

Poll Reveals Division on The Watergate Hearings

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With the Senate Watergate hearings now in recess, the public's assessment of them shows about half (52 per cent) holding the view that the hearings are, on balance, a "good thing for the country." About four persons in ten (41 per cent) feel they are a "bad thing for the country," while 7 per cent are undecided.

One of the criticisms leveled at the hearings is that they will make it difficult for witnesses to get a fair trial. These critics maintain that it will be impossible to find a jury which has not been influenced by the revelations of the Watergate hearings.

When this criticism was posed in the form of a question in the latest nationwide Gallup survey, it was found that a majority of persons (56 percent) hold the belief that, despite the heavy media coverage given the hearings, witnesses are likely to get a fair trial if later they are brought to court.

CRITICISM

Another criticism leveled at the hearings and the Senate Watergate committee is that the committee is "out to get Nixon."

A majority of the public, however, rejects this criticism, with 57 per cent holding the belief that the committee is more interested in getting at the facts surrounding Watergate than it is in trying to discredit the Nixon administration.

Views on the issues dealt

with in the latest report are highly partisan from a political standpoint, as has been the case with other issues related to Watergate.

For example, Republicans by nearly a 2-to-1 vote think the Senate Watergate hearings are a bad thing for the nation. Furthermore, they lean to the view that the Senate Watergate committee is "out to get" Mr. Nixon. And finally, more than four in ten think Watergate witnesses will be less likely to get a fair trial than they might if they had not appeared at the televised hearings.

INDEPENDENTS

Whereas persons who classify themselves as independents usually hold opinions roughly mid-point between the views of Republicans and Democrats, independents in the current report hold views which closely parallel those of Democrats.

Partisan political attitudes also show up clearly in an analysis of attitudes toward President Nixon's performance in office. Whereas only 38 per cent of all persons in the latest Gallup Poll say they approve, a firm majority of Republicans, 63 per cent, do so.

Following, are the questions asked and the findings, national and by party affiliation:

"In general, do you think the Watergate hearings are a good thing for the country or a bad thing?"

	Good %	Bad %	No Opinion %
National	52	41	7
Republicans	36	58	6
Democrats	59	34	7
Independents	58	37	5

Here are the reasons given:

Those saying good thing for country

Keeps the public informed	34%
Exposes political corruption	10
Helps prevent situation from recurring	9
Other reasons	5

(Total adds to more than the national average of 52 percent since some persons gave more than one reason.)

Those saying bad thing for country

Bad for morale of country	11%
Waste of time—takes away from more important issues	9
Gives us bad image abroad	8
Partisan politicians trying to discredit Nixon Administration	7
Other reasons	10

(Total adds to more than the national average of 41 percent since some persons gave more than one reason.)

QUESTION

This question was asked next in the survey:

"Some of the people who have testified at the Watergate hearings may in the future be brought to trial. Do you think the news coverage given the hearings will make it less likely for these men to get a fair trial, or don't you think it will make any difference?"

	Less Likely %	Not Much Difference %	No Opinion %
National	36	56	8
Republicans	48	44	8
Democrats	27	65	8
Independents	38	56	6

This question was asked next:

"Do you think the Senate Watergate Committee is more interested in trying to discredit the Nixon administration, or more interested in getting at the facts surrounding the Watergate situation?"

	Discredit %	Get Facts %	Both %	No Opinion %
National	28	57	9	6
Republicans	46	39	10	5
Democrats	17	71	8	4
Independents	27	56	11	6

The following question was asked to measure attitudes toward Mr. Nixon's performance in office:

"Do you approve or disapprove of the way Mr. Nixon is handling his job as president?"

Views of Total Sample

Strong approval	19%
Mild approval	19
No opinion	8
Mild disapproval	17
Strong disapproval	37

Views of Republicans

Strong approval	40%
Mild approval	23
No opinion	9
Mild disapproval	15
Strong disapproval	13

Views of Democrats

Strong approval	7%
Mild approval	13
No opinion	8
Mild disapproval	17
Strong disapproval	55

Views of Independents

Strong approval	18%
Mild approval	19
No opinion	9
Mild disapproval	15
Strong disapproval	39

The findings reported are based on interviews with 1502 adults, 18 and older, interviewed in person in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period August 17-19.

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