

Scandal? They Like Impeachment Even

NEWARK, Ohio—No sooner had the latest Watergate bombshell exploded in Washington than weathervane voters here reached this paradoxical conclusion: of course the White House deliberately erased the 18-minute tape segment, but Richard M. Nixon still should complete his term as President.

This attitude permeated our interviews, conducted with the help of Oliver Quayle's polling organization, in Precinct "D" of Ward 3, a barometer of state and national election results. An overwhelming majority of these voters regard Mr. Nixon as a liar, a tax chiseler and a poor President. Yet, they oppose even the start of impeachment proceedings, much less removal from office.

Underlying this seeming contradiction is pervasive, deepening skepticism that any successor to Mr. Nixon would improve things much. Consequently, nothing short of proven criminal conduct is likely to inflame public opinion in favor of the President's removal.

The barometer precinct, selected for us by election analyst Richard Scammon, consists largely of blue-collar workers who supported Mr. Nixon in 1972. But among the 70 residents inter-

viewed the day after technical experts reported the apparently deliberate erasure of the 18-minute segment of conversation between Mr. Nixon and H. R. Haldeman, four out of five feel that the White House deliberately destroyed evidence.

This comports generally with answers to a questionnaire prepared for us by Quayle researcher Jonathan Lovell. The President gets a job approval from these 70 voters of only 27 per cent. The vast majority believe Mr. Nixon did not pay his fair share of taxes, has lied about Watergate and has suffered seriously in capacity to govern because of Watergate.

Most shocking, only 7 of the 70 voters believe Mr. Nixon first learned of the Watergate burglary when he said he did. But 34 believe he knew about it before it was planned—a charge nobody has ever made.

These harsh views are held by a 39-year-old government worker who voted for Mr. Nixon but now says: "I think he's dishonest. He's just a crook in every way." Another 1972 Nixon voter, a young steel worker, feels Mr. Nixon has done poorly because "there's too

much scandal. He should have been able to clear himself when it first came to light."

Nevertheless, these two voters vigorously oppose retirement or impeachment, reflecting a consensus here. Those interviewed oppose retirement by a ratio of 2 to 1; by 35 to 27 with 8 undecided, they oppose even the start of impeachment proceedings.

A registered nurse, an erstwhile Nixon voter who now opposes the President, opposes his removal because "I'm sure he wouldn't try to pull anything else now that everybody's got their eyes on him."

Moreover, these voters express overriding fear of impeachment. By 4 to 1, they believe impeachment—no matter how justified—would weaken the country. A middle-aged factory worker who voted for Sen. George McGovern in 1972 believes Mr. Nixon should finish his term "from the standpoint of the good of the country in the eyes of the world."

Finally, there is a cynical belief that removal of Mr. Nixon would be an act of futility. "Nobody is likely to do a better job anyway," says one McGov-

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ern voter, so Mr. Nixon might as well finish.

This cynicism also runs deep in reaction to the energy crisis. Nearly half do not think the crisis is serious, over a third confess they are doing little to conserve energy, and a 3 to 1 majority agrees the oil companies cooked up the crisis to increase profits. Mr. Nixon gets some blame, but the oil companies get much more.

The general climate of cynicism is typified by the 29-year-old wife of a factory worker who believes nothing that Mr. Nixon has said about the 18-minute buzz, suspecting instead he is personally responsible. But, she says, "nobody can do a good job these days" and Mr. Nixon, therefore, should finish his term. Politics is such a dirty business, she and her husband have decided, they will not vote in 1976 or in any future elections.

Futility, cynicism and skepticism are the barriers, then, that may protect Mr. Nixon against future revelations which, by nearly 4 to 1, these voters suspect lie undiscovered. If their present mood holds, however, even new disclosures will not make the impeachment case against the President.