

# Watergate Impact Is Seen In 48-35% Democratic Lead

By Louis Harris

One measure of the potential political impact of the Watergate affair can be found in the 48-35 per cent lead the Democrats now hold nationwide in the 1974 Congressional off-year elections. In 1972, the Democrats won control of Congress, but by a much smaller 53-47 per cent margin. Thus, as the Watergate disclosures continue, the Democrats are threatening to double the popular vote margin by which they carried Congressional elections last year.

If this lead were to hold up through November 1974, the Democrats could dominate the next Congress by majorities they have not held since the 1930s. Obviously, however, the elections are still 18 months off, and much can happen between now and then.

Recently, a cross section of the country was asked:

*"Suppose the 1974 election for Congress were being held today and you had to decide right now, in this Congressional district, would you vote for the Republican or Democratic candidate for Congress?"*

|            | 1974 | 1972 |
|------------|------|------|
|            | %    | %    |
| Democratic | 48   | 53   |
| Republican | 35   | 47   |
| Not Sure   | 17   |      |

Perhaps the best test on Watergate is the question asked in the same survey about President Nixon's possible involvement in the cover-up following the arrest of five Republican spies caught bugging Democratic national headquarters last June. The public was asked:

*"President Nixon said that until March of this year he did not know of any effort on the part of his own staff members of his administration to cover-up White House involvement in the Watergate affair. Do you think the President did not know about the attempts to cover up White House involvement in the Watergate affair before this past March, or do you think he knew it before then?"*

|                   | Didn't Know % | Did Know % | Not Sure % |
|-------------------|---------------|------------|------------|
| Nationwide        | 34            | 50         | 16         |
| By Region         |               |            |            |
| East              | 32            | 54         | 14         |
| Midwest           | 38            | 48         | 14         |
| South             | 37            | 40         | 23         |
| West              | 26            | 61         | 13         |
| By Size of Place  |               |            |            |
| Cities            | 32            | 55         | 13         |
| Suburbs           | 33            | 53         | 14         |
| Towns             | 38            | 45         | 17         |
| Rural             | 36            | 43         | 21         |
| By Age            |               |            |            |
| 18-29             | 30            | 59         | 11         |
| 30-49             | 37            | 45         | 18         |
| 50 and over       | 35            | 48         | 17         |
| By Education      |               |            |            |
| 8th grade or less | 34            | 44         | 22         |
| High school       | 34            | 48         | 18         |
| College           | 35            | 53         | 12         |
| Union Members     | 34            | 54         | 12         |
| Independents      | 33            | 51         | 16         |
| By Religion       |               |            |            |
| Catholics         | 32            | 56         | 12         |
| Protestants       | 41            | 41         | 18         |

These results show clearly that Watergate has taken its greatest toll on precisely those groups which in 1972 were most independent-minded in splitting their tickets between President Nixon and Democratic congressional candidates.

Here is how each of these groups indicate they would vote for Congress, if the off-year elections were held in May 1973; instead of November 1974:

- In the East, the Democrats hold a 51-33 per cent lead, up sharply from the 51-49 per cent margin they won by in 1972.

- In the suburbs, the Democrats hold a 43-42 per cent edge. But that is a vast improvement for them from

the 44-56 per cent loss they incurred in the House races last November.

- Among union members, the Democrats now lead by 56-28 per cent for Congress in 1974. This is substantially ahead of the 59-41 per cent margin by which the Democrats won the House vote among union members in 1972.

- Among Catholics, the Democrats hold a 56-25 per cent lead, which is well above the 60-40 per cent margin they won among this religious group last November.

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