

Public Believes Dean Over President

Post 411574

By Louis Harris

Just after he testified before the Senate Watergate committee, the Harris Survey showed that former White House counsel John Dean had made a favorable impression in terms of his truthfulness. During the ensuing 10 months, belief in what Dean said has not diminished, while President Nixon's credibility has sharply declined. Relatively, therefore, Mr. Nixon's chief accuser now stands as a more credible witness on the events of the Watergate cover-up than the President himself.

By 52 to 28 per cent, a majority of the American people now says it believes Dean's charges that "President Nixon knew about the Watergate cover-up." And by 46 to 29 per cent, the public is inclined to see Dean as being "more truthful about the Watergate cover-up" than President Nixon. Last July, people by a slim margin said they believed the Nixon version of events more than that of Dean, 38 to 37 per cent.

Thus, in the dramatic confrontation which has been basic to the President's alleged involvement in the Watergate cover-up, the clash between John Dean and Richard Nixon, the American people have now come down on the side of believing Dean more than the President. Quite apart from Dean's charges, the public has come to the conclusion, by 62 to 24 per cent, that "President Nixon did not know about the attempt to cover up White House involvement in Watergate."

Between March 24 and 29, a nationwide cross-section of 1,495 adults were asked:

Who do you think has been more truthful about the Watergate cover-up—President Nixon or John Dean?

	March 24-29	July 17-23
President Nixon	29%	38%
John Dean	46	37
Not sure	25	25

Not only has there been a decisive shift toward believing John Dean rather than the President in their sharply differing versions of the

Watergate cover-up, but Dean's testimony has hurt Mr. Nixon among a number of key groups he is depending on for public support in his crisis over impeachment:

More Truthful

	Nixon 29%	Dean 46%	Not Sure 25%
NATIONWIDE			
By Region			
East	22	54	24
Midwest	23	45	27
South	39	36	25
West	28	47	25
By Age			
18-29	19	54	27
30-49	28	46	26
50 and over	38	38	24
By Education			
8th grade or less	33	35	32
High school	29	45	26
College	26	51	23
By Occupation			
Professional	29	50	21
Bus. executive	35	44	21
Skilled labor	26	49	25
White collar	25	48	27
By Party			
Republican	58	23	19
Democratic	15	60	25
Independent	30	45	25
By Religion			
Catholic	25	49	26
White Protestant	39	39	22
Jewish	3	65	32

The groups most convinced of the President's knowledge of and involvement in the Watergate cover-up—those on the East and West coasts, young people, the college-educated, professional and skilled-labor types, Democrats and independents—all tend to draw upon the Dean testimony as evidence supporting their views.

More significant, however, is the fact that those who

have been most supportive of Mr. Nixon on the impeachment question—people in the South, those 50 and over, those with less education—nonetheless are deeply divided over whether to believe Dean or the President.

When persons were asked why they feel either the President or Dean has been more truthful, they poured out their answers in voluminous detail. One in seven rest his case on absolute faith in Mr. Nixon. But 24 per cent of the public points

to Mr. Nixon's evasiveness on answering questions and turning over evidence.

Another 34 per cent expresses confidence in John Dean personally.

All in all, a majority of the public believes Dean's basic story.