

Nixon's Refusal To Testify Called Wrong by Public

By Louis Harris

By 51 to 37 per cent, a majority of the American people believe that President Nixon has been "wrong to refuse to testify personally before the U.S. Senate Watergate committee." By 60-30 per cent, the public also believes that Mr. Nixon has been "more wrong than right" in refusing to turn over White House files which deal with the Watergate bugging and alleged cover-up.

By 50 to 30 per cent, most people believe the testimony of former White House counsel John Dean that "President Nixon knew about the Watergate cover-up." When asked directly who has been more truthful about the Watergate cover-up—Mr. Nixon or John Dean—the public rates the President as more believable by a 38-37 per cent margin.

The results were drawn from a survey of 1,485 households conducted from July 18th-22nd.

On his handling of the Watergate case, Mr. Nixon has a 70-17 per cent negative rating from the public. The public gives the Senate Watergate investigating committee positive marks by 82-69 per cent.

By 59-24 per cent, a majority of the public now believes the President "knew about the attempt to cover up White House involvement in Watergate while it was going on." By a much closer 42-40 per cent, a plurality of the public feels that "President Nixon knew about the attempt to wire-tap Democratic headquarters before it happened." By 47-28 per cent, however, people also do not believe that the President "personally ordered the cover-up."

On each of the dimensions, there has been no increase over the past month in the number who are ready to believe Mr. Nixon was involved in the Watergate affair.

To determine public opinion on the controversy over having the President testify be-

fore the Senate Watergate committee, the cross section was asked:

"President Nixon has refused to agree to testify personally before the U.S. Senate committee on Watergate on the grounds that he would be making the President subordinate to Congress. He gave as an example President Truman's refusal to testify before a congressional committee. Senator Ervin disagrees and gave as an example how President Abraham Lincoln agreed to testify before a congressional committee. Do you think President Nixon was more right or more wrong to refuse to testify personally before the U.S. Senate Watergate committee?"

Total Public %	
More right	37
More wrong	51
Not sure	12

The question of turning over White House files and tapes dealing with the Watergate affair has created even more controversy, since it was revealed that recordings had been made of all meetings and telephone calls Mr. Nixon had been involved in since the fall of 1971. The public is divided 43-43 per cent over whether it approves or disapproves of this practice.

But on turning over the pertinent files to the Watergate committee, the public is in favor of Mr. Nixon making them available by a ratio of 2 to 1. People were asked:

"President Nixon has refused to hand over to the U.S. Senate Watergate Committee files in the White House which deal with the Watergate bugging and the cover-up. Do you think the President was more right or more wrong to refuse to turn over White House files to the U.S. Senate Watergate Committee?"

Total Public %	
More right	30
More wrong	60
Not sure	10

People were also asked:

"Former White House counsel John Dean testified that President Nixon knew about the Watergate cover-up. Do you believe Dean's charges against President Nixon?"

Total Public %	
Believe Dean	50
Don't believe Dean	30
Not sure	20

To test the credibility of Dean's story against repeated White House statements that the President did not know about the cover-up, the survey asked:

"If President Nixon denied John Dean's charges, who do you think has been more truthful about the Watergate cover-up—President Nixon or John Dean?"

Total Public %	
President Nixon	38
John Dean	37
Not sure	25

President Nixon's standing on his handling of the Watergate investigation has suffered in the absence of direct statements.

"How would you rate President Nixon on his handling of the Watergate political spying case — excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?"

	Good- Excellent	Only Fair	Not Sure
July	17	70	13
June	15	70	15
May	31	57	12

The credibility of the Ervin Committee remains high:

"How would you rate the hearings of the select U.S. Senate Committee on Watergate—excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?"

	July	June
	Percent	
Good, Excellent	62	61
Only fair, Poor	29	20
Not sure	9	19

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