

On July 29, the CBS broadcast led off with a story centered on a new Gallup poll projecting Richard Nixon as more likely to defeat Democratic challengers than his Republican primary opponents. Walter Cronkite introduced the story, and explained the significance of the poll numbers in the context of that campaign:

CRONKITE: Good evening. With the Republican National Convention still one week away, jubilant supporters of Richard Nixon were in effect claiming today that it is all over but the shouting. Their jubilation and their claims of victory were based on a Gallup Poll released this morning. It showed that Richard Nixon would do better than Nelson Rockefeller against either Hubert Humphrey or Eugene McCarthy in November. It showed that Nixon would defeat Humphrey by two percentage points, that Rockefeller could only hold him even. It showed that Nixon would defeat McCarthy by five percentage points, that Rockefeller would defeat him by just one.

Rockefeller's forces are dependent on the polls to convince the delegates here that their man could win in November, that Nixon could not. The Gallup Poll, at least, seemed to explode that major Rockefeller hope.²

This set of circumstances produced a reaction unlikely in recent campaigns managed by aides more experienced in manipulation of poll data. In campaigns of the '80s, '90s and 2000s, campaign operatives might well boast about poll numbers behind the scenes, but for public consumption the mantra has been "Don't believe the polls—the voters will have the final say." In 1968, however, Nixon's handlers were not so inhibited:

CRONKITE: The Nixon camp's elation was expressed by Campaign Manager John Mitchell in a statement read by Nixon's long-time press aide, Herb Klein.

KLEIN: The debate now is over. Richard Nixon is the clear-cut winner, whether the count is in actual votes, support from Congressmen, support from delegates, or even in Governor Rockefeller's chosen ground, the polls. The fact is that Richard Nixon will win the nomination. There are in excess of 700 delegates ready to vote for his nomination. We are certain that the count will not be affected by circus-like demonstrations or other costly displays we anticipate in the next few days before this convention nominates Richard M. Nixon for president.³