

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CONGRESSIONAL
RACE IN NEW YORK'S SEVENTEENTH
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Prepared for
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Conducted by
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FOREWORD

This survey was conducted among 302 voters in the 17th Congressional District between the dates of July 31st and August 7th, 1956 by skilled interviewers and analysts of the Harris organization. In all, 15 carefully selected Election Districts were thoroughly covered. These were the 10th, 19th, and 53rd ED's of the 8th Assembly District; the 3rd, 8th, 16th, 30th, 37th, 38th, 54th, and 59th ED's of the 9th Assembly District; and the 37th, 42nd, and 50th ED's of the 6th Assembly District; and the 52nd ED of the 1st Assembly District. Each Election District was selected on the basis of vote shift patterns in past elections and according to special ethnic characteristics.

While not a straight cross-section of the entire Congressional District, it is the belief of the Harris organization that the results are most meaningful for assessing the future direction of the Akers campaign. Caution is urged in attempting to project these results to what the final outcome will be on Election Day. It is far too early and voters are far too undecided for any such projection as this. This is essentially an operational report, not an exhaustive statistical summary.

Any publication of these results must receive the joint prior approval of Anthony B. Akers and Louis Harris.

August 8, 1956

The 17th is a District of sharp contrasts. From the swank luxury apartments of the middle East-side along Fifth Avenue and down Park Avenue to the tenement slums along Second Avenue to the mixed neighborhoods to the South in the Sixth and First AD's, to the Peter Cooper housing project, one can find nearly every racial and religious strain.

However, the earmark of the 17th is that it is essentially Republican voting in habit, though independent minded on issues. The dominant strains are on the higher income side, but there are pockets of real poverty, infiltration of new immigrant groups, and lace curtain Catholic Districts. There is a large but dormant Democratic vote that takes an inordinately low interest in political or public affairs. By contrast, the Republican areas would produce an abnormally high turn-out with very little prodding from Republican election workers.

THE 17th IN 1956

While it has registered sharp ticket-splitting in the past, the signs this year in the 17th are that there will be more extensive crossing of party lines than ever before. This is dramatically illustrated by the results of the Eisenhower-Stevenson, Lehman-Javits, and Coudert-Akers pairings, all of which were asked in consecutive order.

The results indicate that President Eisenhower is running with a strong lead over Adlai Stevenson, approximating the margin he had four years ago. While there is some uncertainty over the

vote at this early date, and some who threaten to vote Democratic if Nixon is nominated for Vice-President, the signs are that Eisenhower enters the race with a commanding lead, as the following table indicates:

	<u>PRESIDENTIAL RACE</u>	
	<u>1952 Vote Among Sample</u>	<u>1956 Preference Vote Among Sample</u>
	%	%
Eisenhower	59	47
Stevenson	41	26
Don't Know	--	27

If, however, the tide appears to be running toward the Republicans in the Presidential race, an opposite trend appears to be in operation in the race for United States Senator. Here, Senator Herbert Lehman appears to be well in the lead over Attorney General Jacob Javits:

	<u>U.S. SENATOR RACE</u>	
	<u>1952 Vote Among Sample</u>	<u>1956 Preference Vote Among Sample</u>
	%	%
Lehman (D)	59	39
Javits (R)	41	33
Don't Know	--	28

Senator Lehman, running in his home district appears to be able to reverse what at first glance looks to be a strong Republican trend on the Presidential level. However, there is a

reason for this: where Javits might expect to be strong, among liberal Republicans of the Jewish faith, Lehman tend to cut heavily into his vote. And among Independents of all faiths, Lehman runs well ahead. In fact, it is certainly not an overstatement to say that Senator Lehman appears to be a powerful vote-getter in this Fall's election, if this District is any indication.

Observation: Certainly it would benefit a Congressional candidate running in this District to run with the full support of Senator Lehman. Not only should the Democratic candidate actively work for the Senator's re-election, but he should associate himself with a good deal of what the Senator stands for and should pledge to work closely with the Senator if elected to the House.

In the Congressional race, we find the voters splitting the difference between the Lehman and Stevenson vote. As a consequence, our results show that Akers and Coudert are running almost an exact parallel today to their race of two years ago:

CONGRESSIONAL RACE

	<u>1952 Vote of Sample</u>	<u>1956 Vote Preference</u>	<u>1956 Vote Projected to Entire 17th</u>
	%	%	%
Coudert	56	33	29.5
Akers	44	26	29.5
Don't Know	--	41	41

When we take into account the fact that the ED's in which the interviewing took place tended to be more Republican than the District as a whole, we find that Akers and Coudert, on a projected basis for the entire District, today are running in a virtual dead heat, the way the 1954 vote turned out.

Beneath the surface of these over-all results there are some observable patterns which ought to be emphasized. In the Irish Catholic areas of the 8th Assembly District, Coudert appears to be cutting into a vote that nominally considers itself to be Democratic. On the other hand, Akers compensates for these losses by picking up ground in traditionally Republican upper income areas in the 9th Assembly District. Interestingly enough, Lehman and Akers run parallel in the 9th AD, but Lehman runs ahead of Akers in the 8th AD. Stevenson runs behind both in both places.

Observation: In order to keep pace with Lehman in the District, these results would indicate that Akers should concentrate on the conservative areas in the 8th AD. However, as subsequent analysis will demonstrate, Coudert has a much more positive appeal in these conservative Democratic areas than he has among liberal Republicans in an area such as the 9th AD. The chances are that Akers could make even heavier inroads in the liberal GOP sectors than in the lower income Catholic areas of the 8th. And should Akers take issue with Coudert on the issues that cut in the conservative Democratic areas (Communism at home and foreign aid cuts abroad), he would stand the risk of either turning an even higher percentage of straight Democratic votes against him, or of maximizing a Coudert turn-out in the area. The only possible appeal Akers might have in these conservative Democratic areas is as a war hero, which many of these voters associate with 100% patriotism.

There is easily greatest interest in the Presidential election, although a Javits-Lehman race would hold special appeal for the voters in the 17th. By sharp contrast, there is a relatively low degree of interest in the Congressional race at this point. And in the face of 1956 being a Presidential year, the chances are that this difference in attention and interest will continue to be the case.

Observation: Many voters said that they simply had not received any literature or information about either candidate running for Congress. They expressed an interest in receiving such information. As the campaign wears on, however, while general interest in the election picks up, voters will become increasingly immune to campaign literature. And since a major Akers problem is to get voters to know him and to get them to understand the difference between Coudert and Eisenhower and to know the true facts about Coudert's Congressional record, perhaps the most effective dates for literature circulation would be relatively early in the campaign from August 27th to September 15th, followed perhaps by another last minute refresher on the issues involved in the Congressional campaign.

Why Voters Say They Will Vote for Coudert

A number of reasons are given by voters in the 17th for voting for Representative Coudert. The top three are:

I Always Vote Republican: These are straight Republican voters and there is probably little way to work on them short of defecting them from their ticket as a whole, or of discouraging them from showing up on Election Day.

Coudert Has Done a Good Job In Congress: A number of voters point to Coudert's record in the House, and believe it is impressive. However, when pressed for specific things he has done, very little is suggested.

Observation: It would appear to be of primary importance to prove to the voters that Coudert has had something less than an impressive voting record in Congress. Most effective would be to point out deficiencies in his record on defense and foreign policy. However, most effective of all would be to show that he simply hasn't been on the job. Apparently the fairly good pull he receives on his Congressional job stems from the effectiveness of his newsletter which a number of voters expressed gratification at receiving. The indications are that Coudert will do battle on defending his record.

Coudert Is Pro-Eisenhower; Republicans in Congress Are Needed: This is a powerful argument for it ties Coudert directly to Eisenhower's coat-tails. And, in the apathy over the Congressional vote, the more people he can get to carry a vote for the President straight across the Republican ticket, the more formidable Coudert will be.

Observation: It is imperative that the voters be clearly impressed with the fact that Coudert and the President have been at odds on much critical legislation. Widespread documentation should be given to any and all evidence showing that Coudert is anything but an Eisenhower Republican.

Apart from these three major reasons for voting for Coudert, there are four fairly frequently mentioned positive bases for support of the incumbent:

I Know Him Personally: Quite a number of people feel they have known Fritz Coudert for many years in school, as an attorney, through his father or other members of his family, or simply through social acquaintance.

I Feel Familiar With Him as My Congressman: Many confess that they have simply gotten used to Coudert as their Congressman over the years, just as they grew accustomed to him representing them in the State Senate before that.

I Like His Newsletter: A number of people express surprise and a reaction of being flattered to have received the Congressman's newsletter quite unsolicited. Undoubtedly it is mostly from this that the impression has been created that he has a respectable record in the House.

He Is Experienced In Public Life: Many know that Coudert has served in public office for a number of years, and this gives them a feeling that he is an experienced legislator who will serve them wisely and well.

In addition to these fairly frequently given reasons for voting for Coudert, there are a number of scattered mentions for the following: He is a responsible man; he is against Communism; he is honest; he has a solid personality; he is 100% American--an America-firster; he did a good job in Albany; he is getting more liberal lately; he is a true conservative; and he is against public debt and government spending. All in all, the essentially conservative appeal of Coudert is evident from this description.

What Voters Are Critical About Akers

The single, dominant reason for voters not taking more readily to Tony Akers' candidacy is that most say they simply do not know who he is or what his experience, qualifications, or record are. Again and again, voters would say they either could not make up their mind or were for Coudert because they simply did not know Akers. Coudert is by contrast a good deal better known. While 66 per cent of the voters said they didn't know Akers, 45 per cent said they didn't know Coudert.

Observation: This is an obviously difficult handicap to make up quickly or easily. Not only are personal appearances by the candidate most effective, but short, concise biographies would be most helpful. In addition, serious thought might be given to publicizing the 1954 race. This would tell many voters that Tony Akers is an impressive political figure in their District and that their vote can be decisive this time. This runs the risk of advertising a losing effort, but if billed as the "closest election in America," some of the sting might be taken out of it. With Coudert so much better known, there is some advantage in advertising Akers as a figure at least equal to Coudert in vote-getting ability.

There is only one other important negative reaction to Akers:

He Is a New Dealer, an ADA-er: This is generally cited by either die-hard Republicans or by defecting Democrats, chiefly a number of Catholics. In this District, such charges could lose some votes. On the other hand, should Coudert press too hard on this score, he could arouse a bitterly negative boomerang in areas such as the 9th AD.

Observation: While there is no way to prevent the opposition from using the cry of radicalism, on balance it is to be hoped that they do not. It would be a serious mistake, however, to be drawn into a defense along these lines, for it could nullify a great deal of Akers' present acceptability to large numbers of Republicans. It might be possible to throw back at

Coudert some Eisenhower quotes about the New Deal, as well as having a statement from Senator Lehman in strong defense of Tony Aker's patriotism, war record, and a denunciation of such scurrilous charges.

Other negative comments about Akers are: he is pro-Communist; he is a Tammany hack; and he seems to lack inspiration. These are entirely scattered in mention, however, and do not appear to add up to a significant pattern.

What Voters Are Critical About Coudert:

A good deal more critical comment was registered on this survey about Coudert than about Akers. This is only partly due to Coudert being better known. The incumbent Congressman is a controversial figure, and he has a substantial number of detractors in the District. There are three main lines of attack against him:

He Is Too Conservative. Is a Reactionary: While mostly mentioned by Democrats, a number of Independents also feel Coudert is simply too conservative for their tastes. He is generally identified by these people with the extreme right-wing of the Republican Party, which is not popular in this District.

Observation: Not only is it imperative to show that Coudert is not an Eisenhower Republican, it is of almost equal importance to show that he belongs to the McKinley type of thinker in public life. There are many signs of voter receptivity to such an attack. However, care must be taken that not too shrill a campaign of sloganeering charges with the use of words such as "reactionary" be undertaken, for this could backfire as badly as the extreme opposite charges against Akers.

He Has A Bad Record of Absenteeism: This charge is fairly widespread and it is one that voters in this District will become aroused over, provided it can be carefully documented. These are pretty articulate constituents who would demand that their Representative be on the job a maximum amount of the time.

Coudert Is An Isolationist: This is believed to an extent by a number of voters. It ties in naturally with the charge that Coudert is too conservative. While people who say this are hard-pressed to give concrete evidence of his isolationism, documentation would tend to shock the essentially international-minded electorate of the 17th.

Observation: Whatever solid evidence on this score that can be gathered ought to receive widespread circulation, perhaps combined with the proof that Coudert and Eisenhower are poles apart. This would be especially effective in view of Eisenhower's strong appeal as a man of peace.

Other minor mentions of Coudert in an unfriendly fashion are that he does not have a good record in Congress, that he is an unfriendly and downright "ornery" man, that he has sent out too much literature, that he is singularly dislikable as a person, that he wanted to abrogate civil liberties on the loyalty bill he introduced, and that he doesn't even live in the District. All of these mentions were scattered, however.

What Voters Like About Akers:

A number of reasons were cited for voting for Tony Akers for Congress. These break down, however, into five major reasons that are cited:

He Is a Democrat: As in the case of Coudert, Akers is preferred by most simply because he is a Democrat. Certainly there is strong indication as of now that indispensable to Akers' showing is a solid residue of straight Democratic voters.

Observation: It is important to let these voters know exactly and simply who the Democratic nominee for Congress is in the 17th.

I Dislike Coudert: A number of voters say they have a strong aversion to Coudert, and while they do not know a great deal about Akers, nonetheless are prepared to vote for him out of a passionate dislike for the incumbent.

Observation: There would appear to be quite a good deal of feeling that it is time for a change in the District. This can be capitalized again by demonstrating that Coudert has had a bad record as a Congressman and that he is not an Eisenhower Republican in Washington, regardless of his campaign claims.

Akers is for a Strong Defense: One of the fairly clear images of Tony Akers that comes through is that he is in favor of a strong defense policy. Some cite his Defense Department experience, while others say they have heard about his concern for the military preparation of the nation. To a degree this stand of Akers is closely linked with the knowledge that he is a war hero.

Observation: Certainly the defense issue, with respect to Coudert, not to Eisenhower, could prove to be a popular tack for Akers to take.

Akers is a War Hero--Patriotic: Another part of the image of Akers that registers with a number of voters is the fact that he was a war hero back in World War II.

Observation: While not a heavy puller with many voters in areas such as the 9th AD, with lower income and Catholic voters the war service of Akers would be used as a powerful instrument of appeal. In fact, in the absence of an issue approach Akers might take, the war hero fact is an effective one to use.

Akers is a Liberal-Minded Man: Coudert is considered too conservative for even a number of Republicans. A good deal of the resultant slack goes over to Akers on the belief that he is liberal-minded, intelligent, and open-minded.

Apart from these five major reasons given for voting for Akers, there are a number of others with fewer mentions. These consist of: I liked his last campaign; He just missed last time; He is for the working man (a standard Democratic source of strength across the country); That he is a smart man; That he is good on foreign policy matters; That he has been trained for public service; That he turns out good leaflets and literature; That he is younger; That he is a hard worker, sincere, and the good Government candidate; And that there are people really excited

about Akers.

All in all, the favorable image of Akers is rooted in his being a Democrat, liberal-minded, and a war hero who wants a strong defense. The possibilities of deepening this favorable image should be carefully explored. It is one that is essentially moderate but enlightened. It is one that fits pretty well with the prevailing mood in the District.

THE NATIONAL ISSUES

Easily the dominant issue on the minds of the voters of the 17th Congressional District is the question of achieving world peace. There are some signs that the deepening Suez crisis has underscored this latent anxiety among the people here. At any rate, foreign policy matters tend to outweigh domestic issues by better than a 3 to 2 count.

Other foreign policy questions to emerge are the Israel issue, on which Jewish voters are pretty aroused and resentful of Dulles policies, and the foreign aid program which has few supporters and a number of critics.

Observation: While foreign aid is not popular, the majority of voters in the District are broadly internationalists. Any effort to call for a reassessment of foreign aid might very well lead to a serious misunderstanding that Akers is fundamentally an internationalist himself.

Major domestic issues mentioned are the Communist problem at home and the belief that "too many immigrants" are coming into this country. These are abundantly mentioned in the Catholic areas of the 8th AD. However, they do not cut very deeply elsewhere in the District.

One issue that seems to have special appeal in the 9th AD is the plight of small business today. There is a good deal of feeling that while large companies have become more prosperous, little business has been seriously hit.

Observation: Akers experience with the Commerce Department here in the State on just this problem could be an effective way to demonstrate both his interest in these kinds of problems and also point up his governmental experience.

Other domestic issues mentioned are housing, especially among the lower income groups; unemployment; civil rights, mentioned both by Negroes and opponents of the desegregation decision; juvenile delinquency, especially among women; inflation; social security; a balanced budget; problems of the aged; and apprehensions over the President's health and Nixon becoming President.

All in all, the issues tend to gravitate around foreign policy, defense and the economic security of workers and small business. The latter areas have never been traditionally strong Republican clusters anyhow. Today, they are beginning to line-up with the Democrats as effective issues. But the overriding issue is peace and preparedness, and on this score, Coudert would appear to be highly vulnerable, based on his record.