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California Poll

Opinions About Nixon Unaltered by Hearings

By Mervin D. Field

Between May and the time they recessed in early August, the Senate Watergate hearings have been the nation's number one news story. Proof of the fact that they captured a high amount of public attention, the California Poll finds in a survey of public opinion that about three out of four Californians (74 per cent) regularly followed the hearings while they were in progress.

Despite this unusual media impact, the public does not appear to have materially changed its view of President Nixon from that which it held before the hearings started. There has been little change in the public's feeling about the degree of Mr. Nixon's involvement in the Watergate affair, the extent of his guilt, and the degree to which he should be punished.

These findings come from a comparison of findings from two statewide California Poll surveys in which separate representative samples of more than 1000 members of the public were interviewed. (The first was in May and the second in August.)

Last May, before the Watergate hearings began, a majority of the California public felt that:

- President Nixon knew about the plot to break in and bug the Democratic office before it took place.
- He knew about the cover-up activities after the burglary.
- That he was guilty of failing to do everything he could to bring out the truth.

Despite this, only a minority of the public now feels, as they did in May, that the President should resign from office or be im-

peached. This seeming paradox in public attitudes appears to be due to the fact that the public fears the consequences of resignation or impeachment.

RESIGNING

By a 54 per cent to 37 per cent margin, the public rejects the idea of President Nixon resigning. By virtually the same margin (53 per cent to 37 per cent) the public does not welcome the idea of impeachment proceedings should he not resign. Further, by a 50 per cent to 44 per cent margin, the public thinks that no matter how guilty the President might be in the Watergate affair, it is better for him to serve out his term than have him resign or be impeached.

One factor contributing to this judgment is that the public is not enthusiastic about the prospect of Vice President Spiro Agnew taking over. By a 55 per cent to 32 per cent ratio, the public agrees with the statement: "I would rather have Richard Nixon as President than Spiro Agnew even if Nixon is guilty of some wrong-doing in the Watergate affair." Feeling on this issue is probably even stronger than shown here because this measure was obtained before widespread publicity was given to the fact that Agnew was under investigation for kickbacks and other scandals while he served as Governor of Maryland.

DEAN

More of the California public is inclined to believe that John Dean's testimony was truthful than thought John Mitchell, John Ehrlichman, or H. R. Haldeman were truthful. While all four formerly held high Nixon administration posts, Dean's testimony tended to indict the President, while

the testimony of the other three tended to exonerate the President.

CREDIBILITY OF WATERGATE WITNESSES TESTIMONY

Witness:	Very truthful	Somewhat truthful	Not truthful
DEAN	19%	45	17
MITCHELL	3%	41	31
EHRlichMAN	5%	34	34
HALDEMAN	7%	35	33

The public tends to commend the Senate Watergate committee on the job it has done in conducting hearings. Approval outweighs disapproval by almost three to one (65 per cent to 24 per cent).

MEDIA

The public overwhelmingly thinks Watergate news coverage has been fair. More than six in ten (61 per cent) say the news coverage has been fair and unbiased; 18 per cent think it is unfair and biased, and 12 per cent have mixed views.

Nonetheless, about half of the public (48 per cent) thinks there has been too much news coverage of the Watergate hearings by newspapers, radio and TV. A smaller proportion (43 per cent) thinks the amount of news coverage has been proper.

Following is a May-August comparison of public attitudes on a number of questions related to Watergate.

"Some people feel the Watergate break-in and bugging affair was no different from the usual political spying that goes on in campaigns. Others feel it was a lot more serious than that. In your opinion do you think the Watergate break-in and bugging was worse than what usually goes on, about the same, or not as bad as the usual activities that go on in a Presidential campaign?"

	AUG. '73	MAY '73
Worse	49%	50%
About Same	41	42
Not As Bad	3	4
No Opinion	7	4

"How about the alleged effort of certain people to try to cover up the Watergate matter — would you say

that the attempts to cover up the Watergate matter are extremely serious, very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not at all serious?"

	AUG. '73	MAY '73
Extremely Serious	40%	38%
Very Serious	26	27
Somewhat Serious	20	18
Not Too Serious	7	10
Not At All Serious	2	4
No Opinion	5	3

"Some people feel the alleged campaign violations (failing to report large sums of money, using misleading ads, and paying people to infiltrate the opposing campaign) are no worse than things that typically happen in Presidential campaigns, while other people feel they are a lot more serious than that. In your opinion, do you feel the alleged campaign law violations in the President's re-election committee are worse than usual, about the same, or not as bad as the usual campaign violations that occur in a Presidential campaign?"

	AUG. '73	MAY '73
Worse	50%	40%
About Same	39	52
Not As Bad	2	3
No Opinion	9	5

"Do you believe that President Nixon, himself, knew about the plot to break into and bug the Democratic headquarters office in Watergate before it took place, or not?"

	AUG. '73	MAY '73
He Did Know	49%	49%
He Did Not Know	30	36
No Opinion	21	15

"Do you believe President Nixon, himself, knew about the activities of people under him to cover up the Watergate affair after the people who made the break-in were arrested in June 1972?"

	AUG. '73	MAY '73
He Did Know	71%	67%
He Did Not Know	14	18
No Opinion	15	15

"Do you believe President Nixon, himself, knew about the other alleged illegal activities of the Re-election Committee or not?"

	AUG. '73	MAY '73
He Did Know	54%	49%
He Did Not Know	27	32
No Opinion	19	19

"Do you think President Nixon is doing everything he can to help bring out the whole truth of what happened, or do you think he could do more than he is doing?"

	AUG. '73	MAY '73
Is Doing Everything	14%	34%
Could Do More	76	57
No Opinion	10	9

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