Election time is filled with prophecy. Voters try to predict what the candidates will do if elected. Candidates predict the dastardly things their opponents will do if elected. Pundits "read the tea leaves" to predict who will get elected and what the parties will do if the balance of power shifts or does not shift. Pollsters talk to thousands of people to predict what will happen.

Ironically, while candidates and supporters work long and hard to impact the future, the media seem more obsessed with prophesying it. They want to predict the future, to tell us what will happen. It almost seems that reporting on the present (or heaven forbid, the past) is worthwhile only if it enables one to foretell the future.

But isn't there a difference between prophecy and prediction? Well, perhaps. Prophecy rightly speaking is the delivery of messages between a god and human beings; most prominently from God to humans. Prediction, by contrast, is simply people saying things about the future, perhaps basing it on actions in the past or just wishful thinking. Besides, many people would say, prophecy took place when God was looking after the people Israel in the Old Testament; it does not take place today.

But take a look at 1 Kings 22, where the king of Israel works to persuade the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, to take part in a war against Syria. To make his decision, the Judean king consults a prophet, Micaiah, who tells him not to go to war.

To put it another way, Micaiah takes a position on a current issue -- whether or not to join in the war. The prophecy takes the form of predicting the outcome based on one of the two choices. If we focus on Micaiah as a speaker rather than the source of his message, he clearly sounds like a TV pundit predicting the outcome of a politician's decision. (To finish the story, Jehoshaphat ignores the prophet's message and is killed in battle.)

Like Micaiah, the famous prophets Elijah and Elisha focus their messages on current, local events. Indeed, whenever we know the circumstances in which an Old Testament prophecy is delivered, the prophecy focuses on the local and the immediate, not on some "far in the future" outcome.

So while pollsters and pundits do not (usually) claim to speak for God, they follow the same interest of the ancient Israelite prophets. That is, they predict the here and now, or rather the here and immediate future. They are concerned with the same kind of content as prophecy, if not the same source.

And of course many Americans watch the pundits on TV, listen to them on the radio, and read them in the papers. If that isn't enough, some of us even search the bloggers to find one whose predictions we appreciate.

Indeed, in terms of who we vote for, too many of us base our decisions more on predictions of the future rather than on past and present facts and actions.

Americans have become fascinated with prophecies of the future. This is worrisome, for as we frequently experience, our experts cannot predict the weather with high degrees of accuracy yet, despite the decades of scientific study that has been put in (although forecasts are improving). If we cannot prophesy the weather with a high degree of accuracy, how can we prophesy our human future any better?

What remains unclear is which kind of prophecy has the most impact in voting. Is it prophecies of a future that is scary, and so people vote against it? Or is it prophecies of a future people find attractive and so they vote for it? I guess we will know on Nov. 3.