

# Poll Finds Distrust of Institutions

By Jim Luther  
Associated Press

Americans place more confidence in garbage collectors than in the police, press, church, law firms, Congress or the White House, according to a Senate-financed poll.

The poll by Louis Harris found that only two of 22 "institutions" draw support from a majority of those questioned. Fifty-seven per cent of those polled have a great deal of confidence in the medical profession; 52 per cent feel confident about local trash collection.

At the bottom of the list was the Watergate-tainted White House, with the support of 18 per cent of those polled.

Despite pessimism about government, cynicism about leaders and alarm over the state of the nation, Americans remain confident that the system can work, the poll found, but they reject government secrecy and demand honesty and integrity.

The \$25,000 poll was commissioned by the Senate Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations and was released last night by Chairman Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) and Sen. Edward J. Gurney of Florida, the panel's ranking Republican.

The poll was conducted Sept. 13-22 and questioned 1,596 persons in 200 locations. Harris also surveyed 68 state officials in 15 states and 206 local-government officials in 96 localities.

Fifth-three per cent of those polled in the general survey feel "there is something deeply wrong in America." Only 34 per cent of the state officials and 45 per cent of the local leaders agreed.

Forty-five per cent of the public said the quality of life in America has deteriorated over the past 10 years, but only 6 per cent of state officials and 24 per cent of the local leaders agreed.

"Clearly the leaders tend far less to see the country in a state of unusual crisis, at least in part because they feel that governmental services and many other key institutions are doing a more effective job than the public is prepared to believe," Harris said.

Asked to list their chief concern, 72 per cent of the people named inflation; 57 per cent cited inflation in May 1972.

Reflecting the Watergate scandal, integrity in government has replaced taxes as the No. 2 issue.

Other top issues cited were crime, drugs, welfare reform, pollution, taxes, the energy shortage, education and a "social breakdown."

The state and local officials interviewed generally agreed with the public priorities, but listed government integrity as the No. 1 issue, followed by inflation, the energy shortage, crime and pollution.

Harris found that government leaders agree there is a lack of confidence in government, but they tended to blame Watergate.

The state and local government officials implied that the news media are partly to blame for the disenchantment because of media efforts to disclose the Watergate scandal.

Although 41 per cent of the public expressed a great deal of confidence in television news and 31 per cent in the print media, only 17 per cent of the local leaders expressed confidence in TV news and 19 per cent in the press.

The citizens and leaders generally agreed on their relatively positive reactions to local garbage collection and medicine, and on their low estimation of law firms and the executive branch of the federal government.

In the public poll, only two institutions drew more confidence than they did in 1966 — the print media and TV news.

Public confidence in the executive branch dropped from 41 per cent to 19 per cent.

But when the results of a 1972 poll are compared with those of 1973, the executive branch was the only one of 12 areas showing a decline — from 27 per cent last year to 19 this year.

Here is how the public rated its confidence in various institutions in the September poll:

Medical profession 57 per cent; garbage collection 52; colleges 44; local police 44; TV news 41; the military 40; local schools 39; organized religion 36; local United Fund 35; the Supreme Court 33; Senate 30; press 30; major companies 29; House of Representatives 29; local government 28; state government 24; law firms 24; organized labor 20; executive branch of the federal government 19, and the White House 16.