

The Gallup Poll

GOP Discounts Watergate as '74 Issue

By George Gallup

PRINCETON, N.J.—Opinion at this time among the Republican county chairmen is that Watergate will not be the No. 1 issue in the congressional elections this November.

In fact, 17 per cent of these grass-roots leaders think Watergate won't hurt Republican candidates at all. Three in 10 (31 per cent) express the view Watergate will hurt GOP office seekers, but only marginally. In addition, a few of these local party pros go so far as to say Watergate may produce a backlash which will help Republican candidates.

"Watergate has been drawn out and beaten to death, so that it will not be an effective weapon in the congressional election," said a young Republican leader in Georgia.

Only about 1 in 9 (11 per cent) of these county-level leaders thinks Watergate will hurt the chances of congressional candidates in their area. "a great deal," while 4 in 10 say it will have at least some adverse effect.

In a nationwide survey which has brought responses from 2,384 GOP county chairmen to date, the most important issue in their opinion will be the high cost of living. The second most important problem will revolve around the energy crisis. Watergate, and the overall issue of honesty in government, is a poor third.

They were asked specifically about the effect of Watergate:

To what extent, if at all, do you think Watergate will hurt the chances of congressional candidates in your area?

These results were obtained:	
A great deal	11%
Somewhat	40
Hardly at all	31
Not at all	17
No opinion	1

Party leaders in the East are the most likely to believe that Watergate will hurt "a great deal," while Southerners are least likely to hold this belief. The comparison is 17 per cent to 3 per cent. In the Midwest the percentage is 11 per cent; in the far West, 15 per cent.

For the past quarter century, the Gallup Poll has surveyed the nation's county chairmen—both Republicans and Democrats. These are the people who have charge of political campaigns in their counties or towns and are, therefore, close to the local scene where national elections are won or lost.

Indicative of the interest in the forthcoming campaign is the fact that, of all county chairmen reached in this mail survey, over 65 per cent completed and returned ballots.

The survey findings reported today, were recorded at a time when GOP congressional strength, as recorded by the Gallup Poll, is at the lowest point in 38 years.

This question was asked: *What do you think will be the most important national issues in the coming congressional elections?*

Here are the top issues named, and the percentage of those who named each issue:

	Per Cent of Total
1. High cost of living/inflation	71%
2. Energy crisis/fuel shortages	65
3. Watergate/honesty in government	32
4. International affairs in maintaining peace relations, Russia, Middle East, national defense, foreign aid	10
5. Unemployment	7
6. Campaign financing, election reform	3
7. Environment/ecology/land use	2

The same pattern of responses emerges when county chairmen are asked what they think will be the most important local issues in their own immediate areas, although farm problems and problems related to the environment come up more frequently.

This question was asked:

As you now appraise the political situation, what is the strongest argument the Republicans can use against the Democrats in the coming congressional elections?

Here are the top arguments given:

	Per Cent of Total
1. Ineffective Democratic Congress	23%
2. Maintaining peace	23
3. International affairs in general/trade	16
4. Democrats are "playing politics" with Watergate	15
5. Congressional overspending	12
6. Rousing inflation	9
7. Liberalism/socialism (Adds up to more than 100 per cent because of multiple responses.)	2