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"Inflation or deflation  
in America?"  
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## Gallup, Roper Are Human; They Erred, but Not Truman

By J. A. Livingston

GOV. THOMAS E. DEWEY is the first "former President of the United States" ever to be elected at the Gallup, Roper and Crossley polls. And the pollsters are still busy explaining what went wrong.

Here is a boner to put the late Literary Digest at ease. In 1936, the Digest predicted a Landon victory over Roosevelt. Yet Roosevelt swept the Nation. At the time, the Gallup, Crossley, and Roper polls were in their infancy. They correctly forecast a Roosevelt sweep, won acclaim at the Digest's expense.

Now they're on the defensive just as the Digest was then.

The Literary Digest went wrong because of a biased sample. It reached—by mail—the upper-income groups, those predominantly Republican. Did that happen all over again? Angus Campbell, assistant director, and George Katona, program director of the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center, think so. They believe the Gallup-Roper-Crossley polls "got too few low-income, low-educated people in their sample."



Livingston

The Michigan pollsters have conducted an experimental, unpublished poll of their own—using a subsample of the sample they use in making surveys for the Federal Reserve Board. They got a 50-50 split in the popular vote, hence were surprised by the Gallup, Roper, and Crossley predictions of a Dewey sweep, hence felt the actual election results confirmed their technique as against the Gallup-Roper technique.

GALLUP and Roper use what is known as "quota sampling." The population is divided into four groups—A, prosperous; B, upper-middle; C, lower-middle, and D, lowest. Interviewers are assigned a stratified quota of persons in each group, which is measured by manner of living, type of home, social status, rather than by income levels. The ultimate result is supposed to provide a miniature replica of the entire United States voting population.

The interviewer selects the interviewee, but is permitted some latitude. If the first prospect isn't available, the interviewer tries another, and another, and so on. Katona and Campbell think this may have been the source of the pro-Dewey bias.

The University of Michigan pollsters go in for "probability sampling," the same as does the United States Census Bureau. The interviewer must go to specific addresses, carefully selected to provide a cross-section of United States sentiments, habits, etc. This prevents the interviewer from taking the interviewee of least resistance.

Under the Roper and Gallup system the interviewer may find he cannot reach the D people easily. Many live in rooming houses,

often aren't at home, or are not approachable. They're less literate, less conversational, and perhaps suspicious of poll-takers. Result: The interviewer may select people easier to interview, thus upgrading his quota and so the entire sample.

POLLSTERS themselves are well aware of this. Gallup, for instance, used to pay by the interview. That placed a money premium on getting interviews over fast. Now, Gallup pays on an hourly basis. None the less, the interviewer who painstakingly sought just the right person in his D quotas, for example, might lag far behind the less diligent interviewer. So he might speed up. Question: Have Gallup, Roper and other pollsters been able to correct for this all-too-human tendency?

Roper and Gallup look for reasons other than a biased sample, but Gallup doesn't rule out the possibility. Both observe that in populous states, such as Illinois, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and New York, President Truman actually ran behind local senatorial and gubernatorial Democratic candidates. Unlike Roosevelt, Truman did not help—but was helped by—the rest of the ticket.

Hindsight suggests to the pollsters that a straight Dewey-versus-Truman poll should have been supplemented by an "intensity" poll. Was the voter in favor of the New Deal Senator and Governor but cool to Truman? Was he voting enthusiastically for Dewey or merely because Dewey was a Republican? Was he anxious to get Truman out? Such under-the-surface questions might have suggested that Republicans were lukewarm for Dewey, and so—feeling sure victory—did not take the trouble to vote. Such questions might have shown that many voters, though indifferent to Truman, wanted to punish Republican members of Congress and were afraid to split their tickets.

Further, the intensity test might have revealed the large number of undecided voters who perhaps made it a closer race than the pollsters figured.

ANYWAY, there it is. The polls of '48 prove there's no short cut to understanding human beings. Though you get a sample of voters, you can never know whether it's a complete sample. Only half the eligible voters use their franchise. Thus, do the pollsters actually reach the people that vote? After all, one half of America may not be a trusty clue to what the other half does.

For which, praise God. Even though Roper and Gallup—and the University of Michigan too!—tell us what we'll eat, when, and how much, we can escape the feeling of dissected robots. We know there's a doubt.