social research.

But the picture is not completed by knowledge only of who changes and in response to what influences. We also want to know the directions of the changes: Do they result in a random redistribution of opinion, or is there some discernible pattern? Turnover analysis in the present study provided preliminary, but revealing, answers to this question. For particular subgroups within the community, attitude change led to greater uniformity and *homogeneity*: individual changes brought members of specific subgroups into closer agreement with each other. For the community as a whole, however, attitude change produced greater diversity and *polarization*: individual changes brought the members of one subgroup into sharper disagreement with members of other subgroups. We shall consider this process in greater detail in a later section of the foreword. The point to emphasize here is that, through the kind of dynamic research employed in the present study, problems such as the development of group cleavages or increasing awareness of class interests become amenable to social research.

Social Research as a Continuing Endeavor

We are frequently warned that the results of a specific study are valid only for the time and place where it was conducted. Does this mean that the findings of one study can never be duplicated in another? Should we expect different results, even under similar conditions? Questions of this kind suggest that terms such as "repetition" and "corroboration of evidence" need to be considered more carefully. In fact, when

similar studies are available, comparative analyses can serve three positive functions:

1. The comparison may indicate that the findings of both studies are the same. This we shall call "the function of corroboration."

2. The comparison may indicate that, although the statistical results of the two studies differ, consideration of the specific conditions under which the results were obtained will lead to the same general conclusions. This we shall call "the function of specification."

3. A negative result in the first study may be clarified by new findings in the second one. This we shall call "the function of clarification."

It happens that the present study can be compared with a similar one. A second but briefer panel study was conducted during the 1944 presidential campaign, four years after the one dealt with in this volume. The Bureau of Applied Social Research, in cooperation with the National Opinion Research Center, then at the University of Denver, conducted two interviews with a nation-wide cross-section of about 2,000 people: one interview before the election, the other after. What will a comparison of these two studies yield? We shall select several examples to illustrate and clarify the functions of comparative analyses.

A first example deals with the corroboration of findings. In the Erie County study, there were 54 party changers, persons who shifted their allegiance from one party to the other. Here again the question about the direction of attitude change arose. Did these party shifts bring the changers in closer harmony with other members of the subgroups to which they belonged, or did the changes occur in some other direction?

In order to answer this we made use of the fact already referred to, namely, that the poor, the urban residents, and the Catholics are more likely to vote the Democratic ticket, while the well-to-do, the Protestants, and the rural dwellers

are more frequently found in the Republican camp. On the basis of these three social characteristics, indications of membership in different social groups, it was possible to construct an "index of political predisposition." The index, in turn, permitted us to classify the social backgrounds of all individuals as conducive to either a Democratic or a Republican vote. (For more detailed discussion of the index and the types of analysis which it engendered, see Chapter III in the present study.) It was thus possible to distinguish between two types of individuals: those whose vote intentions were in harmony with their social backgrounds, and the deviate cases whose intentions were at variance with those of the subgroups to which they belonged.

When the 54 party changers were studied, it was found that, before their shifts in party allegiance, 36 individuals had expressed intentions at variance with their social environments, while, after their shifts, only 20 were deviate cases. We thus came to the conclusion that party changes are in the direction of greater consistency and homogeneity within subgroups (p. 139, below).

Because the 1944 study covered only the final few weeks of the campaign, when party changes are rare, it found an even smaller number of shifters. Moreover, an index of political predisposition is less valid when applied to a nation-wide sample than when applied to the residents of one county. And yet, despite these limitations, the results of the second study are an almost *a fortiori* corroboration of those in the first. In 1944 it was possible to study 36 changers. Before their shifts, 22 expressed intentions which deviated from the prevailing opinion climate of their social environments; after the shifts, only 14 deviated.

A comparison of similar studies can thus increase our confidence in findings which might be considered doubtful if only one of the studies had been carried out. Without such corroboration, a finding based on 54 cases in one study and on 36 in a second would be so unreliable that we would question its

validity. With the corroboration made possible by successive studies, we are more inclined to accept the result.

Comparative analyses can also confirm general conclusions by indicating that statistically different results are the outcome of different specific conditions. In order to illustrate this function of "specification" we shall return once more to a group of changers already considered: those who said in their pre-election interviews that they would not vote, but who finally went to the polls. In the Erie County study all such individuals voted Republican, while in the 1944 study a majority of these changers voted Democratic. At first glance this might appear to be a contradiction of findings. But is it? In 1940 the Erie County Republican machine was by far the stronger; in 1944 the Political Action Committee was active throughout the nation. Furthermore, P.A.C. concentrated on getting low-income people to the polls on the assumption that, if they voted at all, they would vote Democratic. The figures of the 1944 study prove that assumption correct. Of 20 people (largely from low-income groups) who did not intend to vote but who finally did, 3 cast a Republican and 17 a Democratic ballot.

Thus comparative analyses of studies carried out under different historical or social conditions can lead to much the same sort of confirmation as does actual duplication of results. A comparison of the final decisions of last-minute voters in an election where the Republican machine is strong, with the similar decisions made by similar voters in an election where pro-Democratic forces are active leads to one general conclusion: the machine which makes a strong last-minute effort to get stragglers to the polls can be of great assistance to its party.

Finally, a comparison of similar studies can lead to the clarification of results. In the 1940 study there was some indication that the party changers were the more indifferent voters. This finding was an unexpected one, for political experts have frequently asserted that, during a campaign, the more intelligent and concerned voter will shift his allegiance from one candidate to another as he learns more about their platforms

and as he is better able to appraise their qualifications to deal with the foreign and domestic situations which arise. Because the relationship between party changers and indifference was unanticipated, the plan of the 1940 study did not make adequate provisions for examining it.

This was corrected in the 1944 study. Then all respondents who expressed a vote intention in their preelection interviews were asked two questions: Were they much concerned whether or not their candidate won? and, Did they believe there were any important differences between the two candidates? Analysis of the answers to these questions revealed, in fact, that the party changers (those who voted for one candidate after having said they intended to vote for the other) were considerably *less* concerned with the election than were the "constant" voters (those who actually voted as they had previously intended to): 38 percent of the changers, as contrasted with 21 percent of the constant voters, said it made little difference which candidate won the election; 65 percent of the changers, as contrasted with 46 percent of the constant voters, could see no real differences between the candidates. It is important to recognize that these expressions of indifference are not post-factum rationalizations of party changes; they were obtained *before* the change took place.

We can thus clarify a result in the earlier study. The people who change their political opinion are not greatly concerned about the campaign or its outcome. Their indifference makes it difficult for them to reach a lasting decision, for they are easily swayed by fortuitous influences. A conversation with a friend today sways them toward one candidate; a persuasive radio talk yesterday had convinced them to vote for the other party. It is not impossible, in fact, that some of the indifferent voters have not reached a real vote decision even as they enter the polling booths.

We were able to compare only two studies and these only at several points. Yet the comparative analysis was productive. It did increase our confidence in results of the individual

studies, and it did confirm some of the broader interpretations. Clearly, then, social scientists have missed a valuable opportunity for adding to the fund of basic knowledge by failing to repeat the same type of study under constant and varying conditions. Panel studies lend themselves particularly well to such repetition: their logic is clear, and comparable aspects of different situations can easily be isolated and contrasted.

Our discussion thus far has indicated research methods and plans through which sociologically relevant and scientifically precise data can be obtained. But social research does not stop with the collection of such information. What is needed further is a systematic integration of the data in a theoretical context. Only then can we expect that the data will, on the one hand, be applicable in concrete social situations, and will, on the other hand, point out the directions in which future research work should move.

Throughout the first edition of *The People's Choice*, we tried to indicate the broader implications of our concrete findings. Further research on specific problems growing out of the original study is now in progress, but much work remains to be done. It should be useful, therefore, to develop more explicitly the theoretical framework in which the study was carried out, and the theoretical implications of its results.

Empirical Data and Social Processes

The Erie County study resulted in a number of generalizations which should be relevant to any research concerned with short-range changes in attitude or behavior. These do not yet form a coherent system. They are generalizations which form a bridge between the facts as they are observed and a more systematic theory which still awaits development. They are statements about social processes, and are, thus, high-order generalizations when contrasted with statements of empirical fact, low-order generalizations when contrasted with the theoretical formulations toward which social research aims.

All of our conclusions about the social processes through

which attitude changes occur are closely interrelated, but for our present purposes it will be sufficient to discuss them separately.

1. A first point concerns the stability of attitudes. The subjects in our study tended to vote as they always had, in fact, as their families always had. Fully 77 percent of the panel members said that their parents and grandparents had voted consistently for one or the other of the major political parties, and they maintained these family traditions in the 1940 election. This stability was made possible by a sort of protective screen built around central attitudes. Despite the flood of propaganda and counterpropaganda available to the prospective voter, he is reached by very little of it. And, when we examine what exactly does reach him, we find that he elects to expose himself to the propaganda with which he already agrees, and to seal himself off from the propaganda with which he might disagree.

2. Such stability cannot be explained by reference to the "stubbornness" or "inertia" of human nature. Whatever other social or psychological functions may be served by the preservation of basic attitudes, it provides a source of great satisfaction to individuals in their group contacts. By maintaining their attitudes intact, they are able to avoid or to minimize conflicts and disagreements with the persons in their social environments who share these attitudes. Thus attitude stability is instrumental in preserving feelings of individual security.

3. These individual tendencies are supplemented by group processes. While the individual preserves his security by sealing himself off from propaganda which threatens his attitudes, he finds those attitudes reinforced in his contacts with other members of his group. Because of their common group membership, they will share similar attitudes and will exhibit similar selective tendencies. But this does not mean that all of the members of a group will expose themselves to exactly the same bits of propaganda or that they will be influenced by precisely the same aspects of common experiences. Each individual will

have his private fund of information and his private catalogue of experiences, even though these are selected and judged according to common standards.

In their mutual interactions, each individual makes public some of the private information and a few of the private experiences which support common attitudes. Thus all individuals become subject to a broader range of selected influences. The interactions serve to increase the isolation of any one individual; they provide him with additional arguments to support his position. The end result of such interactions among group members, then, is a reinforcement, a mutual strengthening, of common attitudes.

4. And yet, change does come about in some cases. It is important, therefore, to determine the conditions under which attitudes lose their stability, and the processes through which the change takes place.

One process depends on the activation of previous experiences and ideas. Every individual carries around with him germs of observations and half-forgotten experiences which are in a sense "recessive," usually because they do not fit into the prevailing traditions or interests of the group to which he belongs. Under certain circumstances, however, during a crisis or during a period of intensive propaganda, these can be brought to the fore. They can then lead to a restructuring of attitudes, and, perhaps in some cases, to a change in group affiliations.

5. Such predispositions to change are more typical for individuals in whom cross-pressures operate. In our complex society, individuals do not belong to one group, only. They have a variety of major social affiliations: their social class, their ethnic group, their religious group, the informal associations in which they participate. These various affiliations will make conflicting claims on some individuals: an upper-class Catholic, for example, may find that his religious affiliation pulls him in one direction, while his class position pulls him in the opposite direction. And when concrete situations, such as

an election campaign, require him to make a definite decision, he must also decide which of his group loyalties should take priority.

The problem of determining how these cross-pressures are resolved is one of the main tasks for social research. The following questions are relevant in this connection: In which of his various group affiliations does the individual experience such conflicting claims? Are there any general rules for predicting which claims will prove the stronger, when several are in conflict? The reader will find that many of the specific findings in the present study are pertinent to this problem, although no safe generalizations about so complex a topic can be made on the basis of a single investigation. The method developed in the Erie County study, however, should provide the means for answering the question. What kind of behavior does an individual under such cross-pressures exhibit? We found in the present study that, compared with the rest of the Erie County population, individuals who experienced cross-pressures took considerably longer to arrive at a definite vote decision. But such delay is not the only possible reaction. Other alternatives range all the way from individual neurotic reactions, such as an inability to make any decisions at all, to intellectual solutions which might lead to new social movements. Many of the baffling questions about the relationship between individual attitudes and social environment may be answered when these problems of cross-pressures and reactions to them are thoroughly and properly studied.

6. But when we talk about an individual and his environment we oversimplify the problem, for the environment consists of other individuals. How are their attitudes developed? Or, to put it somewhat differently, through what mechanisms and processes does a group develop common attitudes?

Again the problem leads us in several directions. We are led, first of all, to study opinion leaders. In every social group there are some individuals who are particularly active and articulate. They are more sensitive than others to the interests

of their group, and more anxious to express themselves on important issues. It is relatively easy to locate these individuals, and thus to study how they differ from the majority of their group.

In the present study we found that one of the functions of opinion leaders is to mediate between the mass media and other people in their groups. It is commonly assumed that individuals obtain their information directly from newspapers, radio, and other media. Our findings, however, did not bear this out. The majority of people acquired much of their information and many of their ideas through personal contacts with the opinion leaders in their groups. These latter individuals, in turn, exposed themselves relatively more than others to the mass media. The two-step flow of information is of obvious practical importance for any study of propaganda.

The concept of opinion leadership is, incidentally, not a new one. In the many studies of "power," "influence," and "leadership," we are reminded that every community can point to important men and women who set the fashions and are imitated by others. But our investigation suggests that this familiar concept must be modified. For we found that opinion leadership does not operate only vertically, from top to bottom, but also horizontally: there are opinion leaders in every walk of life.

7. Opinion leadership, however, is only one of the mechanisms through which the attitudes of a group are formed. Another is what has been called the "emergence" or "crystallization" of opinion. Social situations, of which a political campaign would be one example, constantly demand actions or opinions. And the members of a group meet these demands, even when there is no particularly articulate individual on whom they can rely for advice. For, above and beyond opinion leadership are the mutual interactions of group members which reinforce the vague feelings of each individual. As these interactions take place, a new distribution of articulate opinions and attitudes is crystallized.

In essence, then, the process of emergence is another phase of the process of reinforcement discussed above in point (3). When prior attitudes exist, mutual interactions will reinforce them; when no prior attitudes but only vague feelings exist, mutual interactions will crystallize these feelings into definite opinions.

Such emergences of attitude or action have usually been studied only in panic situations, or in attempts to understand "mob behavior." The same processes are at work in many other situations, however, and they do not always lead to turbulence or violence. They occur whenever a stream of propaganda inundates a community, when an important event takes place, or if a group decision is to be made. And, because of their generality, it is important to study under what conditions and in what way these emergences develop.

It is interesting to note that, formulated in this way, questions about the formation of opinion are similar to problems with which economists have struggled for many years. For example, they frequently view the stabilization of price levels as a function of the interactions between supply and the demands of a number of individuals. This is logically similar to considering the distribution of opinion in a group a result of the interactions of many individuals. In neither case can the final result be explained by the previous actions or opinions of individuals considered separately. In both cases the final result is a function of interactions which have as their by-product something which had not existed before.

8. There is still another factor in opinion change. Opinions seem to be organized in a hierarchy of stability. In the course of a campaign, the more flexible ones adapt themselves to the more stable levels. Each political party holds a set of tenets which it tries to impress upon voters. At the beginning of a campaign quite a number of people give "Republican" answers to some questions and "Democratic" answers to others. But as the campaign goes on, there is a tendency for the opinion structure of more and more people to become more and more

homogeneous. When the changes are studied, the topics can be ranked according to their degree of flexibility. Vote intention is most stable; attitudes on more specific topics tend to become consistent with party position. Among these topics, in turn, there are some which seem to be dragged along by others. In the 1940 campaign, for instance, opinions on the personalities of the candidates were relatively more stable, and opinions on specific issues, such as the role of the Government in economic affairs, were likely to be adjusted to the evaluation of the men.

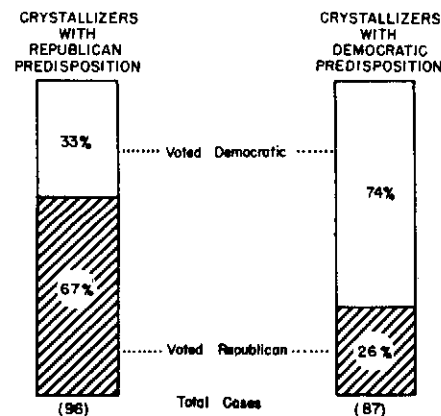
These are only some of the processes through which opinions are formed and modified. But they should help to answer a question raised previously, namely, whether shifts in attitudes move in any definite direction. For, whether the process of change involves the resolution of cross-pressures, the influence of opinion leaders or external events, or mutual interactions, the result of change is increased consistency, both within groups and within individuals. As these processes mold and modify opinions, the group members find themselves in closer agreement with each other; there is thus the simultaneous movement toward increased homogeneity within groups and increased polarization between groups which we described earlier. And correlatively, as the individual conforms more closely to his social environment, as he resolves his cross-pressures and finds vague feelings crystallized into definite opinions, many of the inconsistencies in his private set of attitudes will disappear.

Finally, while these generalizations refine the results of the present study, it is important to recognize their preliminary and tentative character. Investigations of other specific situations may lead to new generalizations or may indicate the need to modify those outlined here. One must keep in mind the relation of a specific study and the type of generalization which we consider. They summarize the information thus far collected, but they are not only summaries. They operate also as guides in new researches, for, with them in mind, we know

~~were undecided in May as to how they would vote but later made up their minds.~~ About two-thirds of those with Republican predispositions decided by October to vote Republican, and about three-fourths of those with Democratic predispositions decided for the Democrats (Chart 25).¹ Thus from a simple three-factor index, we can predict with considerable consistency

CHART 25

Predisposition, as measured by the IPP scale, permits us to predict subsequent vote decisions of people who originally are undecided.



the outcome of deliberations which the deciders themselves cannot foresee. The explanation for this is clear. What the political campaign did, so to speak, was not to form new opinions but to raise old opinions over the thresholds of awareness and decision. Political campaigns are important primarily because they *activate* latent predispositions. We therefore turn to a more thorough analysis of just what happens in this process of *activation*.

The Process of Activation

Perhaps a few analogies will help to bring out the meaning of the concept of activation. A photograph is on an exposed negative, but it does not appear until the developer acts to bring it out—first faintly but finally in all its sharp contrast. The developer, however, has had no influence upon the content of the emerging picture. Or, children often shade a piece of paper placed over a coin. The structure of the coin determines the picture which emerges. No picture would have come out if the coin's surface had had no structure. But in addition, stroke after stroke of shading is necessary to bring out the underlying outline. Campaign propaganda has something like the effect of the developer and the pencil shading. It brings the voter's predispositions to the level of visibility and expression. It transforms the latent political tendency into a manifest vote.

The activating forces of political communications are of two types. First, there are the materials in the formal mass media—the newspaper, magazine, and radio. Secondly, there are direct personal influences which, as we shall see later, can be more important than widespread publicity, but that analysis must be reserved for another chapter. Here we shall be concerned mainly with the way in which the formal propaganda develops or activates the latent inclinations of the voter.

The Four Steps of Activation

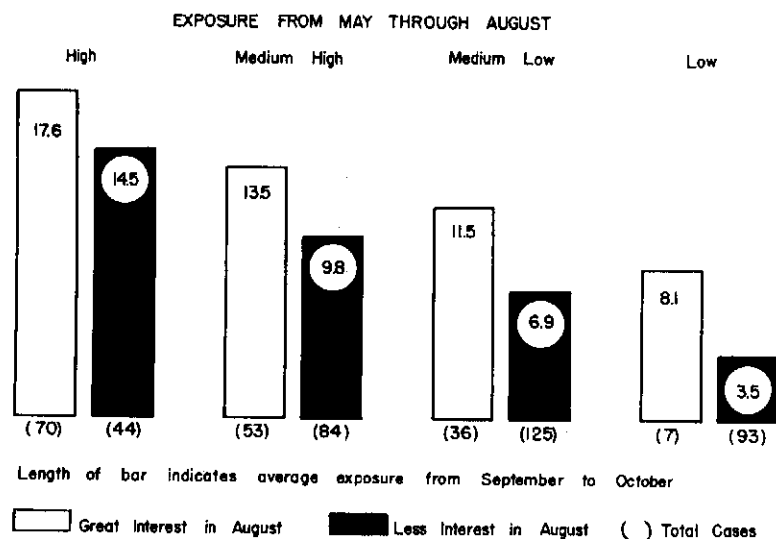
There are four continuous steps in the normal process of activation. We shall state them here and then develop the evidence for each in more detail.

1. *Propaganda Arouses Interest:* As the campaign gains momentum, people who have not been interested begin to pay attention. At this stage it is the rising volume of propaganda which initiates the change.

2. *Increased Interest Brings Increased Exposure:* As people "wake up" to the campaign, their aroused attention leads them to see and hear more out of the supply around them. ~~The~~

CHART 28

The four pairs of bars distinguish between people with different degrees of exposure in the first part of the campaign. They were divided according to their degree of interest in August. The more interested read and listened to more campaign material during the second part of the campaign, irrespective of their previous exposure level.



Attention Is Selective

In a typical American presidential campaign, there is often not a complete balance between material favorable to the Democrats and that favorable to the Republicans, but still anyone who wants to read a particular side can usually find it. (The situation in Erie County in 1940 is described in Chapter XIII.) But supply need not be equated to exposure and actually was not. People selected political material in accord with their own taste and bias. Even those who had not yet made a decision exposed themselves to propaganda which fit their not-yet-conscious political predispositions.

This is easily demonstrated. The people who in August did not have a definite vote intention are classified by their index of political predispositions (IPP) into two groups: those with social characteristics which should predispose them to be Democrats and those with characteristics indicating Republican predispositions. Remember that these people had not yet made up their minds how they were going to vote. Next we look at their exposure to political communications but we do it differently from before. What interests us now is not the extent but the *political color* of the material to which they were exposed. All the speeches, magazine articles, or newspaper stories they reported reading or hearing were classified according to their political content. Thus we were able to classify the exposure of each respondent as predominantly Republican, predominantly Democratic, or neutral (the last if the respondent had neither heard nor read anything or if his attention was evenly balanced between the two parties).

The still-undecided persons with the economic, religious, and residential attributes which usually characterize Republicans managed as a rule to see and hear more Republican propaganda (Chart 29). Among those whose characteristics—economic, religious and residential—tended Democratic, three times as many saw and heard more pro-Democratic propaganda than pro-Republican.

There are at least two factors which account for the differences. One is external to the voter himself. He lives in the country so he reads farm journals that happen also to be more Republican; or he lives in the city so he hears more talk from fellow-workers who are pro-labor and pro-Democratic. The environment sifts the propaganda which the respondent sees and hears.

But there is also an effect caused by the still-unconscious psychological predispositions of the voter himself. From his many past experiences shared with others in his economic, religious, and community groups, he has a readiness to attend to some things more than others. His internal as well as his external

county. But the *distribution* of votes was not affected by it. The interviewers activated the predispositions of some of our more sluggish respondents but did not affect the ratio in which they finally voted for the two parties.

Thus, personal relationships were also instrumental in activating the latent predispositions of the voters. Before dealing with them directly, however, let us turn to some other effects of the campaign.

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The Reinforcement Effect

Paradoxically enough, campaign propaganda exerted one major effect by producing no overt effect on vote behavior at all—if by the latter “effect” we naively mean a *change* in vote. Half the people knew in May, before the campaign got underway, how they would vote in November, and actually voted that way. But does that mean that campaign propaganda had no effect upon them? Not at all. For them, political communications served the important purpose of preserving prior decisions instead of initiating new decisions. It kept the partisans “in line” by reassuring them in their vote decision; it reduced defections from the ranks. It had the effect of reinforcing the original vote decision. ✓

The importance of reinforcement can be appreciated by conjecturing what might have happened if the political content of the major media of communications had been monopolized, or nearly monopolized, by one of the parties. European experience with totalitarian control of communications suggests that under some conditions the opposition may be whittled down until only the firmly convinced die-hards remain. In many parts of this country, there are probably relatively few people who would tenaciously maintain their political views in the face of a continuous flow of hostile arguments. Most people want—and need—to be told that they are right and to know that other people agree with them. Thus, the parties could forego their propagandizing only at considerable risk, and never on a unilateral basis. So far as numbers of voters are concerned, campaign propaganda results not so much in gaining new adherents ✓

as in preventing the loss of voters already favorably inclined.

Wherever the parties stand in substantial competition—as they do throughout most of the country and as they did in Erie County in 1940—party loyalties are constantly open to the danger of corrosion. Party propaganda—from his own party—provides an arsenal of political arguments which serve to allay the partisan's doubts and to refute the opposition arguments which he encounters in his exposure to media and friends—in short, to secure and stabilize and solidify his vote intention and finally to translate it into an actual vote. A continuing flow of partisan arguments enables him to reinterpret otherwise unsettling events and counter-arguments so that they do not leave him in an uncomfortable state of mental indecision or inconsistency. For example, Republicans who might be disturbed by Willkie's relationship to utility interests were equipped with the notion that his experience in business would make him a better administrator of the national government than Roosevelt. Similarly, Democrats uneasy about the third term as a break with American tradition were able to justify it by reference to the President's indispensable experience in foreign affairs at such a time of world crisis. (In fact, this latter argument *was* the answer to the disturbing third-term argument for many loyal Democrats.)

The provision of new arguments and the reiteration of old arguments in behalf of his candidate reassure the partisan and strengthen his vote decision. Should he be tempted to vacillate, should he come to question the rightness of his decision, the reinforcing arguments are there to curb such tendencies toward defection. The partisan is assured that he is right; he is told why he is right; and he is reminded that other people agree with him, always a gratification and especially so during times of doubt. In short, political propaganda in the media of communication, by providing them with good partisan arguments, at the same time provides orientation, reassurance, integration for the already partisan. Such satisfactions tend to keep people "in line" by reinforcing their initial decision. To a large extent,

stability of political opinion is a function of exposure to reinforcing communications.

Partisanship, Partisan Exposure, Reinforced Partisanship

The availability of partisan propaganda in Erie County in 1940 was somewhat out of balance. There was much more Republican material available (see Chapter XIII) but it was still reasonably easy to read or listen to the Democratic side. If the exposure of the partisans paralleled the partisan distribution of available communications, they would always be running up against the case of the opposition, especially the Democrats. Thus reinforcement would take a step forward and then a step back, and its effect would be halting and lame at best.

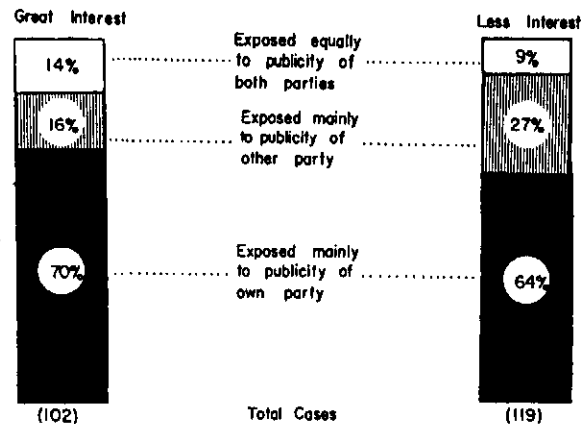
But, of course, actual exposure does *not* parallel availability. Availability *plus* predispositions determines exposure—and predispositions lead people to select communications which are congenial, which support their previous position. More Republicans than Democrats listened to Willkie and more Democrats than Republicans listened to Roosevelt. The universe of campaign communications—political speeches, newspaper stories, newscasts, editorials, columns, magazine articles—was open to virtually everyone. But exposure was consistently partisan, and such partisan exposure resulted in reinforcement.¹

By and large about two-thirds of the constant partisans—the people who were either Republican or Democratic from May right through to Election Day—managed to see and hear more of their own side's propaganda than the opposition's.² About one-fifth of them happened to expose more frequently to the other side, and the rest were neutral in their exposure (Chart 30). But—and this is important—the more strongly partisan the person, the more likely he is to insulate himself from contrary points of view. The constants with great interest and with most concern in the election of their own candidate were *more* partisan in exposure than the constants with less interest and less concern. Such partisan exposure can only serve to reinforce the partisan's previous attitudes. In short, the most partisan people

protect themselves from the disturbing experience presented by opposition arguments by paying little attention to them. Instead, they turn to that propaganda which reaffirms the validity and wisdom of their original decision—which is then reinforced.)

CHART 30

The more interested people are in the election, the more they tend to expose themselves to propaganda of their own party. This chart deals only with those with constant vote intention from May to November.



One of the assumptions of a two-party democratic system is that considerable inter-communication goes on between the supporters of the opposing sides. This evidence indicates that such inter-communication may go on in public—in the media of communication—without reaching very far into the ranks of the strongly partisan, on either side. In recent years, there has been a good deal of talk by men of good will about the desirability and necessity of guaranteeing the free exchange of ideas in the market-place of public opinion. Such talk has centered upon the problem of keeping free the channels of expression and communication. Now we find that the consumers of ideas, if they

have made a decision on the issue, themselves erect high tariff walls against alien notions.)

Reinforcement Described by the Reinforced

Partisans need reasons for being partisan, and the formal media supply them and thus reinforce their partisanship. At one point during the interviews, the respondents who maintained a constant voting preference were asked why they favored the candidate of their choice. Their answers sometimes showed the effect of reinforcement.

Faint beginnings of doubt about the wisdom of their decision were counteracted by appropriate propaganda, and corrosion is thus halted. For example, a young married woman, a Democrat with low income, reported: "In FDR's Wednesday night speech, he stated the facts of his administration. He mentioned several facts of which I had been unaware—for example, that there have been fewer bank failures in his administration than in previous ones. I cannot recall any others at present, but *I had no idea FDR had accomplished so much.*" The final phrase clearly expresses this partisan's relief and gratification in the apparent validity of her decision.

Similar reinforcement—the other side of the coin—is evident in the case of a young salesman on a low SES level who was for Willkie in 1940 just as he had been for Landon in 1936. His actual economic position conflicted with his appraisal of himself as belonging to small business. He granted that "Roosevelt's policies were good but we don't need them now," and then continued: "I have been reading various articles about Roosevelt lately and he didn't do as much as I thought. . . . Read in *Nation's Business* about the NLRB. The basic idea was all right but they didn't push it far enough. *It just sounds like he has done a lot but he really didn't.*" This man's wife disagreed with him on politics. Under all these cross-pressures, perhaps insecure in his Republican vote intention, he turned to business publications to reassure himself, to convince himself that he was right, and to get good ideas for purposes of argument. With-

out such reinforcement, this man might have swung away from the Republicans.

But some respondents had more than the faint beginnings of doubt; they had enough doubts actually to leave their original choice for indecision or even the other party, after which they returned to their first decision. Such people are the waverers we have discussed in earlier chapters. The influence exerted upon them by the media of communication to return to their original decision is no less a reinforcement effect than that exerted upon someone who doubted but never actually left his party. It is just that they needed *more* reinforcement.

Consider the case of a young unemployed laborer on a low SES level—a “natural” Democrat. Originally Democratic, he favored Roosevelt because “he gave us work” and because he is “damned if he knows” who will benefit from Willkie’s election. And yet he decided in August to vote Republican because of the third term issue: “Two times is enough. The rest of ’em didn’t take it.” But then he heard an argument which served to reinforce his Democratic predispositions: “I heard a Lowell Thomas broadcast yesterday saying that *Hitler and Mussolini wanted Willkie elected*. I don’t want to vote for any Bund.” And so this respondent returned to his Democratic vote intention because “FDR has the experience we need at this time and I don’t have the confidence in Willkie, without experience in this crisis.” And once again, he cited his favorite commentator, Lowell Thomas, as the source of this reason for change.

Another illustration of the effect of reinforcement upon a waverer involves the vice-president of a bank, with strong Republican predispositions. In May he was Republican, but by June—after Germany’s conquest of Western Europe—he was not sure: “My decision will depend upon who will keep us out of war. That is paramount in my mind.” But all his attitudes and values, and probably associates, were so firmly Republican that his indecision was short-lived. By August he was back doing business at the same old stand: “For one thing, FDR’s running for a third term made me very disgusted . . . *Any man*

(Willkie) who has made such a success of himself in such a big business as Commonwealth and Southern will do a lot for this country in a business way. I’ve read articles about him in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and also the *Chicago Tribune*. I have also read a book, ‘The Smoke Screen,’ which woke me up to just how badly FDR is spending the taxpayers’ money.”

It is in comments of this kind that we find indications of the reinforcement functions of partisan arguments. They reinforce by validating, orienting, and strengthening the original decision, by minimizing tendencies toward an internal conflict of opinions, by buttressing some opinions at the expense of others, and by countering possible or actual corrosion of partisan attitudes.

The Conversion Effect

Campaign propaganda activated people by bringing their latent political attitudes to the surface of recognition and expression. It reinforced people by telling them what they most wanted to see and hear. But what of the third effect of campaign propaganda—conversion? When people speak of the influence of the press and radio, that is usually what they mean. Were people actually convinced by campaign propaganda to renounce their original choice in favor of the opposition or to decide upon a vote contrary to that ordinarily associated with their social characteristics? How often did conversion occur and how did it work?

The first thing to say is that some people *were* converted by campaign propaganda but that they were *few indeed*. What we have already learned about the factors involved in vote decisions makes this less than surprising. Clearly, several factors other than short-run communications took precedence in influence. Such factors or conditions actually served to insulate various groups from the conversion influence, thus delimiting its area of application. In combination, they acted as a fine political sieve through which relatively few people passed. As the following summary briefly indicates, a whole set of established behavior patterns operated against conversion and hence made it an uncommon experience.

Restriction 1: Half the people knew in May for which party they would vote and clung to this choice throughout the campaign. They were the least susceptible to conversion.

Restriction 2: Of those who were undecided in May, about

half made up their minds after they knew who the nominees were and maintained this decision throughout the campaign. Such partisans, who made their choice conditional on the nominee, were likewise not open to ready conversion.

Restriction 3: The vote decisions of 70% of the people, whether or not they expressed an early vote intention, corresponded to the vote tendencies prevailing among groups with social characteristics similar to their own. The predispositions of such people were so deeply rooted that they could not be readily converted by the opposition's campaign propaganda.

Restriction 4: The strongly partisan devoted most attention to campaign propaganda. In other words, the people who read and listened most to political communications had the most fixed political views. Thus, in sheer quantity campaign propaganda reached the persons least amenable to conversion.¹

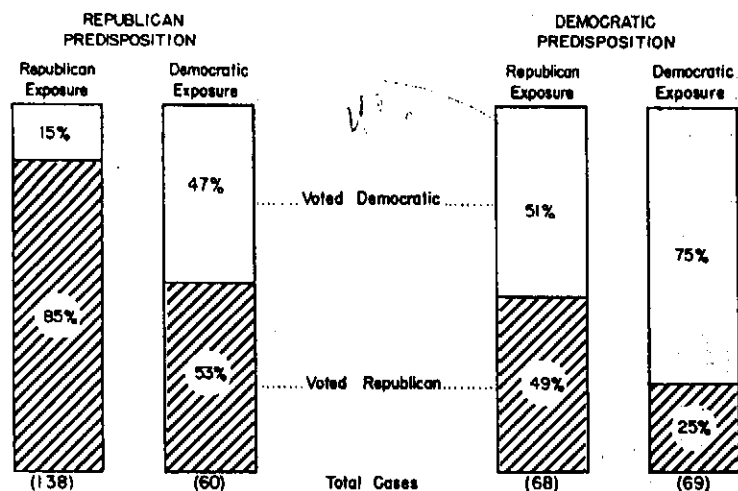
Restriction 5: The people who read and heard most political communication were exposed to more of their own partisan propaganda. Thus in partisanship too, attention to propaganda led away from conversion.²

In summary, then, the people who did most of the reading and listening not only read and heard most of their own partisan propaganda but were also most resistant to conversion because of their strong predispositions. And the people who were most open to conversion—the ones the campaign managers most wanted to reach—read and listened least. Those inter-related facts represent the bottleneck of conversion.

But although these restrictions considerably narrow the application of conversion, they do not eliminate it altogether. For the sake of the record, let us definitely establish the occurrence of conversion on the basis of campaign communications available in the formal media. To do so, we must show that exposure to partisan propaganda leads some people to vote against their predispositions. Within the limitations outlined above, this does happen (Chart 31). Persons with Republican predispositions who were exposed to predominantly Democratic propaganda voted more Democratic than those with the same predisposi-

CHART 31

Exposure to political propaganda has a converting effect: people predisposed toward the Republicans vote more Democratic if they are exposed to Democratic propaganda. The same finding holds for those with Democratic predispositions.



tions who were exposed to predominantly Republican propaganda. And the same was true for those with Democratic predispositions. Among people with definite predispositions, then, a certain proportion exposed to propaganda in opposition to their predisposition voted *in line with the propaganda* and *out of line with their predispositions*. Such people were converted by campaign propaganda.

The Conversion Effect Illustrated—The Third Term Issue

Every campaign has its major issues and arguments which are supposed to be not only the most "important" but also the most effective in converting voters. In 1940, the major Republican argument—perhaps the major issue of the whole campaign—

was the third term. What success did it have in converting people?

Naturally, almost all the Republicans disapproved of the third term in principle, and most of the Democrats favored it. But this indicates nothing as to its value as a converting argument. To show how influential for conversion it "really" was, we must set up rigid criteria. Let us say that the third term issue *could have converted* to a 1940 Republican vote only those who (1) voted for Roosevelt in 1936 *and* (2) did not intend to vote Republican in May, 1940 (i.e., before Roosevelt was nominated) *and* (3) believed that Roosevelt had been a good president. The application of these criteria narrows the field considerably, but at the same time it serves to delimit sharply the "real" converting influence exerted by the argument. If we find that such people ascribed their Republican vote in 1940 to the third term issue, then we may agree that it exerted a "real" influence upon them.

Of all the persons who changed toward Willkie during the course of the campaign, only 15 qualified on all these criteria of good-will toward Democratic policies. Of those, only nine mentioned the third term as the most important reason for their final vote decision when queried just after Election Day. But only six of them gave the third term as the *sole* reason for change at the time they shifted to a Republican position. According to our criteria, then, the third term issue served as a "real" converting influence only for these few people—about 2% of the total Republican vote. (And even then, probably not all six were "real" converts, since five of them had mixed political predispositions tending toward Republican. Thus, even the 2% for whom the third term argument was "really" effective were partly activated and only partly converted to a Republican vote.)

One clear case of the effectiveness of the third term argument—the one clear case as outlined above—is presented by a poor Catholic carpenter on the lowest SES level, obviously a man with strong Democratic predispositions. He had voted for

Roosevelt in 1932 and 1936 (and for Al Smith in 1928), he approved what Roosevelt had accomplished, and he originally had planned to vote for him again—but “the third term is a stumbling block.” When he finally decided to vote Republican in August, he explained his change in these terms: “I have changed because of the third term. *I don't approve FDR's running for a third term.* He wants to be the first dictator in the United States. . . . *This will be the first time I have ever voted for a Republican.* I am voting for Willkie despite the fact that he's talking too much and making too many promises he won't be able to fulfill.”

Thus, insofar as mass media of communications led to conversion at all, it was through a redefinition of the issues. In this example and others, issues about which people had previously thought very little or had been little concerned, took on a new importance as they were accented by campaign propaganda. In this way, political communications occasionally broke down traditional party loyalties.

Willkie, Champion of the Poor

The third term issue was a “natural” for the Republicans. But one propaganda problem which faced them was to convince voters on the low SES strata that Willkie had their interests at heart. The Republican pro-business tradition as well as Willkie's utility background worked against him in this regard.

In all, there were 14 people on the lowest SES level who changed to Willkie for economic reasons. These respondents were deviates from the general trend, which would suggest that they were converted by what they read and heard. Republican propagandists were successful in twisting the Democratic argument that “Willkie is in league with big business” into a form which would appeal most to these low-income people. It is interesting that a few of the respondents specifically mention Gerald L. K. Smith or Townsend as the sources of their opinions. Their reasoning follows these lines: “Willkie promised work, and *the Republican party is the money party so he will*

be able to keep his promise”; “Willkie would increase wages because *he was born poor. Roosevelt was born wealthy* and doesn't know what it was like to be poor”; “Willkie will throw out New Deal measures. *Cooperating with capital will create work.*”

The “Doubters”

Finally, there was a small number of conversion cases—very small—who were greatly interested in the election, who felt that there was something important to be said for each side, who tried more or less conscientiously to resolve their doubts one way or the other during the campaign. They, and only they, conformed to the standard stereotype of the dispassionate, rational democratic voter.

For the most part, such persons had “weak” predispositions, i.e., they tended to fall at or near the center of the IPP score. In other words, their social position was such that they could “afford” conversion through thought. Such people had established for themselves certain criteria by which to judge a presidential candidate—criteria formulated in terms of the interests of the country as a whole rather than the interests of a special group—but they were in doubt as to whether Roosevelt or Willkie fit the specifications better. They were subject to strong attitudinal cross-pressures (resulting from their “weak” predispositions); they liked Roosevelt for this and Willkie for that, or they approved one part of a candidate's program but disapproved another part. They gave some evidence of careful and objective thought about the problem of casting their ballot.

For example, here is a young man with slightly Republican predispositions. This first voter—rated extremely fair-minded by the interviewer—had a high school education and a little better than average means. He considered experience in business and in government equally important in a president, approved conscription but with reservations, was not particularly impressed by the third-term argument, and thought Willkie and Roosevelt agreed on most issues. He approved Roosevelt be-

The Nature of Personal Influence

The political homogeneity of social groups is promoted by personal relationships among the same kinds of people. But for a detailed and systematic study of the influence of such relationships—the political role of personal influence—a systematic inventory would be needed of the various personal contacts and political discussions that people had over a sample number of days. That would provide an index of personal exposure similar to the indices of exposure to the formal media developed in previous chapters. Such complete data are not available in the present study,¹ but enough information has been collected to indicate the importance of personal relationships so far as their direct political influence is concerned. Our findings and impressions will be summarized without much formal statistical data. The significance of this area of political behavior was highlighted by the study but further investigation is necessary to establish it more firmly.

In comparison with the formal media of communication, personal relationships are potentially more influential for two reasons: their coverage is greater and they have certain psychological advantages over the formal media.

Personal Contacts Reach the Undecided

Whenever the respondents were asked to report on their recent exposure to campaign communications of all kinds, political discussions were mentioned more frequently than exposure to radio or print. On any average day, at least 10% more people participated in discussions about the election—either actively or

passively—than listened to a major speech or read about campaign items in a newspaper. And this coverage “bonus” came from just those people who had not yet made a final decision as to how they would vote. Political conversations, then, were more likely to reach those people who were still open to influence.

For example, people who made up their minds later in the campaign were more likely to mention personal influences in explaining how they formed their final vote decision. Similarly, we found that the less interested people relied more on conversations and less on the formal media as sources of information. Three-fourths of the respondents who at one time had not expected to vote but were then finally “dragged in” mentioned personal influence. After the election, the voters were given a check list of “sources from which they got most of the information or impressions that caused them to form their judgment on how to vote.” Those who had made some change during the campaign mentioned friends or members of their family relatively more frequently than did the respondents who kept a constant vote intention all through the campaign.

The Two-Step Flow of Communications

A special role in the network of personal relationships is played by the “opinion leaders.” In Chapter V, we noted that they engaged in political discussion much more than the rest of the respondents. But they reported that the formal media were more effective as sources of influence than personal relationships. This suggests that ideas often flow *from* radio and print *to* the opinion leaders and *from* them to the less active sections of the population.

Occasionally, the more articulate people even pass on an article or point out the importance of a radio speech. Repeatedly, changers referred to reading or listening done under some personal influence. Take the case of a retired school teacher who decided for the Republicans: “The country is ripe for a change

... Willkie is a religious man. *A friend read and highly recommended* Dr. Poling's article in the October issue of the *Christian Herald* called 'The Religion of Wendell Willkie'."

So much for the "coverage of personal contacts." The person-to-person influence reaches the ones who are more susceptible to change, and serves as a bridge over which formal media of communications extend their influence. But in addition, personal relationships have certain psychological advantages which make them especially effective in the exercise of the "molecular pressures" finally leading to the political homogeneity of social groups. We turn now to a discussion of five such characteristics.

Non-Purposiveness of Personal Contacts

The weight of personal contacts upon opinion lies, paradoxically, in their greater casualness and non-purposiveness in political matters. If we read or tune in a speech, we usually do so purposefully, and in doing so we have a definite mental set which tinges our receptiveness. Such purposive behavior is part of the broad area of our political experiences, to which we bring our convictions with a desire to test them and strengthen them by what is said. This mental set is armor against influence. The extent to which people, and particularly those with strong partisan views, listen to speakers and read articles with which they agree in advance is evidence on this point.

On the other hand, people we meet for reasons other than political discussion are more likely to catch us unprepared, so to speak, if they make politics the topic. One can avoid newspaper stories and radio speeches simply by making a slight effort, but as the campaign mounts and discussion intensifies, it is hard to avoid some talk of politics. Personal influence is more pervasive and less self-selective than the formal media. In short, politics gets through, especially to the indifferent, much more easily through personal contacts than in any other way, simply because it comes up unexpectedly as a sideline or marginal topic in a casual conversation. For example, there was the restaurant waitress who decided that Willkie would make a poor president

after first thinking he would be good. Said she: "I had done a little newspaper reading against Willkie, but the real reason I changed my mind was from *hearsay*. So many people don't like Willkie. Many customers in the restaurant said Willkie would be no good." Notice that she was in a position to overhear bits of conversation that were not intended for her. There are many such instances. Talk that is "forbidden fruit" is particularly effective because one need not be suspicious as to the persuasive intentions of the speakers; as a result one's defenses are down. Furthermore, one may feel that he is getting the viewpoint of "people generally," that he is learning how "different people" think about the election.

Such passive participation in conversation is paralleled in the case of the formal media by accidental exposure, e.g., when a political speech is heard because it follows a favorite program. In both conversation and the formal media, such chance communication is particularly effective. And the testimony to such influence is much more frequent in the case of personal contacts. The respondents mentioned it time and again: "I've heard fellows talk at the plant . . . I hear men talk at the shop . . . My husband heard that talked about at work. . ."

Flexibility When Countering Resistance

But suppose we do meet people who want to influence us and suppose they arouse our resistance. Then personal contact still has one great advantage compared with other media: the face-to-face contact can counter and dislodge such resistance, for it is much more flexible. The clever campaign worker, professional or amateur, can make use of a large number of cues to achieve his end. He can choose the occasion at which to speak to the other fellow. He can adapt his story to what he presumes to be the other's interests and his ability to understand. If he notices the other is bored, he can change the subject. If he sees that he has aroused resistance, he can retreat, giving the other the satisfaction of a victory, and come back to his point later. If in the course of the discussion he discovers

some pet convictions, he can try to tie up his argument with them. He can spot the moments when the other is yielding, and so time his best punches.

Neither radio nor the printed page can do anything of the kind. They must aim their propaganda shots at the whole target instead of just at the center, which represents any particular individual. In propaganda as much as in other things, one man's meat is another man's poison. This may lead to boomerang effects, when arguments aimed at "average" audiences with "average" reactions fail with Mr. X. The formal media produced several boomerangs upon people who resented what they read or heard and moved in the opposite direction from that intended. But among 58 respondents who mentioned personal contacts as concretely influential, there was only one boomerang. The flexibility of the face-to-face situation undoubtedly accounted for their absence.

Rewards of Compliance

When someone yields to a personal influence in making a vote decision, the reward is immediate and personal. This is not the case in yielding to an argument via print or radio. If a pamphlet argues that voting for the opposite party would be un-American or will jeopardize the future, its warning may sound too remote or improbable. But if a neighbor says the same things, he can "punish" one immediately for being unimpressed or unyielding: he can look angry or sad, he can leave the room and make his fellow feel isolated. The pamphlet can only intimate or describe future deprivations; the living person can create them at once.

Of course all this makes personal contacts a powerful influence only for people who do not like to be out of line. There are certainly some people who gain pleasure from being non-conformists, but under normal circumstances they are probably very much in the minority. Whenever propaganda by another person is experienced as an expression of the prevailing group tendencies, it has greater chances of being successful than the

formal media because of social rewards. For example, here is a woman who was for Roosevelt until the middle of the campaign: "I have always been a Democrat and I think Roosevelt has been all right. But my family are all for Willkie. They think he would make the best president and they have been putting the pressure on me." She finally voted for Willkie. This aspect of personal contacts was especially important for women.

The rewards of compliance to other people are learned in early childhood. The easiest way for most children to avoid discomfort is to do what others tell them to do. Someone who holds no strong opinions on politics and hence makes up his mind late in the campaign may very well be susceptible to personal influences because he has learned as a child to take them as useful guides in unknown territory. The young man who was going to vote for Roosevelt because "my grandfather will skin me if I don't" is a case in point.

Trust in an Intimate Source

More people put reliance upon their personal contacts to help them pick out the arguments which are relevant for their own good in political affairs than they do in the more remote and impersonal newspaper and radio. The doubtful voter may feel that the evaluations he reads or hears in a broadcast are plausible, for the expert writer can probably spell out the consequences of voting more clearly than the average citizen. But the voter still wonders whether these are the issues which are really going to affect *his own* future welfare. Perhaps these sources see the problem from a viewpoint entirely different from his own. But he can trust the judgment and evaluation of the respected people among his associates. Most of them are people with the same status and interests as himself. Their attitudes are more relevant for him than the judgments of an unknown editorial writer. In a formal communication the content can be at its best; but in a face to face contact the transference is most readily achieved. For example, here is the case of

a young laborer who professed little or no interest in the campaign and who did not even expect to vote until late October: "I've been discussing the election with *the fellows at the shop* and I believe I'll vote, but I haven't decided yet who for." His constant exposure to the views of his fellow-workers not only brought him to the ballot booth but also brought out his final Democratic vote in line with his colleagues.

A middle-aged woman who showed great interest in the campaign was undecided until late October and then voted for Willkie: "*I was talking politics just this morning with a friend, a businessman.* He says business will improve if Willkie is elected and that Willkie promises to keep us out of the war. FDR is getting too much power. He shouldn't have a third term." Her friend had apparently run out for her what amounted to a small catalogue of Republican arguments and he was impressive enough to clinch her vote, which had been in the balance throughout the campaign. Her trust in his judgment settled her mind.

Trust in another person's point of view may be due to his prestige as well as to the plausibility of what he has to say or its relevancy to one's interests. It is obvious that in all influences prestige plays a considerable role. The degree of conformity is greater the higher the prestige of the person in our group who seeks to influence us. The plausibility of the consequences he presents will seem greater if he is important. (Of course, the formal media are also important in this respect.) The heightening of trust through the prestige of certain personal contacts was clear in the case of the driver of a bread truck who changed to Willkie because the prominent president of a business firm had done him the honor of persuading him in that direction. Then, too, there is the case of a middle-aged housewife with little education who was for Willkie from May through September, became undecided in October, and finally voted for Roosevelt. She left Willkie because of the statements of people whom she considered authorities: "I talked with *a college student* from Case, in Cleveland, and students are for Roose-

velt because he has helped recreation. I talked, too, with *a man from Chicago who is very interested in politics*, and he doesn't seem to think that Willkie is a big enough man to handle international affairs."

Persuasion Without Conviction

Finally, personal contacts can get a voter to the polls without affecting at all his comprehension of the issues of the election—something the formal media can rarely do. The newspaper or magazine or radio must first be effective in changing attitudes related to the action. There were several clear cases of votes cast not on the issues or even the personalities of the candidates. In fact, they were not really cast for the candidates at all. They were cast, so to speak, for the voters' friends.

"*I was taken to the polls by a worker who insisted that I go.*"

"*The lady where I work wanted me to vote.* She took me to the polls and *they all voted Republican so I did too.*"

In short, personal influence, with all its overtones of personal affection and loyalty, can bring to the polls votes that would otherwise not be cast or would be cast for the opposing party just as readily if some other friend had insisted. They differ from the formal media by persuading uninterested people to vote in a certain way without giving them a substantive reason for their vote. Fully 25% of those who mentioned a personal contact in connection with change of mind failed to give a real issue of the campaign as a reason for the change, but only 5% of those who mentioned the formal media omitted such a reason. When personal influence is paramount in this way, the voter is voting mainly for the personal friend, not the candidate.

Practical Implications

In a way the outcome of the election in Erie County is the best evidence for the success of face-to-face contacts. It so happened that for some time the Republican machine in that area worked much more vigorously than its Democratic oppo-

ment. When asked whether they knew people who had good ideas about politics, our respondents mentioned considerably more Republican than Democratic local politicians. A few people who did not expect to vote but finally went to the polls mentioned Republican canvassers as the main influence, but we could not trace a similar success for the Democratic machine.

However, one should not identify the personal contacts discussed in this chapter with the efforts of the *professional* political machines. These personal contacts are what one might call *amateur machines* which spring up during elections—individuals who become quite enthusiastic or special groups that try to activate people within their reach. One might almost say that the most successful form of propaganda—especially last-minute propaganda—is to “surround” the people whose vote decision is still dubious so that the only path left to them is the way to the polling booth. We do not know how the budget of the political parties is distributed among different channels of propaganda but we suspect that the largest part of any propaganda budget is spent on pamphlets, radio time, etc. But our findings suggest the task of finding the best ratio between money spent on formal media and money spent on organizing the face-to-face influences, the local “molecular pressures” which vitalize the formal media by more personal interpretation and the full richness of personal relationships into the promotion of the causes which are decided upon in the course of an election.

In the last analysis, more than anything else people can move other people. From an ethical point of view this is a hopeful aspect in the serious social problem of propaganda. The side which has the more enthusiastic supporters and which can mobilize grass-root support in an expert way has great chances of success.

Footnotes

CHAPTER I

¹All four groups approximated 600 at the outset. But in any questionnaire study involving repeated interviewing, the problem of “mortality” arises. That is, there are always a few instances in which it is impossible to contact some of the respondents on successive recalls. In this study, mortality arose from a few who refused to be reinterviewed, some who were temporarily unavailable because of illness or travel, and some who moved out of the county permanently or who died. Every effort to keep mortality at a minimum was made. In most cases of difficulty, the field supervisor personally attempted to regain the cooperation of the respondent. In many instances, respondents who were not successfully contacted on one interview were picked up again on the next wave of interviewing. In the panel group, missing cases on the seven interviews were kept down to 14 per cent, a figure which proved to be remarkably low in the experience of subsequent investigators. Analysis of the characteristics of the missing cases showed that the number lost was so small that their influence on the total trends was practically unnoticeable. (Gaudet, Hazel and Wilson, E. C., “Who Escapes the Personal Investigator?” *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, XXIV, December 6, 1940, 773-777.)

²Proof that repeated interviewing did not affect the results will be presented in a separate paper.

³It is our hope that in all future elections similar studies will be possible. Comparisons over a period of years should greatly enhance the value of any individual results. It is therefore appropriate to add a word here on the kind of improvements which, looking backward, we feel are advisable in such panel studies. Whereas we made seven interviews with our group, in the future it would be sufficient to make four interviews only—one before the conventions, one right after the conventions, one on the eve of the election, and one right after Election Day. The savings so achieved could be used to increase the panel to at least 1,000 cases. There were a number of more refined statistical results which we could not utilize in our study because the necessary cross-tabulations brought us down to too small a number of cases. As far as the interviews with the changers go, a more sophisticated case study technique would be advisable to learn more about the background and the personality of the changers as well as the specific situations in which their changes of mind came about. The reader will find a few specific improvements indicated at

Impr.

(1)

(2)

(3)