

Watergate Impact Assessed by GOP

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Opinion at this time among the Republican county chairmen of the nation is that the Watergate scandal will not be the No. 1 issue in the congressional elections this November.

In a nationwide Gallup survey that has brought responses from 2384 GOP county chairmen to date, the most important issue in the opinion of these local party leaders 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.

When asked the specific question 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	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 8 per cent. In the Midwest the proportion is 11 per cent; in the Far West, 15 per cent.

This question was also 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:

Most Important National Issues In November Elections? (Spring 1974)

	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 problems: Maintaining peace, Dealing with Russia, Mideast situation, 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 next:

"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 seven arguments given:

Strongest Campaign Arguments (Spring 1974)		Per Cent of Total
1. Ineffective Democratic Congress		24%
2. Maintaining Peace		23
3. International affairs in General/trade		16
4. Democrats are "playing politics" with Watergate		15
4. Congressional overspending causing inflation		12
6. Prosperity		9
7. Liberalism/socialism		5

(Adds up to more than 100% per cent because of multiple responses.)

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