

The Harris Survey

Public Criticizes Nixon Tapes Policy

By Louis Harris

On every dimension surrounding his response to the Watergate inquiry by the House Judiciary Committee, President Nixon comes up with negative reactions from the American people. And, by 56 to 33 per cent, a majority of the American people feel that the committee should vote a bill of impeachment "if President Nixon refuses to hand over the materials and tapes requested by it."

By 67 to 23 per cent, the public was firmly convinced earlier this month that the President had not turned over all the evidence the committee wanted, and had "withheld important information."

The Harris Survey asked a nationwide cross-section of 1,555 households from May 4 through May 7 a series of questions on its reaction to Mr. Nixon's response to the House inquiry. People were asked:

How would you rate President Nixon on (read list)?

	Pos	Neg	Not Sure
His televised speech on Watergate, April 29	21%	50%	29%
His turning over 1,300 pages of transcripts from edited tapes	26	67	7
His cooperation with House Judiciary Committee on impeachment	18	71	11
His refusal to turn over the original tapes to House Judiciary Committee	21	72	7
The way he is cooperating with impeachment proceedings	21	73	6
His handling of Watergate tapes	15	80	5
His handling of Watergate case	15	82	3

The President received a positive rating for turning over the edited transcripts of White House tapes from only 26 per cent of the public, but 67 per cent gave him negative marks. His televised speech on April 29 evoked a generally negative rating from 50 per cent of those with opinions as against only 21 per cent who responded favorably.

A substantial 68 per cent agree with the statement that "by not handing over

material, he makes people suspicious that he is trying to hide important information that would show he was more deeply involved in Watergate." Twenty-three per cent disagree.

A measure of how closely the public is following the details of President Nixon's response to the House Judiciary Committee inquiry could be found in the 71 per cent who were aware in early May that the President had refused to "give the House Judiciary Committee the actual tapes requested which deal with discussions about Watergate," the 59 per cent who agreed that he had refused to "hand over to the committee tapes and materials dealing with the ITT case," and the 58 per cent who were ready to say he had not handed over requested "tapes and materials dealing with the milk fund contributions."

All in all, a substantial 67 per cent felt that the President had withheld important information. The cross-section was asked:

From what you have heard or read, do you think President Nixon has turned over all the evidence the House Judiciary Committee wants from him, or do you think he has withheld important information from them?

Has turned over all evidence needed	23%
Has withheld important information	67
Not sure	10

The major consequence of this perception of Presidential non-cooperation is public support in these circumstances for the House to vote a bill of impeachment against Mr. Nixon. People were asked:

The House Judiciary Committee feels President Nixon did not turn over the materials and tapes requested by it. If the President refuses to hand over this material, do you think the Committee should vote to bring up impeachment charges against the President or not?

House should vote impeachment	58%
Should not	33
Not sure	11