

EXIT POLLS: INTERVIEW WITH BURNS W. ROPER AND JOHN BRENNAN

Public Perspective: You've announced plans to conduct exit polls in 1990 and 1992, as the centerpiece of a new election service. How are things shaping up?

Burns W. Roper: We started out with a very ambitious program: we were going to do pre-election surveys—at least one, probably two or three—and then a national exit poll; there would be the same kind of package for roughly a dozen states. Now it looks like that is too ambitious a program to get off the ground this year. We have given up the idea of pre-election polls. There is far more interest in the state exit polls than in the national poll, but a few potential clients are interested *only* in the national poll. We find ourselves going in two directions at once. We're being guided, not surprisingly, by expressions of interest.

John Brennan: Based on these expressions and other considerations, we're concentrating on eleven states: Louisiana, Michigan, Massachusetts, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, California, Illinois, Ohio, Arizona, and Georgia. These are the most likely states for exit polls....Our approach is to go into a state and attempt to establish an exit poll by distributing the costs among a group of print and broadcast outlets, while maintaining their exclusivity within a medium and a market. The other thing that we are doing is concentrating on the range of contests and other votes in a state, not just the "top-of-the-ticket" election. In Massachusetts there are seven statewide races, in Louisiana 15 ballot initiatives. In Texas there are 10 statewide races. We're not making the commitment to cover all of these, of course, but we want to tailor our questionnaire to the local media. The media we're talking to are interested in all ten of the Texas contests.

PP: Clearly, when you approached this venture you had commercial interests, but what other goals did you have?

BR: One of them was to avoid a situation in which there is only one set of exit polls. Exit polls have been wrong and if you just have one, you don't have any clue as to whether, or where, it's wrong. Bill Schneider has said, one exit poll is worse than no polls.

PP: Do you have the sense that exit polls in the past have been missing something important?

JB: I've worked enough election nights to know that feeding affiliates a whole bunch of numbers isn't a very satisfying situation. These people just don't know how to read the data; that's not their job. Now, there is a general move away from large network type services toward more

nimble, syndicated services....Our goal is to set up fullfledged in 1992 a syndicated political editorial service -- that tells the hows and whys of what's going on in the electorate. The networks could have done this, but they chose not to....There's no law that says election day has to proceed the way the networks have traditionally had it proceed, with what I call the Moses complex: coming down from the mountain and delivering unto voters its projections. Exit polling has been incorrect, it has had problems, and our reaction to those problems has been somewhat paranoid. Our goal should be to try to bring the viewer more into the process: if we think the reliability of our exit survey is suspect, we should make that clear. For example, in the Dinkins/Guiliani election in New York City last year, the networks were sitting on exit polls showing large Dinkins leads, from which they projected a Dinkins victory; we then watched for three hours while Rudolph Guiliani ran ahead in the popular vote and barely lost. We can do better than that.

BR: One of the things we are going to do that has not been traditional is announce our exit poll findings, even if we think they do not justly project a winner. We're going to provide numbers as soon as we've got them, and if those numbers aren't conclusive we're going to say so; we will keep people updated as the evening wears on.

JB: In exit polls, the statistical error is not the greatest source of error. A number of response bias problems come into play in certain political environments. When a black runs against a white, exit polling is often not as reliable. When a woman is running against a man, there is less reliability. The best exit polls are between two white males out in Nebraska. But you put a Dianne Feinstein against a John Van de Camp, a David Dinkins against a Rudy Guiliani, or a Harold Washington against a Jane Byrne—and you've got to be careful. Also, we are dealing with large and increasing absentee votes. In Texas we are talking about an absentee vote that could get as large as 25%. People can vote before election day. It's called "no excuse" voting. Exit polling by itself is not going to be able to give you a good sense of what is happening, when it covers only three out of every four voters.

PP: Some critics charge that exit polling and early calls contribute to diminished voter turnout.

JB: Bud has come up with a radical approach to that matter. I find it an intriguing idea, though I don't know where we'll go with it. We certainly do need to experiment with his idea of turning this whole thing on its head.

BR: My idea is: report results at noon, stressing how the late vote could change it and how nonvoters could change it even more if they get to the polls....I think that rather than declaring the election over, this could keep it even more

alive. If registered nonvoters would get off their duff, they could change the prevailing distribution.

JB: There is a certain hypocrisy about keeping these numbers from the general public—because we all know that they are leaked all over the political community. Washington has been abuzz on election day with people phoning their contacts within the networks. Everybody knows what's going on -- except the public. The public has been treated as if they can't be trusted to behave themselves.

Incidentally journalists and others are going to find this year that they can't get network exit poll results as easily as they used to. They are used to walking over to the ABC or NBC news bureau and finding a fullfledged operation to hand them data. That used to be funded by corporate public relations—not by news. It was done because there was a competitive environment. That's all gone, now that the networks are pooling their efforts.

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THE CANADIAN IDENTITY

By Seymour Martin Lipset

From Lipset's **CONTINENTAL DIVIDE: THE VALUES AND INSTITUTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA** (New York and London: Routledge, 1990)

National identity is the quintessential Canadian issue. Almost alone among modern developed countries, Canada has continued to debate its self-conception to the present day. One of its leading historians notes that it "has suffered for more than a century from a somewhat more orthodox and less titillating version of Portnoy's complaint: the inability to develop a secure and unique identity. And so...intellectuals and politicians have attempted to play psychiatrist to the Canadian Portnoy, hoping to discover a national identity."¹ As if to illustrate his point, Margaret Atwood comments ironically, "If the national mental illness of the United States is megalomania, that of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia."²

The reasons for this uncertainty are clear. Canada is a residual country. It is that part of British North America that did not support the Revolution. Before 1776, Anglophone Canadians possessed the same traits that distinguished other American colonists from the British. Then...the new nation to the south developed a political identity formulated around the values set out in the Declaration of Independence. Americanism became and has remained a political ideology.³ There is no ideology of Canadianism, although Canada has a Tory tradition derived from Britain and is, like the United States, descended from a North American settler and frontier society....

Given the contrasts between the Canadian historical experience and the American one, it is not surprising that the peoples of the two countries have formed their self-conceptions in disparate ways. The United States, as we have seen, was organized around what Abraham Lincoln called a "political religion." As a result, as Sacvan Bercovitch notes, both left and right take sustenance from the American creed. Canada never developed its own universalistic ideology....⁴

...[T]he ideology of the American Revolution provides a *raison d'être* for the Republic — it explains why the United States came into being and what it means to be American. But Canada "arrived at freedom through evolution in allegiance and not by revolutionary compact." Hence, its "final governing force...is tradition and convention."⁵ The country could not offer its citizens "the prospect of a fresh start...because (as the Canadian poet Douglas Le Pan put it) Canada is 'a country without a mythology.'⁶ To justify separate national existence, Canadians have deprecated American values and institutions, mainly those seen as derived from an excessive emphasis on competition, which they once identified as an outgrowth of mass democracy and equalitarianism but which in recent years are explained by their intellectuals as endemic in the hegemonic capitalist values and institutions.

Canadians have tended to define themselves not in terms of their own national history and traditions but by reference to what they are *not*: Americans. Canadians are the world's oldest and most continuing un-Americans.⁷ "Without at least a touch of anti-Americanism, Canada would have no reason to exist."⁸ Evidence drawn from "popular fiction, westerns, science and spy thrillers"