

Harris Survey

Presidency Rated Below Trashmen

By Louis Harris

Confidence in the leadership of most of the nation's key institutions has risen in the past year, the conspicuous exception being the executive branch of the federal government. The number of Americans who say they feel "a great deal of confidence" in the latter has slipped from 27 per cent to 19 per cent.

Although Congress and the Supreme Court have increased somewhat in public esteem during the past 12 months, barely one in three Americans rates these remaining two branches of government at the top of the scale. And all of the institutions tested, except television news and the press, are still well below the confidence levels recorded for them back in 1966.

In a year of controversy and confrontation the mass media increased their confidence rating significantly. Even so, less than a majority is willing to accord them "a great deal of confidence."

The sharpest rise upward in the past year has been recorded by the media, both television and the press. The main reason for this sizeable increase in confidence is the widely held view on the part of 63 per cent of the public that "disclosures about corruption in government would not have happened if it had not been for newspapers and television news."

In a special study conducted for the Senate Committee on Government Operations, the first poll ever authorized by the Senate, the Harris firm measured public confidence in key institutions, as it has done periodically since

1966. A cross-section of 1,594 adult Americans was asked in person between Sept. 13 and 22:

How much confidence do you feel in the people who are running (READ LIST)—a great deal, only some, or hardly any confidence?

| | 1973 | 1972 | 1966 |
|---------------------------|------|------|------|
| Great Deal of Confidence: | | | |
| Medicine | 57% | 48% | 72% |
| Higher education | 44 | 33 | 61 |
| Television news* | 41 | 17 | 25 |
| Military | 40 | 35 | 62 |
| Religion | 36 | 30 | 41 |
| U.S. Supreme Court | 33 | 28 | 51 |
| Press | 30 | 18 | 29 |
| U.S. Senate | 30 | 21 | 42 |
| Major companies | 29 | 27 | 55 |
| U.S. House of Rep. | 29 | 21 | 42 |
| Labor | 20 | 15 | 22 |
| Federal exec. branch | 19 | 27 | 41 |

The survey asked about the leaders of a number of other governmental institutions and services for the first time:

How much confidence do you feel in the people who are running (READ LIST)—a great deal, only some, or hardly any confidence?

| | Great Deal of Confidence: | Total Public |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Local trash collection | 52% | |
| Local police department | 44 | |
| Local public schools | 39 | |
| State highway systems | 34 | |
| Local government | 28 | |
| State government | 24 | |
| Local tax assessment | 19 | |
| White House | 18 | |

Local government emerges for the most part as the least unpopular area of government today, with key services such as trash collection, local police, and local public schools enjoying the best of a limited share of public esteem.

State government fares even more poorly than local government on a relative basis. But, without doubt, the center of crisis in confidence in government in America today focuses upon the federal establishment, and, most of all, involves the White House itself.