

Poll Finds Nixon Rating Lowest After Saigon's Invasion of Laos

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WASHINGTON, March 3 — President Nixon's popularity fell to the lowest level of his Presidency shortly after the South Vietnamese invasion of Laos, despite his recent appeal for support of domestic reforms, the Gallup Poll reported today.

A bare majority of 51 per cent approved of the President's performance in office in a survey conducted Feb. 19 to 21, the Gallup organization, said. That was five percentage points lower than the President's Gallup rating in January, one point below his previous low rating in December, 1970, and a 17 point drop from his highest rating, in November, 1969.

The Gallup survey was being studied today at the White House, as well as at the Democratic National Committee. There was no immediate comment from Mr. Nixon's staff, but a spokesman for the Democrats called the poll "evidence of a sincere feeling among people that they are not getting any leadership" from the President.

The most recent survey was also the second of Mr. Nixon's tenure in which an attempt was made to measure the depth of popularity for the President. The Gallup organization reported that only one person in four who approved of Mr. Nixon's performance had expressed "strong approval." This was a sharp decline from the attitude shown in a survey in September, 1969.

Mr. Nixon traveled to Des Moines, Iowa, on Monday to

planned public pleas for support of his domestic program, which he called "a New American Revolution." He outlined the program in his State of the Union Message on Jan. 22.

In Des Moines, the President encountered an unusual combination of vocal opponents. Construction workers in hard-hats and farmers in work-clothes demonstrated concern over the Administration's economic policies alongside long-haired youths opposed to the war in Indochina.

The latest Gallup findings appeared to confirm that Mr. Nixon faced a difficult time rallying support for his program. The results were mildly surprising, however, coming on the heels of the nationally telecast address on Jan. 22 and the beginning of the South Vietnamese military thrust into Laos on Feb. 8.

Soon after he described his Vietnamization program in November, 1969, Mr. Nixon's Gallup rating reached its highest point.

In the current poll, 1,443 adults were asked, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Mr. Nixon is handling his job as President?" Of those polled, 51 per cent expressed approval, 36 per cent disapproval and 13 per cent had no opinion.

The percentage of those expressing strong approval dropped from 23 per cent in September, 1969, to 14 per cent last month, while those indicating strong disapproval rose from 8 per cent to 16 per cent.