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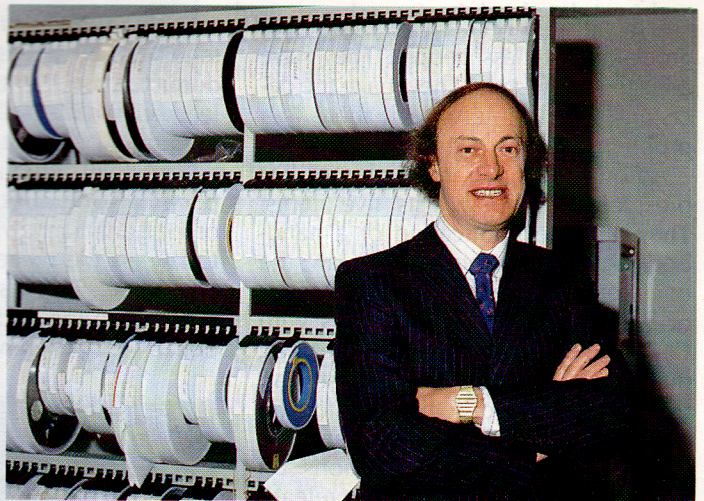
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Martin Goldfarb analyzes polls.

Pollster probes public preferences

By JEFF ROSEN

Martin Goldfarb is not unlike a psychologist who is forever examining different aspects of human behavior. However, unlike the good practitioner who examines one patient at a time, his professional couch is big enough to take in large segments of the population at one time.

Not that his offices atop Toronto's Madison Centre would hold all those people, but as president of Goldfarb Consultants Inc., pollster Goldfarb has probed, examined and studied different aspects of human behavior in various social science disciplines.

"It's a wonderful business," Goldfarb reflected. "You are forever discovering people and dealing with the most dynamic subjects in our society."

Of course anyone who follows public opinion polls realizes there are practically no taboo subjects for a pollster. Whether it is prejudice, discrimination, some aspect of consumer purchasing, politics, intimate or religious behavior or morals and ethics, an experienced pollster will have probed them all.

And Goldfarb, in his 22 years of polling, has definitely seen it all.

After completing undergraduate and graduate degrees in anthropology and sociology at the University of Toronto, the Toronto-born Goldfarb discovered the joys of examining the public psyche while working at a research company. Then, after trying his hand at teaching for a year, Goldfarb and his wife Joan, teamed up to start Goldfarb Consultants.

"She was a phenomenal help to me. Not only in helping me get the work done, but in editing the work. I would write, she would read and edit; she would ask questions, challenge some of the insights."

Eventually Goldfarb's "better-half" left the family business as the business of running of a growing family took precedence.

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However, even today, her contribution to the firm is quite apparent. As an interior designer and artist, her artwork adorns her husband's office, which she designed.

While the Goldfarb clan was growing (they now have five children), the Goldfarb business was also expanding by leaps and bounds.

What started as a small family business now has 65 employees in Toronto and branch offices in New York, Dallas and San Jose. At the same time, Goldfarb said he has quite a few clients in Europe.

The computer revolution has obviously had a major impact on Goldfarb.

Starting with an IBM card sorter — basically a hand-operated computer — Goldfarb now employs computer operators and software programmers to operate "some of the most sophisticated hardware."

The result has been that studies that used to take weeks now take hours. Data now can be collected, processed and analyzed within a matter of hours on computers the size of a coffee table.

And there's no stopping this revolution, Goldfarb says, predicting that tech-



Martin Goldfarb advises federal Liberals. (M-J Crete photo)

nology will drive polling even faster and provide the public with a greater amount of information.

"In real terms what we are moving from is representative democracy to information democracy," he said. "It will provide both the citizen and the decision-makers with instant informa-

tion on the public attitude on any subject matter on any given day.

"It will make the world not less friendly, but more friendly because what you will have is personal information and access to personal information. You will be able to exchange ideas



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with your computer and with other human beings through your computer."

While the idea of government leaders having more information on its citizens may not go over well with some who feel that their elected representatives now govern by poll, Goldfarb dismissed the premise.

He said an effective leader has a responsibility to lead and may use polls as an aid to understand society's attitude on a given subject. Even when a leader's objective clashes with society's preference, a poll can help in overcoming obstacles to achieve the desired political result, said Goldfarb, whom most people associate with the Liberal Party of Canada.

Not that the Liberal Party is Goldfarb's only client, though. He said political work accounts for only five percent of his business. Among the big name clients Goldfarb's company conducts research for are Ford Motor Company, Four Seasons Hotels, Bank of Montreal, McDonald's, Coca-Cola and The Toronto Star.

In each case, Goldfarb looks at what his client is trying to find out and "tailor-makes" the type of poll it should conduct.

He explained there are a number to choose from including: probability polls where you sample the nation; segmented polls where, for example, you sample a particular behavior pattern or a particular type of coffee; telephone polls and personal interview polls.

Looking at this more closely, Goldfarb said that if The Canadian Jewish News wanted to better understand its market, he would probably do a telephone sample. However, if he were to study prejudice within the Jewish community, a personal interview format would probably be more suitable in order to get at real inner feelings and

attitudes.

After the data is gathered by part-time people working evenings and weekends, it is analyzed and presented to clients, along with recommendations.

And what if the poll results are not exactly what the client is looking for?

"Our approach is to make recommendations and develop an intimate relationship with our clients and encourage them to act on them," Goldfarb replied. "We feel very possessive about things we find.

"The tactic here is not to give them results to make them feel good. You do research to discover, and the results often surprise you."

It is precisely this digging for research to understand the behavior of the nation that Goldfarb admitted to be exciting.

"In some respects that nation is on our couch. We do all kinds of research that deals with behavior in various social science disciplines, be it political, sociological, anthropological, psychological or economic."

Looking back at last fall's federal election, Goldfarb denied that there was any discrepancy between the fact that the majority of those polled opposed free trade and yet gave the Conservative Party its second consecutive majority.

He said the public deserves greater credit for recognizing that free trade was not the only issue at stake; trust also played a key role.

Disputing criticism that Canada's political system is not truly representative as the various fringe parties managed to garner 14 percent of the popular vote while failing to elect any members to Parliament, Goldfarb said Canada's system is still the most sensitive of any devised.



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It is even more sensitive than the American system as it is less cumbersome and more democratic because the prime minister is responsible to Parliament and the cabinet is chosen from elected representatives.

"Democracy is not a free-for-all. It doesn't mean every individual should have a say in every decision. Democracy has to have order and only functions when there is order."

He pointed to Israel's political system as an example of what happens when a country aims for what it perceives as a true democracy.

Instead of achieving it (by allowing proportional representation whereby any party receiving one percent of the vote is allowed to send a representative to sit in the country's legislative assembly), it produces chaos as fringe parties can demand extremist concessions and thereby weaken the country.

"The country in many respects faces a crisis day-to-day because it doesn't have stability in its government and stability is fundamental for the success of democracy."

It also results in reduced democracy because, unlike Canada's system where

members of Parliament represent a given area and its citizens, Israeli politicians are chosen from slates so there is no one to ensure an area gets fair treatment.

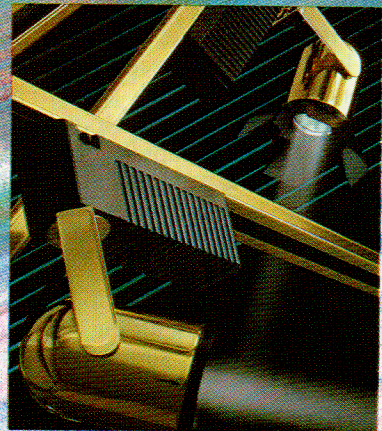
Despite his contention that Israel's political system is less efficient than Canada's, there is nothing clinical or statistical about Goldfarb's commitment to Israel and Judaism.

He said that while growing up in Toronto at the corner of Dundas and Grace streets above his family's fruit store, his parents David and Sarah instilled in him and his two brothers, Harvey and Stanley, a tremendous commitment to Zionism and Israel and to Jewish principles and values.

These values are apparent in Goldfarb today as he deals with society's likes and dislikes.

"Judaism is committing yourself to certain principles and living within those principles. Each of its streams has its own merits and disciplines and laws to follow. Each of these is as valuable as the other. Within those sets of rules Judaism helps the individual to develop an honorary relationship within the family, friends and nation you live with."

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