

Integrity Now the Watergate Issue

By Louis Harris

The American people now have become convinced that the central issue in the Watergate affair is the question of integrity of the federal government itself. By 47-to-43 per cent, the public has now ceased to look on Watergate as being "mostly political" and sees it "as a very serious question involving the honesty of the White House." This is a marked change from last fall, when by 62-to-26 per cent, a sizable majority chalked up the Watergate charges as mainly political rhetoric, or the kind of thing both sides engage in in political campaigns.

On the question of his handling of the Watergate affair, by 58-21 per cent, a majority of the people believe Mr. Nixon "has withheld important information about it" and has "not been frank and honest" with the people on the matter. His personal rating on his handling of Watergate has now slipped to 70-to-15 per cent negative, down sharply from

the 57-to-31 per cent negative standing recorded for him in May by the Harris Survey.

By the same token, before he was scheduled to testify, no more than 6 per cent of the public felt that statements and leaks from former White House Counsel John Dean were "very truthful," 27 per cent felt he had been "only partly truthful," and 17 per cent were convinced he was "hardly truthful." However, 50 per cent of the American public did not feel competent to pass judgement on this issue.

The Latest Harris Survey, conducted in person in 1,509 households between June 14th and 18th, asked about the truthfulness of the testimony and other public statements by key figures in the Watergate case.

"How truthful do you think (READ NAME ON LIST) has been in what he (she) has said about the Watergate affair — very truthful, only partly truthful, or hardly truthful at all?"

	Very Truthful %	Partly Truthful %	Hardly Truthful %	Not Sure %
President Nixon	16	30	23	31
James McCord	15	34	12	39
Martha Mitchell	15	20	21	44
Jeb Stuart Magruder	10	25	13	52
John W. Casper	8	24	9	59
Maurice Stans	7	22	14	57
John Dean III	6	27	17	50
E. Howard Hunt	5	26	13	56
John Mitchell	5	21	34	40
John Ehrlichman	4	25	20	51
H. R. "Bob" Haldeman	4	24	20	52
Charles Colson	3	19	9	69

No longer do people believe that Watergate is a matter of "politics," as was so long the case. Periodically, the Harris Survey has asked: "Do you think the Watergate episode is a very serious question involving the honesty of the White House, or do you think it is mostly politics?"

	June '73 %	May '73 %	April '73 %	Oct. '72 %
Serious question involving White House integrity	47	40	36	26
Mostly politics	43	52	48	62
Not sure	10	8	16	12

Most suspect of all in the public's mind, in terms of telling the truth, quite clearly are three central high-level figures. former presidential chief of staff H. R. Haldeman, former domestic adviser John Ehrlichman and former Attorney General John Mitchell. Together with former White House special counsel Charles Colson, who was largely unknown to the public up to now, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and Mitchell were closer to Mr. Nixon than any other four men during his first administration.

It is apparent that the man people are looking for most of all for answers is the President himself. And his rating on handling Watergate has now slipped to a low of 70 to 15 per cent negative. No matter what the impact of the Dean testimony and that of Mitchell, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and the others to follow, only a convincing story from Mr. Nixon himself now will suffice, according to the American people themselves. Obviously, the crisis of public opinion over Watergate has now been reached.