

WXPost
The Harris Survey

JUL 2 1973

59% Back Press on Watergate Expose

By Louis Harris

By 59 to 12 per cent, a majority of the American people that "in exposing the facts about Watergate, the Washington Post and other newspapers have been an example of a free press at its best." In addition, by 56-to-18 per cent, most Americans are also convinced that "if it had not been for the press exposes, the whole Watergate mess never would have been found out."

By sizeable margins, the public reaction to press and television coverage of Watergate is highly positive. In contrast, by 61 to 17 per cent, most people reject the proposition that "the press is just out to get President Nixon on Watergate." But a narrower 46 to 40 per cent margin, people deny that "the press and television have given more attention to Watergate than it deserves."

By and large, majorities of the public believe that their local newspapers and the television networks, including public television, have been "very fair" in the way they have covered Watergate developments. Between June 14 and 18, just before John Dean's testimony, a cross section of 1509 households nationwide was asked in person:

"Do you feel (READ LIST) have been very fair, only somewhat fair, or have been unfair in the way they have

covered the Watergate developments?"

	Very Fair %	Only Somewhat %	Unfair %	Not Sure %
TV network news	56	20	5	19
Public television	53	15	3	29
Newspapers where you live	51	24	6	19
Radio news	43	20	3	34
News magazines	31	17	3	49

Basically, television and newspapers have been used most by the public to follow the coverage of Watergate, and both came off very well, indeed. On a relative basis, news magazines do not score as high as other media but have the highest number of persons unable to express an opinion.

One key element which has brought public television much credit from the people has been the policy of carrying in its entirety each day's hearing of the Select Senate Committee on Watergate. People were asked about this policy:

"As you know public television is carrying the entire day's hearings on Watergate every evening in prime time. How would you rate public television on this coverage—excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?"

	Total Public
Positive	64
Negative	10
Not sure	26

This unusual programming decision by public television has served that med-

ium well, since 75 percent of all people with an opinion of public TV coverage believe it has been "very fair," higher than any other medium. Asked whether they "find news in general about Watergate boring and confusing," the public

agreed by 47-39 percent.

All in all, in what has been a sad and shocking episode to most Americans, the Watergate affair has given a majority of the people the opportunity to be thankful for a free press.

© 1973, Chicago Tribune