

SURVEY
OF
INFLUENCES
ON
WOMEN'S VOTING BEHAVIOR

ARCHIVES

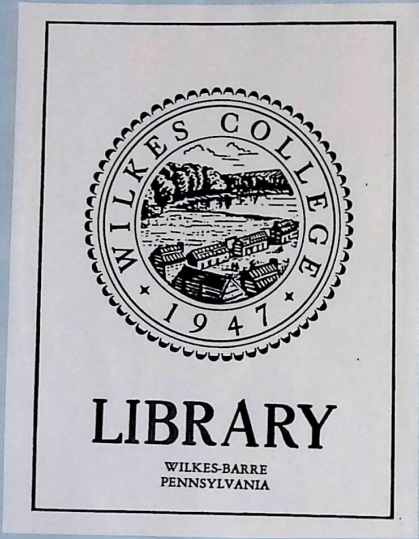
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W682

1963

INSTITUTE OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Wilkes College

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania



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INTRODUCTION

Did women elect Eisenhower and Kennedy? Political pundits can be found on both sides of the question. Whatever the answer, the women's vote is held a vital and decisive factor in elections in the United States. It was repeatedly stated during the Presidential campaign of 1960 that John F. Kennedy drew large crowds. These crowds had a special quality. Women of all ages seemed to predominate them. Perhaps the size of the crowds might be ascribed to the Kennedy personality and an indefinable quality that especially made women want to see him and show friendliness toward him. Were these women in every economic and social strata of American life? Many observations were made on the types of women who appeared in these crowds during the political campaign of 1960.

This survey was undertaken not as an attempt to discover how women voted in the 1960 election. It was merely an attempt to discover some of the influences on their voting behavior in the 1960 Presidential campaign. It should be remembered that the assessment of the media of communications, speeches of candidates, and the personal traits of candidates, as they appear to the voter is actually subjective with the voter. Hence, the study of the two groups of women voters in this survey has its limitations in appraising those factors.

A group of two hundred married women were selected for this

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survey, one hundred of whom were union members' wives (UMW) and one hundred of whom were businessmen's wives (BMW). The names of the respondents were obtained from a list of union members of a labor organization and from a list of members of a women's organization, both organizations with offices in Wilkes-Barre. The subjects interviewed covered a geographical area extending from Forty-Fort Borough on the north to Newport Township on the south, a distance along the axis of the Valley approximately 15 miles, including about a dozen municipalities. For obvious reasons, neither of these organizations can be publicly identified. No attempt was made to exclude or include any particular person on either list. The only determination made at the time the name was selected or at the time of the interview related to whether the person was married. The names of single and widowed members from the list of the women's organization were withdrawn, and in similar fashion, the same people were excluded from the labor organization's list.

While the subjects for the interview were chosen at random from the two lists, caution must be exercised in considering either of these groups as representative of union members' wives or businessmen's wives. Responses of those interviewed were identified only according to the two categories stated.

The interviewers were four upperclassmen in an advanced politics class at Wilkes College. Two students interviewed the union members' wives, and two students interviewed businessmen's wives. The interviewing was done during the month of November immediately fol-

lowing the 1960 election. The five questions were read to the women, and each in turn was asked to choose an answer from a limited list of responses.

The results have been tabulated by questions. A further breakdown of the responses in relation to the other questions in the survey was also made but only for purposes of class discussion. This latter tabulation is not presented in the survey in order to keep the writing to a reasonable length. However, some comments on the breakdown of responses in relation to other questions are made where they appear to be significant in understanding the political attitudes of women. All results were evaluated in percentages. Unfortunately, while these do describe relative differences, they do not tell us whether those differences are significant. For certain questions, a lower percentage might be more significant than a higher percentage for other questions.

Viewed in the light of a small-scale analysis of voting patterns, certain limited conclusions can be drawn from the data. A study such as this cannot measure any subtle or veiled factors that underlie political behavior.

Hugo V. Mailey, Director
Institute of Municipal Government

QUESTION 1

Question 1: "What do you think does the best job of educating the public about Presidential candidates?"

The respondents were given a choice of seven factors in soliciting their answers to the above question--newspapers, churches, schools, political clubs, radio, TV, and the candidates themselves. Some of the respondents stated that they thought other factors did the best job of educating the public. These are marked with an asterisk. The reader is reminded that the question did not ask what factors affected the respondent, but rather which factors the respondent thought affected others of the public.

RESPONSES TO THE FIRST QUESTION

<u>Factor</u>	<u>U. M. W.</u>	<u>B. M. W.</u>	<u>Total</u>
Newspapers	17.0%	46.0%	31.5%
Churches	3.0%	.....	1.5%
Schools	.....	.....	.....
Political Clubs	.....	.....	.....
Radio	3.0%	.....	1.5%
T. V.	55.0%	30.0%	42.5%
Candidates Themselves	22.0%	19.0%	20.5%
*All	.....	1.0%	0.5%
*Magazines	.....	1.0%	0.5%
*Party workers	.....	1.0%	0.5%
*Not included in survey form			

The three factors which received the most emphasis among the 200 women were TV, newspapers, and the candidates themselves, in that order. Apparently, the women thought both media of communications played a significant role in educating the public about the candidates in view of the fact that almost 75% ranked these two factors first and second. Since these are the major media of communications, this is not an unexpected result. TV and newspapers as factors might be even more significant if the candidates themselves were not seen in person, but appeared to the voters only through TV, newspaper pictures, or news comments.

Judging from the responses to this question, it would appear that UMW emphasized seeing, whereas BMW signified reading. Caution should be exercised in concluding that UMW prefer to see whereas BMW prefer to read in view of the phraseology of the question. Moreover, it is only a speculative conclusion that the BMW were not influenced strongly by the TV debates in the 1960 campaign. This conclusion could be reached only if there is a significant difference in the educational level between the two groups, which was not contemplated in the survey. Among the UMW, the largest number (55.0%) said that TV did the best job of educating the public about candidates, followed by the candidates themselves (22.0%), and newspapers (17%). The wives of the businessmen, on the other hand, changed this order: newspapers ranked first (46.0%), TV ranked second (30.0%), and the candidates themselves third (19.0%).

In breaking down this composite and considering the inter-relationship of the responses to this question with those of the other questions, many interesting correlations were observed. A majority of all three groups of BMW (those emphasizing newspapers, TV, and the candidates themselves as the educating force) claimed to have made up their minds politically and tended toward political independence and little influence from their husbands.

Whereas the BMW who stated that the newspapers did the best job of educating the public on the Presidential candidates showed no marked choice as between faith and hope in their candidates' political speeches, those BMW who stated that the candidates themselves did the best job inclined toward faith, and the group that preferred TV were inclined to have complete faith. Perhaps, further analysis might reveal an educational and intellectual difference between the BMW preferring newspapers on the one hand and the BMW preferring TV and the candidates themselves on the other hand.

All three BMW groups expressed a preference for ability over experience and sincerity. The respondents were offered no criterion for judging any of the qualities. It is significant, too, that none of the BMW who felt that newspapers were the important educating factor chose personality as the most important personal attribute in a candidate, which might suggest that candidates project their personality visually rather than through the impersonal media of print.

A substantial number of UMW, no matter which educating factor they chose, felt that no outside influence interfered with them in making up their minds politically. The wives who thought that newspapers did the best job of educating the public were slightly more intense toward this political independence.

The UMW who stated that the political candidates did the best job of educating the public had stronger faith in their candidates' speeches than those who preferred TV or newspapers. One possible interpretation from this correlation could be that these UMW had already made a decision regarding their presidential choice. Or, this could mean that such impersonal educating factors as TV and newspapers are not as conducive to building faith in candidates as the very candidates themselves.

Both the group of UMW who believed that the candidates did the best job of educating the public and the group which preferred TV as the significant educating factor agreed that sincerity was the most important quality in a candidate. Surprisingly enough, among those UMW who preferred newspapers, experience was the quality emphasized rather than sincerity.

QUESTION 2

Question 2: "Who helps you most in making up your mind politically?"

In the same manner as the first question, five factors or responses were offered to the women to choose from. These five factors were: father, mother, husband, friends, and others. Two additional factors, "independent decisions" and "can't answer," were not included in the survey form but were offered as responses by a substantial number of women. In quite a number of instances, the interviewer was skeptical about the "independence" as deduced from the tone of the interview. Nevertheless, the interviewer recorded the answers as the respondents gave them.

RESPONSES TO THE SECOND QUESTION

<u>Factor</u>	<u>U. M. W.</u>	<u>B. M. W.</u>	<u>Total</u>
Father	----	----	----
Mother	----	----	----
Husband	18.0%	23.0%	20.5%
Friends	1.0%	2.0%	1.5%
Others	2.0%	15.0%	8.5%
*Independent Decisions	79.0%	59.0%	69.0%
*Can't Answer	----	1.0%	.5%

* Not Included in Survey Form

Although the form provided no opportunity for the women to indicate that no one assisted them in making up their minds, a large majority (69.0%) insisted that they made their own decisions. If assistance was sought, most women from both groups stated that it came from their husbands (20.5%). Both the UMW and the BMW placed independent decision first and husbands second. In this, there was agreement, although the political independence was more pronounced among the UMW than among the BMW (79.0% to 59.0%).

Both the BMW who made up their own minds politically and those who admitted that their husbands helped them to make up their minds agreed that newspapers did the best job of educating the public. The greatest difference between the two groups of BMW--those who expressed political independence and those who relied on their husbands--related to the amount of faith the women placed in their candidates' speeches. The politically independent BMW expressed about equal faith and hope in the candidates' speeches, whereas the BMW who relied on their husbands had more hope than faith. While both the politically independent and those who sought their husbands' advice among the BMW group felt that ability was the most important quality in the candidate, the more pronounced feeling for ability was found among those who leaned on their husbands on political matters.

A near majority of the UMW who claimed to have made up their own minds politically stated that TV did the best job of educating the public and a lesser number said that the candidates themselves were

responsible. Newspapers were placed last by this group. The second group of UMW--those who listened to their husbands--ranked the educating factors as follows: Newspapers, radio, candidates.

An even half of the UMW who consulted their husbands on political matters had complete faith in their candidates' speeches. Both the politically independent UMW and those who were advised by their husbands felt that sincerity was the most important personal quality to look for in a candidate; and, in descending order, these same women selected experience, ability, personality, and fairness.

QUESTION 3

Question 3: "Did you have faith in your candidates' political speeches?"

In giving the women a choice of four responses on this question, the objective was to ascertain the degree of faith that the women had in the speeches of their political candidates.

RESPONSES TO THE THIRD QUESTION

<u>Response</u>	<u>U. M. W.</u>	<u>B. M. W.</u>	<u>Total</u>
"Have some faith"	20.0%	25.0%	22.5%
"More hope than faith"	20.0%	34.0%	27.0%
"Yes"	48.0%	36.0%	42.0%
"No"	12.0%	5.0%	8.5%

The composite total showed that the women had at least some faith in their candidates' political speeches, with the greater percentage saying that they definitely had faith (42.0%), and a smaller number (22.5%) indicating that they had only some faith. Of those who didn't indicate faith in their candidates' political speeches, a considerable number (27.0%) had more hope than faith, whereas only 8.5% said that they had no faith at all.

A comparison of the UMW and the BMW shows that in both groups, the greater number of women had faith in their candidates' speeches, although such faith was more marked in the former, 48.0% to 36.0%. Among the BMW almost as many had more hope than faith

(34.0%), as had complete faith in the speeches of the candidates (36.0%). On the other responses there was relative agreement between the groups. Among the UMW, an equal division was found between those having some faith and those having more hope than faith (20.0%). There was a larger percentage of UMW than BMW who had no faith at all in the speeches of the candidates (12.0% to 5.0%).

The largest group among the BMW were those who did have faith in the political speeches of their candidates. although only slightly more than those who had "more hope than faith." Basically, these women showed little difference in their choice between newspapers and TV, as to which medium did the best job of educating the public. A majority of these women said that no one helped them to make up their minds politically and that ability was the most important quality in a candidate.

Both the BMW group which had more hope than faith and the group that had only some faith in their candidates' political speeches claimed that the newspapers did the best job of educating the public about the Presidential candidates, that they made up their own minds on political matters, and that ability was the most important personal quality in a candidate. Those BMW who had more hope than faith leaned slightly more on their husbands and were more emphatic in selecting ability in the political candidate.

A majority of the UMW in the first three groups on a preceding table (who had some degree of faith) thought that TV did the best job of educating the public and also made up their own minds. Only the UMW

who had some faith in the political speeches of their candidates selected personality as the important quality, whereas the others chose sincerity. It could be that those UMW who had only "some faith" were relatively uninfluenced by facts and ability.

About the only new aspect that emerges from the breakdown of this question was the fact that some in the UMW group who had complete faith in their candidates' speeches felt that the churches played some part in educating the public. This question was not pursued further to associate the respondent with church membership.

QUESTION 4

Question 4: "What personal qualities did you look for in a candidate?"

The aim of the fourth question was to determine, if at all possible, the personal quality used by the women in selecting a political candidate. The women were offered a choice of six personal qualities by which they could judge the potential of a political candidate. The six personal qualities were experience, ability, sincerity, personality, fairness, and maturity. Two additional possibilities offered by a few women are marked by an asterisk in the table which follows.

RESPONSES TO THE FOURTH QUESTION

<u>Personal Quality</u>	<u>U. M. W.</u>	<u>B. M. W.</u>	<u>Total</u>
Experience	23.0%	16.0%	19.5%
Ability	16.0%	60.0%	38.0%
Sincerity	38.0%	14.0%	26.0%
Personality	11.0%	.....	5.5%
Fairness	9.0%	1.0%	5.0%
Maturity	2.0%	6.0%	4.0%
*Integrity	.....	2.0%	1.0%
*All	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%

The composite total showed that no one personal quality is the single criterion used by the 200 women in selecting a candidate for the Presidency. The women placed the most emphasis on ability (38.0%) followed by sincerity (26.0%) and experience (19.5%). Substantially fewer women showed a preference for personality, fairness, maturity, and integrity.

A comparison of the two groups shows a considerable divergence of opinion concerning the qualities desirable in a Presidential candidate. Of the three most-favored qualities, the BMW showed an overwhelming preference for ability (60.0%), with almost equal numbers, but far less, choosing experience (16.0%) and sincerity (14.0%). The UMW, on the other hand, placed least emphasis on ability (16.0%) and most on sincerity (38.0%) among the three qualities most selected. Not one of the 100 respondents in the BMW group selected personality, whereas this quality ranked with ability in the UMW group. It is noteworthy that some of the qualities listed as choices lend themselves to visualization (personality) while others do not (experience).

No matter what quality the BMW preferred in the candidate--ability, experience, or sincerity--they all agreed that the newspapers did the best job of educating the public. The most politically independent of the BMW were those who ranked sincerity first. A sizeable number among those BMW who preferred ability admitted to influence by their husbands. All the BMW groups, no matter the personal quality which they preferred, had some degree of faith in their candidates' speeches, although the BMW group which ranks sincerity first revealed quite a number with "more hope than faith."

An interesting paradox on this question involves the same group of BMW who are most influenced by the ability of their candidate and yet have more hope than faith in those same candidates. The students who conducted this survey wondered how they voted.

The UMW who said that they looked for sincerity as the most important quality agreed with the other groups which chose experience and ability that TV did the best job. A very large majority of all three groups of UMW--sincerity, experience, and ability--insisted that they made up their own minds politically. The UMW groups preferring experience and sincerity had complete faith in their candidates' speeches. While a majority of the UMW who felt that ability was the important personal quality had complete faith in their candidates' speeches, about a third of them had only some faith.

Those of the UMW who said that personality was the most important quality did present one difference. Not one of the women of this group selected newspapers as the best medium for educating the public. The main bulk of opinion was evenly split between TV and the candidates themselves.

QUESTION 5

Question 5: "Did you vote in the 1960 election?"

From the 200 women interviewed, the following statistics based on the responses were compiled:

RESPONSES TO THE FIFTH QUESTION

<u>Response</u>	<u>U. M. W.</u>	<u>B. M. W.</u>	<u>Total</u>
Yes	90.0%	97.0%	93.5%
No	10.0%	3.0%	6.5%

With respect to voting in the 1960 Presidential election, both the composite total and the breakdown of each group show that the voting participation of both groups was not similar to the voting participation of the nation as a whole, since 93.5% of the women interviewed claimed to have voted, whereas the national average was about 64%. However, the high voting participation by both the UMW and the BMW is supported, in part, by the Luzerne County voting participation. Of the total of 197,407 who were registered to vote in the 1960 election in Luzerne County, 173,709, or almost 88% did cast a ballot.

While there was a 7.0% difference in the voting participation between the BMW and the UMW, the voting participation of both groups is exceedingly high. Strong political implications can be deduced if the voting participation of both groups of women is as high as indicated in this survey.

SUMMARY

In a survey of two hundred women, one hundred of whom were BMW, a number of findings can be made concerning their voting behavior in the 1960 Presidential election. However, several points must be remembered about this survey. There was no attempt to go into depth on any of the questions. As a matter of fact, a great many of the women interviewed expressed surprise that so simple a survey could actually prove anything.

Indicative of this lack of detail was the failure of the survey to go into any depth concerning at least the second question. It is doubtful whether so many women actually did make up their own minds politically. This doubt was very aptly borne out by the woman who claimed to have made up her own mind and then turned to her husband to inquire whether he had had faith in "their" political candidate. The inherent shallowness of the survey left to provision for a case such as this and should be remembered when the results of this survey are read.

With regard to the factor that did the best job of educating the public about the Presidential candidates, it would appear that UMW feel that the public prefers to see whereas BMW feel that the public would rather read to obtain their knowledge of their candidates. It should not be inferred from the above that the respondents themselves chose to read or chose to see.

On the question of how political decisions were arrived at, there was substantial agreement between the two groups in that the vast majority claimed that they reached independent political decision. In both groups, husbands ran a very weak second.

Responses showed that a majority of the women polled did have faith, complete or qualified, in the candidates' speeches, with a greater number having unqualified faith. Businessmen's wives had less complete faith than union-members' wives.

No one personal quality is the criterion used in selecting a candidate. A comparison of the two groups shows a considerable divergence of opinion concerning the qualities desirable in a Presidential candidate. Of the three most favored qualities, businessmen's wives showed an overwhelming preference for ability and no preference at all for personality, whereas union-members' wives placed no decided emphasis on any particular quality, although sincerity was selected by most women.

From the extremely high numbers of women who claimed to have voted in the last election, it can be seen that the sample of women selected for this survey was not truly representative of the population on a nation-wide basis. And yet, these women might have been representative of Luzerne County voters who showed remarkable high voting participation.

The comparative percentages for all questions suggest that most of the women treated these questions independently and did not recognize inherent inconsistencies or contradictions in their responses relevant to a voting decision. For example: If you think your candidate has the ability, but you mistrust his sincerity, then what?

The students concluded that attempts to ascertain the determinant of the responses as to personal qualities lead to no conclusive evi-

dence, indicating that this may be an area of subjective judgment, the person deriving from his preferred medium that conclusion which he wants to derive. This is supported by the fact, for example, that of those who chose sincerity, the UMW judged their candidates mostly on the basis of what they saw on TV, whereas the BMW who favored TV for the most part were impressed by the candidates' ability. Thus, from watching the same medium, the two groups derived highly divergent impressions.

It is difficult from the above results to make any positive statements on the feelings and attitudes of the women toward the American political process. Some students got the feeling that one reason for less than half of the total women queried having faith in the political speeches of their candidates was because they were withholding their judgments until some later date after election. If the reader does read skepticism into the data, then it does appear that the BMW group is perhaps more skeptical of political speeches than the UMW group. In view of the fact that more than a fourth of the women polled stressed hope rather than faith in the political speeches of their candidates could support that these women are not quite convinced about their own candidates during a campaign.

Candidates and party leaders might find some of the data useful in waging political campaigns. In examining the answers of the UMW who claimed to have made up their own minds politically, almost a majority stated that TV did the best job of educating the public, and a lesser

number said that the candidates themselves were responsible. . News-
papers were placed last by this group, thus completely reversing the
selections of the BMW. The UMW who expressed independence were
more trustful in their candidates' political speeches. This difference
in choice of media is an interesting area for further investigation by
party managers.

Accepting the survey results at face value, reservations im-
plicit, the question that persistently nagged the students was whether
they could draw the inference that women are exerting an independent
influence on politics and whether they should be reckoned as a political
force of their own.



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