

Public Reaction To Watergate

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The reaction of the American public to Watergate, as of early June, can be summed up as follows:

1—Two out of every three Americans in the latest survey believe that President Nixon was involved, to at least some degree, in the Watergate affair.

2—At the same time, approximately half of all persons dismiss the Watergate affair as "just politics—the kind of thing that both parties engage in," although a sharply increasing number believe it is a "very serious matter," revealing corruption in the Nixon administration.

A series of questions was asked to determine public awareness of the Watergate affair, views on Mr. Nixon's degree of involvement and whether or not the public regards Watergate as revealing corruption in the Nixon administration.

To measure awareness, this question was asked first:

"Have you heard or read about Watergate?"

Following are the latest results, with the trend, starting with an early measurement during last fall's presidential campaign:

Have you heard or read about Watergate?

| (TREND IN AWARENESS) | |
|----------------------|-----|
| Sept. 22-23, 1972 | 52% |
| April 6-9, 1973 | 83% |
| April 27-30 | 91% |
| May 11-14 | 96% |
| June 1-4 | 97% |

Another question in the Watergate series sought to find out whether the public believes Mr. Nixon was involved and to what extent:

"Here are four statements concerning President Nixon's connection with the Watergate affair. Will you please tell me which one comes closest to your own point of view?" (Survey respondent was handed a card with the four statements.)

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| Nixon planned the Watergate "bugging" from the beginning | 8% |
| Nixon did not plan the "bugging" but knew about it before it took place | 28% |
| Nixon found out about the "bugging" after it occurred but tried to cover it up | 31% |
| Nixon had no knowledge of the "bugging" and spoke up as soon as he learned about it | 19% |
| No opinion/not heard or read | 14% |

Views on the extent of Mr. Nixon's involvement depend in considerable measure on one's political affiliation. For example, only 3 per cent of Republicans say Mr. Nixon planned the bugging from the beginning, compared to 14 per cent of Democrats.

This question also was asked:

"Which of these two statements comes closer to your point of view about Watergate?"

"1—It's a very serious matter because it reveals corruption in the Nixon administration.

"2—It's just politics — the kind of thing that both parties engage in."

The latest findings show a sharp increase since an early April survey in the percentage of Americans who feel that Watergate is a very serious matter.

Here is the tabular comparison:

| | Serious matter— Reveals Corruption | | No Opinion/ Not Heard | |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|---------|--------------------------|---------|
| | Just Politics | Or Read | Just Politics | Or Read |
| April 6-9 | 31% | 53% | 16% | 16% |
| June 1-4 | 47% | 46% | 7% | 7% |

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