

5-20-74
W Post

The Harris Survey

Dean Believed Over Nixon

By Louis Harris

Despite heavy attacks on John W. Dean's credibility by the White House and statements by jurors in the Mitchell-Stans case that they were skeptical about testimony by the former White House counsel at that trial, a plurality of the American people (45 to 32 per cent) believes that "John

Dean has been more truthful about the Watergate cover-up than President Nixon."

Significantly, a 52 to 30 per cent majority said it "believes Dean's charges that President Nixon knew about the Watergate cover-up." Dean is scheduled to be a key witness before the House Judiciary Committee in its hearing to determine whether to impeach President Nixon. A pivotal question will be just how credible a witness the former White House counsel will be.

The outcome of the Mitchell-Stans trial, in which the two former Nixon Cabinet members were found not guilty, did shake the credibility of Dean in the eyes of 26 per cent of the public. However, twice that many, 52 per cent, said the episode left them unshaken in their estimate of Dean's veracity.

On May 7 and 8, a nationwide cross section of 1,555 adults was asked by the Harris Survey:

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

	Nixon	Dean	Not Sure
May, 1974	32%	45%	23%
April	28	49	23
March	29	46	25
July, 1973	38	37	25

These results are in marked contrast to the prevailing public view last July, right after Dean's original testimony, when by a narrow 38 to 37 per cent margin, people tended to believe the Nixon version of the facts.

The cross-section was also asked:

"Tell me if you believe President Nixon or not when he says the transcripts of the edited tapes will prove that former White House counsel John Dean, and not President Nixon, was guilty of improper and illegal acts?"

	Believe Nixon	Do not	Not sure
	78%	46	26

White House hopes that the Mitchell-Stans trial would mark a turning point in public opinion away from Dean simply have not materialized. What does remain is the basic credibility of Dean's charges of involvement by President Nixon in the Watergate cover-up:

"Former White House counsel John Dean testified that President Nixon knew about the Watergate cover-up. Do you believe or not Dean's charges against President Nixon?"

	Believe Dean	Do Not	Not Sure
May, 1974	52%	30	18
April	55	28	17
March	50	28	20
July, 1973	50	30	20

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