

# **A DELICATE MISSION**

THE WASHINGTON DIARIES OF R.G. CASEY, 1940–42

**EDITED BY CARL BRIDGE**

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Casey to John McEwen, Minister for External Affairs  
R.G.C. 9

An important phenomenon has arisen in America in the last year or so, in the shape of researches into the state of public opinion on subjects of the day. [ ... ]

Dr Gallup<sup>39</sup> (American Institute of Public Opinion) conducts the best known of such 'Polls', and the periodical *Fortune* another. They have their own methods of taking what purport to be properly weighted samples of opinion throughout the country. I attach examples of the results as they are published in the Press each week. When I first arrived here I was somewhat naturally inclined to discount the importance and reliability of such 'polls'—principally by reason of the fact that the 'sample' of opinion was only a very small fraction of the population. However, I came to find that the 'Gallup Poll' and the 'Fortune Poll' were very widely accepted as being true reflections of American public opinion, based largely on the fact that they had been proved right, within small limits, by subsequent public vote at many elections.

The results of the 'Gallup Poll' are syndicated throughout the country—in over one hundred newspapers and are taken seriously by the majority of people.

I am still rather critical about their accuracy but whether they are accurate or not, I think there is little doubt but that they create opinion as well as attempt to record it. They are watched very closely by members of Congress and it has been alleged against them that they prevent free deliberation on Congress, particularly as in many cases they cover particular states or cities. I lunched with Mr Gallup in New York. He tells me that he has an organization in England, which he operates in conjunction with the *Daily Chronicle* newspaper. When the war started he was on the point of starting up in France.

Dr Gallup tells me that he has been in communication with Sir Keith Murdoch<sup>40</sup> with regard to the setting up of the 'Gallup Poll' organisation in Australia—and I understood him to say that Sir Keith Murdoch is shortly sending one of his officers to America for training in the method of conducting such polls of public opinion.

Many considerations spring to one's mind in connection with these 'Polls'. The form in which the questions are asked is clearly most important and then again, the questions asked must be questions about subjects on which the general public have made up their mind. While a subject is being 'bandied about', public opinion may swing widely. [ ... ]

39 On cue, Roosevelt asked Congress on 17 May for a billion dollars to bolster US defence preparedness.

40 George Gallup, Director of Research, Young and Rubicam Advertising Agency, New York; founder and director, American Institute of Public Opinion, Princeton University, 1935. Originator of public opinion polling. Earl Newson, the US public relations man recommended to Casey by the Australian Prime Minister, R.G. Menzies, had arranged for Casey to lunch with Gallup in New York in the last week of April (Newson to Casey, 23 April 1940, A3306/66, NAA). Newson had established the public relations firm Earl Newson and Company in 1935; clients included Ford, Westinghouse, and the [International Wool] Secretariat.

41 Editor and proprietor, Melbourne Herald; Director-General of Information, 8 June – December 1940.

My reason for writing you on this subject is that these polls have become of very considerable public interest and importance in this country—and they may well spread to other countries.

EXAMPLES OF PUBLISHED RESULTS OF 'GALLIUP POLLS'

*PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION*

(Results published—14 April 1940)

If President Roosevelt runs for a third term on the Democratic ticket against Senator [Arthur] Vandenberg<sup>12</sup> on the Republican ticket, which one would you prefer?

ROOSEVELT 53%  
VANDENBERG 47%

If Cordell Hull runs for President on the Democratic ticket against Senator Vandenberg on the Republican ticket, which one would you prefer?

CORDELL HULL 58%  
VANDENBERG 42% [ ... ]

*PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION*

(Results published - 15 March 1940)

What party would you like to see win the Presidential election this year?

New York State Voters:

Want Democrats to win 53%  
Want Republicans to win 47%

(Similar polls are being conducted in all States and progress 'scores' are reported from time to time).

*ATTITUDE TO WAR*

(Results published - 28 April 1940)

	TODAY	DECEMBER
Voters saying US should fight Germany	3.7%	3.5%
Voters opposed to going to war with Germany	96.3	96.5