

California Poll

Public Feeling About Nixon

By Mervin D. Field

A significant change is occurring in the California public's feeling toward former President Nixon. Simply stated, it is a mixture of a sense that justice was not done when Mr. Nixon the President escaped standing trial for his actions in the Watergate affair, and a growing feeling of compassion for Mr. Nixon the man.

More Californians today think Mr. Nixon has paid enough penalty for what he did than think he has not been penalized enough. This is a significant trend in a state which has, over the years, been found to be consistently more unfavorable toward Mr. Nixon than the rest of the U.S. when data from state and national polls are compared.

The rise in sympathy for Mr. Nixon's personal position has not, however, altered the public's firm belief that he should not hold a high government position again. Overwhelmingly, the public rejects the idea that he become U.S. ambassador to China or run for the U.S. Senate. Additionally, virtually all Republicans believe he would hurt rather than help the GOP if he became a spokesman for the party.

The sympathy wave for Mr. Nixon, who has withdrawn from public life since last August, may also be carrying over to Mr. Nixon's aides (H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, and John Mitchell) who recently stood trial and were convicted for their Watergate roles. The public is now almost evenly divided over whether they should go to jail for these crimes or be pardoned.

A California Poll survey of a representative cross-section of this state's adult public was completed between February 15 and March 3 and found that:

● 62 per cent of the public thinks Mr. Nixon should have been required to stand trial for crimes he may have committed while in office

● However, 51 per cent think he has now paid enough penalty for what he did (44 per cent think he has not been penalized enough)

● Californians strongly disapprove (79 per cent to 17 per cent) of the idea of former President Nixon becoming U.S. ambassador to China or some similar job

● By an even greater margin (84 per cent to six per cent) people say they would not vote for him if he were to run for U.S. Senate

● By an equally large ratio (83 per cent to eight per cent) Republicans say Nixon would hurt the GOP more than he would help if he became party spokesman

● The public is nearly evenly divided (46 per cent to 46 per cent) on whether convicted former Nixon Administration people like Haldeman, Mitchell, Ehrlichman and Robert Mardian should go to jail or be pardoned.

	State-wide	Democrats	Republicans
Should Mr. Nixon have had to stand trial?			
Should have had to	62%	77%	35%
Should not have had to	38	21	64
No opinion	2	2	1
Mr. Nixon penalized enough?			
Yes, penalized enough	51%	35%	78%
Not penalized enough	44	60	17
No opinion	5	5	5
Mr. Nixon as China ambassador?			
Approve	18%	10%	38%
Disapprove	77	85	65
No opinion	5	5	5
How vote if Mr. Nixon ran for U.S. Senate?			
Would vote against him	87%	95%	74%
Would vote for him	9	3	17
No opinion	4	2	9
Would Mr. Nixon help or hurt GOP as spokesman?			
Would hurt	84%	85%	83%
Would help	6	5	8
No difference	5	4	6
No opinion	5	6	3
Jail or pardon for Mr. Nixon aides?			
Should go to jail	46%	51%	38%
Should be pardoned	46	40	55
No opinion	8	8	7

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