

The election eye . . .

Watch presidential rankings to narrow

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Now that the National Republican Convention is put to rest and Ronald Reagan and George Bush are named as the standard bearers, watch for the national polls to take a flipflop.

It's happened in most election years and there is no reason to believe it won't take place again.

For that reason, the celebration of expected general election victories by the Republicans at their national convention in Detroit last week may be premature — a situation the more astute and professional Republicans know.

Polls this far ahead of the election and even a month before voting time are misleading as many candidates have painfully found out.

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At present polls indicate that Carter is far behind and the Republicans smell victory. The latest national polls about a month ago showed Reagan holding what appears a wide dozen point edge when he wasn't even the nominee. After the Democrats select President Carter to head their tickets watch how the polls report the gap narrowing.

Just last November, the ABC-Harris poll showed Carter had forged into the front over Reagan 52-45, but only two months earlier was trailing 50-45. It's now amusing to see that Sen. Edward Kennedy held a 2-1 lead over Reagan and a comfortable one over Carter. Now look at Ted Kennedy staggering around for the final knockout which will be delivered at the National Democratic Convention in mid-August at New York City.

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Only last May, this same poll showed Reagan with 39 percent of the vote, Carter 33 percent and John Anderson with 29 percent. The poll then revealed that if respondents were asked how they would vote if they thought Anderson really had a chance, the results narrow to 35 percent for Reagan, 31 for Carter and 29 for Anderson. This would indicate he would take more votes away from Reagan than Carter, or 4 percent from Reagan and 2 percent from Carter. The present analysis from the so-called experts doesn't indicate that now.

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It was observed last fall and winter that the sizeable Carter lead was premature and would likely evaporate. This has happened. Now Reagan holds the advantage but he also faces the same problems of seeing it melt away as the campaign progresses.

Carter's performance as a president may have fallen short of spectacular but his skill as a campaigner is recognized. One has only to go back four years ago when he easily won the nomination after months of preparations and then nosed out the Republican incumbent Gerald Ford in the general.

Carter has the advantages of incumbency and he has shown he can use this to effective advantage.

Americans have a record of electing a president and then

constantly abusing him while in office, regardless of who he is. At the same time, they have re-elected their presidents since Republican Herbert Hoover's depression debacle in the early 30s. Ford was beaten four years ago but he never had been elected either as a president or vice president, merely appointed.

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Only after Carter is named the Democratic nominee next month and the two main contenders lock horns in debates and campaign will voters get an inkling of how the two candidates really stand.

There are many imponderables that bring complexities in the coming campaign, among them the presence of Anderson as the independent candidate and if the economy will stage a forecast upturn. Those are factors that could bring startling reversals of the present trend.

From this long distance view, the presidential race could turn out to be a humdinger — or some unforeseen drastic development could throw it decisively to one of the main contenders. The poll that really counts Nov. 4 will decide.