

How Californians Feel About Nixon

By Mervin D. Field

In the aftermath of President Nixon's public disclosure of the edited transcripts of Watergate tape recordings, the mood of the California public has hardened against him.

In a cross-section statewide survey of 738 adults completed between May 1 and May 7, after President Nixon's TV address and after he made public the White House edited versions of the Watergate tape recordings, the California Poll found that:

1. A majority of the public (55 per cent) said they believed he knew and approved of the Watergate affair, or that he took an active part in the planning. Another one-third (32 per cent) felt he at least must have had some idea of what was going on. Only eight per cent believed he knew nothing at all about it.

2. A large majority (69 per cent) feels that the President is obstructing the Watergate investigation. Just 18 per cent feel he is helping all he can.

3. Fewer than one in five Californians (18 per cent)

thinks he is doing a good job as President. The number who think he is doing a poor job is at an unprecedented high of 49 per cent.

4. Testing sentiment toward Mr. Nixon's resignation or impeachment, the California Poll finds that:

- 41 per cent believe President Nixon should resign or that Congress should proceed with the impeachment process.

- 24 per cent feel Mr. Nixon should not resign, but feel that Congress should proceed with the impeachment process.

- 32 per cent feel Mr. Nixon should not resign, nor

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should Congress proceed with the impeachment process.

- Three per cent have no opinion on the resignation/impeachment questions.

In sum, it appears that today about 65 per cent of the public would like either to see a presidential resignation, or to have his tenure in office decided by Congress.

Another significant indicator of the depth of anti-Nixon sentiment among the public shows up in the finding that today a plurality would like to see Vice President Gerald Ford, a man hardly known by the general public a few months ago, replace President Nixon for the remainder of this administration's term of office.

Replies to the question about a presidential resignation elicit a wide range of strong feelings from people. Some firmly support the President, others express anger and outrage, many are fearful of the consequences of the President's resigning, and others give vent to their cynical view of politics.

Among about half of that portion of the public that believes the President should resign, there is a fairly unified feeling of condemnation of the President expressed by statements that the President has done wrong, that he is guilty of a crime, or that he has used the office improperly.

Another significant segment, however, amounting to about one-fourth of the pro-resignation comments, are blaming Mr. Nixon for doing a poor job as President on matters unrelated to Watergate, such as "not controlling inflation," and his failure to pay income tax.

Other pro-resignation reasons are mixed. Some feel

that resignation would be "good for the country," that "it would save taxpayer's money," or that it "would be the decent thing for him to do."

Among the segment who feel President Nixon should not resign, about four in ten are supportive of the President, that is, they feel he has done a good job as chief executive, or they feel he has not been proven guilty and there is no proof to warrant his resignation.

Another four in ten who are against resignation do so out of fear of what might happen to them or the country, or because they are cynical of all politicians.

About one person in ten argues against resignation because they feel President Nixon should be punished.

Among those who advocate Congress proceeding with the impeachment process, about half of them say: "It's the only way to settle the matter," "The constitutional (legal) process must be followed."

Another group of comments, about one-fourth of the pro-impeachment total, seem to be making a judgment that Mr. Nixon is guilty.

About one-third of those

opposing impeachment are supportive of the President: "He's a good President," "What he has done does not warrant impeachment."

A few others (about one-fourth) who advocate dropping impeachment proceedings offer the opinion that "impeachment would hurt the country." Still others feel "they don't have all the evidence yet."

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