

Poll Finds Nixon Widens Lead, With Backing of 51% in G.O.P.

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PRINCETON, N. J., Feb. 20—Richard M. Nixon has widened his already commanding lead over seven other leading G.O.P. contenders as the top choice of Republican voters for the 1968 Presidential nomination.

The former Vice President is the favorite of half (51 per cent) of rank-and-file Republicans in the latest (early February) Gallup Poll survey and now leads his closest rival, Governor Rockefeller of New York, by the wide margin of 26 percentage points.

Mr. Rockefeller's standing has shown little change since the previous survey, in early January, while Mr. Nixon has gained 9 percentage points.

Governor Rockefeller's surge in popularity with Republican

voters came between the November and January surveys, when he nearly doubled his share of the vote from 15 per cent to 27 per cent.

Mr. Nixon has led the field in all but one of the 23 tests of G.O.P. candidate strength conducted since the 1964 Presidential election. The exception came in November 1966, when the newly re-elected Gov. George Romney of Michigan briefly moved into the lead.

Governor Romney, the only other announced candidate on the list, continues to lose favor with Republicans. Firmly in second place before his "brain-wash" statement in early September (with 24 per cent of the vote to Nixon's 35 per cent), Mr. Romney now has only 7 per cent of the vote and is in fourth place behind Gov. Ronald Reagan of California.

Interviewing for the current survey was completed Feb. 7, immediately following Mr. Nixon's announcement of his candidacy and just prior to the clash between Mayor Lindsay of New York and Governor Rockefeller over the recent sanitation strike in that city.

Other potential candidates listed in the survey were Senator Charles H. Percy of Illinois, Senator Mark O. Hatfield of Oregon and retired Lieut. Gen. James H. Gavin.

Here is the question asked: "Here is a list of men (card lists 8) who have been mentioned as possible Presidential candidates for the Republican party in 1968. Which ONE would you like to see nominated as the Republican candidate for President in 1968?"

Here are the latest choices of Republicans, compared with

those from surveys in January and September:

| | Feb. | Jan. | Sept. | Sept. |
|-------------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Nixon | 51% | 42% | 40% | 35% |
| Rockefeller | 25 | 27 | 17 | 14 |
| Reagan | 8 | 8 | 16 | 11 |
| Romney | 7 | 12 | 14 | 24 |
| Percy | 3 | 5 | 9 | 6 |
| Hatfield | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Lindsay | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Gavin | 1 | 1 | * | * |
| No Pref. | 1 | 2 | 2 | 6 |

* (Not included on earlier list.)

The results in today's report are based on a national sample of Republicans and cannot be applied to any one region or state.

Mr. Nixon has also registered gains with independents, voters who do not align themselves with either major party. Governor Rockefeller in January had drawn even with Mr.

Nixon, but the latter has now moved into a 34 to 26 per cent lead among these voters.

The choices of independents are important since numerically they represent a voting group as large as Republicans. In order to do well in a Presidential election, a Republican nominee must make a good showing with this group.

The choices of independents, and the comparison:

| | Feb. | Jan. | Sept. | Sept. |
|-------------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Nixon | 34% | 27% | 29% | 23% |
| Rockefeller | 26 | 27 | 20 | 16 |
| Reagan | 13 | 14 | 15 | 17 |
| Romney | 11 | 13 | 17 | 20 |
| Percy | 5 | 7 | 5 | 6 |
| Lindsay | 2 | 3 | 5 | 6 |
| Hatfield | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Gavin | 1 | 1 | * | * |
| No Pref. | 6 | 6 | 8 | 11 |

* (Not included on earlier list.)