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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

*File
Harris*

September 24, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: H. R. HALDEMAN
FROM: CHARLES COLSON *WC*
SUBJECT: Attached Harris Poll

Anticipating your questions on the upcoming Thursday Harris Poll, it is not written the way I would like to see it written. The first paragraph is more negative in tone than I had expected. Probably this is the result of it having been written by one of Harris' writers since Harris has been in the Soviet Union for the past two weeks and I know that this poll was not written before he left. He is getting back later today and I will find out for sure how this happened.

You should know that Harris had agreed earlier that he would not use the 48-50 positive/negative rating because both of us felt that it would not be helpful; Harris, as you know, had expected that the President would go well above 50 percent in his positive rating after the China and economic announcements. I assume that the positive/negative rating was used because Gallup already published the fact that the President did not rise in public approval following China and the economic initiative. The damage was, therefore, done.

This particular poll was planned, however, to make certain points which Harris and I discussed before: (1) to establish the fact that the President does not need a 50 percent positive rating to be reelected and to further establish that there was not necessarily a correlation between the positive/negative and the trial heats. If this point can be established then any subsequent polls would show us below 50 percent will have less political significance; (2) to establish that it is really the nature of the times and public mood that prevents us from having a large majority of public approval, that this is a phenomenon of public attitudes today and isn't related to the President or his performance. On these two scores the poll does the job beautifully and makes the point in the second paragraph that an incumbent can run for re-election and win even when a majority is not with him. Harris also makes the point that our problems are that government is poorly regarded and that fact places an enormous burden on any President.

In one of our last conversations before Lou left for Russia he told me that he wanted to establish the point that a President does not need majority support to be reelected and that Nixon's difficulties are the result of just being President of the United States in this period of time. As I say, unfortunately that came through very strong in the body of the release and in the last paragraph while the lead is more negative than I think Lou would have written it if he were here.