

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Two stories over the past four weeks are distinguished by how much and how little attention Americans paid to them.

Reports of the amount of destruction caused by Hurricane Hugo were very closely followed by 60% of Americans, making it the third most closely followed story out of the 71 tracked by the Times Mirror News Interest Index over the past three years. At the other extreme only 6% reported following closely news about the scandal involving Barney Frank. The Frank story now matches the record for public inattentiveness established by the story of former Japanese Prime Minister Takeshita's troubles in May 1989.

The difference in public response to these two stories is in keeping with a pattern that has become clear from the monthly findings of the Times Mirror News Interest Index. Public attentiveness to coverage of news **events** is high, while public attentiveness to news about most personal scandals is usually low. A second pattern that emerges from our monthly data is also dramatically reinforced this month. Big news in Washington often doesn't travel very far, even when the consequences are far reaching. Not one of the major Washington stories of this period was followed by as many as 25 percent of Americans. Even interest in overseas events overshadowed interest in what was happening in Washington this month.

Only 14% of the Times Mirror sample paid close attention to news about approval in the House of Representatives of a cut in the capital gains tax. A similar proportion (15%) followed closely news about the President's education summit meeting with the nation's governors. The most closely followed Washington story was the attempt in Congress to repeal the catastrophic health insurance plan, with just 19% of the public following these developments closely.

Overall inattentiveness to Washington notwithstanding, the survey does show that significant elements of the population paid more attention to these stories than did others. Thirty six percent of those over 50 years of age followed very closely news about attempts to repeal catastrophic health insurance. Interest fell off very sharply among the younger elements of the population, with only 4 percent of people under 30 years of age paying attention to this story.

Interest in, and awareness of, the capital gains news was also related to one's stake in the story. While only 16% of our sample knew that capital gains were taxed at the same rate as earned income and 29% overall knew that the passage of the bill in the House was considered more a victory for the Republican party than a victory for the Democratic party, news of such things was much more compelling to affluent America. Among people with family incomes of \$50,000 or more, 26% followed this story very closely, 31% knew about the tax laws, and a resounding 55% saw this as a victory for the Republican party. This is nearly double the percentage of Republicans (31%) who saw the bill's passage as victory for the GOP.

In contrast, the education summit and the Barney Frank story generated no greater interest among particular segments of the public than they did with the public overall. Lack of public awareness of Barney Frank is especially apparent. Only 12 percent of the total sample could identify him on an unaided basis, and that figure rose to only 23 percent among those who follow news stories more closely than the average American.

While he may have kept himself off television, Samuel Pierce has not been able to prevent more Americans from knowing who he is. Public identification of the former HUD Secretary increased significantly over the past month. Currently, 10 percent of the public know who he is, compared to six percent just a month ago.

Zsa Zsa Gabor, on the other hand, has made her mark with the public. No less than 80% of the Times Mirror sample was able to explain on an unaided basis why she has been in the news recently.

Television evangelist Jim Bakker also held the attention of many Americans this month. Stories about his conviction were the second most closely followed news of the period. Thirty three percent said they followed the story very closely. This was 11 percentage points more interest than we found last month when we asked about interest in his trial. Again a pattern emerges. As we found with Pete Rose, news about the conclusion of a trial or inquiry generates substantially more attention than news about the conduct of the deliberations or revelations that emanate from them.

Also as was found in September, there was substantial feeling that the Bakker story was being over-reported. As many as 43 percent of the sample told our interviewers that this story received too much coverage. Interest in Bakker news and, paradoxically, feelings that it was being overcovered were both greater among women and among people in the South and Midwest.

While a substantial plurality thought there was too much coverage of the conviction of the former televangelist, only 9% of the sample thought that news organizations were unfair to or biased in their coverage of him. Fully 83 percent of the public named no stories as covered in a biased and unfair way during this period.

Two overseas stories received unusual amounts of public attention this month. News about East German refugees and the failed coup attempt in Panama were followed very closely by 31 and 29 percent, respectively. As is usually the case with international stories, men, older people and the better educated paid more attention to both stories than did other Americans.

Despite its status as the national pastime, stories about the baseball playoffs were of great interest to only 20 percent. Among men strong interest increased to 28% and there was some what more interest in the West than in the rest of the country, probably because two of the four teams playing are from California.

News organizations were given better grades for their coverage of the stories Americans followed most closely this month than in previous months, largely because the public gave the press considerable praise for its coverage of Hugo (39% rated coverage as excellent), the East German refugee story (46% excellent), and news about the playoffs (36% excellent). In contrast coverage of the Panama story received relatively low marks with only 17 percent rating it as excellent and as many as 34% giving press coverage low marks, only fair, or poor.

The media controversy of the month -- accusations that CBS News and Dan Rather ran staged footage from the Afghanistan war -- earned relatively little attention from the public. Only five percent said they heard a lot about it, and another 28 percent said they had heard something about the story. However, almost half the population (47%) said that they thought that television news crews often stage the news or pose shots for better effects.

Viewer Reaction to New Magazine News Programs

One month into the new television season, the recently introduced news programs "Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," "Primetime Live," and "Saturday Night with Connie Chung," have yet to appeal to viewers the way established shows like "60 Minutes," "20/20," or "Nightline" do.

When asked to rate how much they like these shows on a one to four point enjoyment scale, almost two-thirds (64%) of those who could rate gave "Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" negative ratings ("1's or 2's"), and just over half (52%) feel the same way about "Saturday Night with Connie Chung." "Primetime Live" was the only program for which positive ratings ("3's and 4's") exceeded negative enjoyment ratings, but it was close (52% to 48%). In fairness to the new programs, only minorities of the public could rate these new shows. "Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" was rated by only 23% of the sample, "Primetime Live" by only 44%, and Connie Chung's show by 40%. As more viewers come to know these programs, evaluations might well improve.

Established news programs, on the other hand, are rated even higher than the four top Nielsen-rated entertainment shows. More than eight in ten (82%) of those who could rate, gave the three network evening news programs positive ratings, and as many (80%) enjoy watching "60 Minutes." Nearly three-quarters (72%) enjoy watching "48 Hours," and more than six in ten (64%) rate "Nightline" as enjoyable.

Well established entertainment shows receive much lower ratings than do well established news programs. "The Cosby Show" is enjoyable to 66% of those who could rate, while about two in five rate "The Golden Girls" similarly. The long-running situation comedy, "Cheers" (59%), and last season's big success "Roseanne," (54%) are considered enjoyable by just over half the respondents.

Sub-group differences on this question are very strong for sex and age -- women are more likely than men to rate most shows, news or entertainment as very enjoyable ('4') than are men. Among those over 50 years, news shows get higher enjoyment ratings than do most entertainment shows while among those under 30 years of age the pattern is just the reverse with entertainment shows ratings' exceeding news shows ratings'.

**VIEWER REACTION TO THE NEW MAGAZINE NEWS PROGRAMS
(BASED ON THOSE WHO COULD RATE)**

	<u>Don't</u> <u>Enjoy</u> 1	2	3	<u>Enjoy</u> 4	Percent who rated
a. Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow	38	26	22	14 = 100	23%
b. The Cosby Show	15	19	24	42 = 100	84%
c. Primetime Live	21	27	30	22 = 100	44%
d. 60 Minutes	6	14	27	53 = 100	91%
e. Roseanne	25	21	21	33 = 100	72%
f. 20/20	6	15	31	48 = 100	85%
g. The three network evening news programs	4	14	36	46 = 100	87%
h. Cheers	20	21	24	35 = 100	80%
i. Nightline	16	20	30	34 = 100	61%
j. Saturday Night with Connie Chung	27	25	25	23 = 100	40%
k. The Golden Girls	20	19	23	38 = 100	81%
l. 48 Hours	7	21	30	42 = 100	62%

Question: As I read a list of television programs, tell me how much you enjoy it -- if you haven't heard of the program or haven't seen it enough to know, tell me that. First, if 1 is a program you don't enjoy at all, and 4 is a program that you enjoy very much, where on this scale would you rate... **(READ AND ROTATE LIST)**

% FOLLOWING EACH NEWS STORY "VERY CLOSELY"

	<u>Post-Season Baseball Playoffs</u>	<u>Cut in Capital Gains Tax</u>	<u>Hurricane Hugo</u>	<u>Educa- tion Summit</u>	<u>Repeal Cata- strophic Health Plan</u>	<u>Panama- nian Coup Attempt</u>	<u>East German Refugees</u>	<u>Barney Frank</u>	<u>Jim Bakker's Guilty Verdict</u>
Total	20	13	60	15	20	29	30	6	33
<u>Sex</u>									
Male	28	18	57	14	17	36	33	7	31
Female	13	9	63	16	22	23	28	4	35
<u>Race</u>									
White	20	14	60	14	20	29	31	5	33
Non- white	24	12	60	20	16	28	27	8	34
<u>Age</u>									
Under 30	22	4	53	12	4	19	19	3	26
30-49	17	12	57	15	14	32	32	5	30
50+	23	22	69	17	36	34	38	9	42
<u>Education</u>									
College Grad.	22	23	56	22	21	34	37	6	26
Other College	18	13	61	19	16	32	34	6	32
High School Grad.	23	10	60	12	17	25	28	6	34
Less than H.S. Grad	16	10	66	8	26	31	26	6	42
<u>Region</u>									
East	20	16	62	14	21	30	35	9	32
Midwest	19	10	57	12	17	24	29	6	34
South	18	11	66	19	21	32	30	4	37
West	26	18	52	14	18	30	28	3	29
<u>Party Id</u>									
Repub- lican	24	16	62	17	21	32	31	6	32
Democrat	20	11	63	12	20	26	32	5	38
Indepen- dent	16	13	55	16	17	30	28	7	30
<u>Income</u>									
\$50k+	18	26	59	17	15	38	40	8	29
\$30k- 49.9k	22	15	60	16	19	29	30	5	28
\$20k- 29.9k	24	12	65	15	22	28	31	5	31
Under \$20k	18	8	58	13	18	28	27	6	39

Question: Now I will read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past month. As I read each item, tell me if you happened to follow this news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely.

PRESS COVERAGE RATINGS OF NEWS STORIES

Press Coverage	Story Followed Most Closely:					
	Total	Post-Season Baseball Playoffs	Hurricane Hugo	Panamani an Coup Attempt	East German Refugees	Jim Bakker's Guilty Verdict
Excellent	32%	36%	39%	17%	46%	27%
Good	45	50	42	46	42	49
Only Fair	18	11	16	24	9	21
Poor	3	2	2	10	2	1
Don't Know	<u>2</u> 100%	<u>1</u> 100%	<u>1</u> 100%	<u>3</u> 100%	<u>1</u> 100%	<u>2</u> 100%
Sample Size	1131	99	492	125	91	196

PRESS PERFORMANCE

	<u>May 1989</u>	<u>July 1989</u>	<u>August 1989</u>	<u>September 1989</u>	<u>October 1989</u>
Excellent	19%	26%	25%	19%	32%
Good	43	42	45	50	45
Only Fair	24	21	21	22	18
Poor	10	10	8	7	3
Don't Know	<u>4</u> 100%	<u>1</u> 100%	<u>1</u> 100%	<u>2</u> 100%	<u>2</u> 100%

Question: In general, how would you rate the job the press has done in covering (STORY FOLLOWED MOST CLOSELY IN Q.4); excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey results are based on telephone interviews with 1234 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period of October 5-8, 1989. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

TIMES MIRROR DATABASE
PUBLIC ATTENTIVENESS TO MAJOR NEWS STORIES
(1986 - 1989)

	Percent <u>Very Closely</u>
The explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger (July 86)	80
The little girl in Texas who was rescued after falling into a well (Oct 87)	69
THE DESTRUCTION CAUSED BY HURRICANE HUGO (OCT 89)	60
The U.S. air strikes against Libya (July 86)	58
The crash of a United Airlines DC-10 in Sioux City, Iowa (Aug 89)	53
The Alaska Oil Spill (May 89)	52
Supreme Court decision of flag burning (July 89)	51
The flight of the space shuttle (Oct 88)	50
The murder of Marine Lt. Col. Higgins in Lebanon, and and negotiations to free the other hostages in the mideast (Aug 89)	49
The drought and its effects on American farmers (Aug 88)	49
The TWA hostage crisis that took place last summer in Beirut, Lebanon (July 86)	48
The political upheaval in China (July 89)	47
The Supreme Court decision on abortion (July 89)	47
The nuclear accident at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union (July 86)	46
News about the presidential campaign in 1988 (Oct 88)	43
The hot weather this summer and the greenhouse effect (Aug 88)	42
The downing of an Iranian passenger plane by a U.S. Navy ship (Aug 88)	42
The Bush administration's plan to deal with this country's drug problem (Sept 89)	40
The stock market crash (Oct 87)	40
News about the presidential campaign in 1988 (Aug 88)	39
The U.S. Navy escort of Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Persian Gulf (Sept 87)	38
The U.S. Navy escort of Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Persian Gulf (Oct 87)	37
The stories about Dan Quayle, the Republican Vice-Presidential candidate (Aug 88)	37
The sentencing of Oliver North (July 89)	37
The hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise ship in the Mediterranean (July 86)	35
The explosion and fire on the U.S. Battleship Iowa (May 89)	35
The war between the Colombian government and the major drug traffickers (Sept 89)	34
The Congressional hearings about the Iran- Contra affair (Sept 87)	33
THE GUILTY VERDICT IN THE TRIAL OF TELEVANGELIST JIM BAKKER (OCT 89)	33
The world series (Oct 88)	31

	<u>Percent Very Closely</u>
THE FLIGHT OF EAST GERMAN REFUGEES TO WEST GERMANY (OCT 89)	31
The Oliver North trial (May 89)	31
The Banishment of Pete Rose from baseball for life (Sept 89)	30
The Democratic convention (Aug 88)	30
The attack and sexual assault on a female jogger in Central Park, New York, by a group of youths (May 89)	29
THE FAILED COUP ATTEMPT AGAINST PANAMANIAN STRONGMAN NORIEGA (OCT 89)	29
The problems at nuclear reactor plants (Oct 88)	28
The end of Gary Hart's candidacy and the Donna Rice allegations (Sept 87)	28
The Republican convention (Aug 88)	27
Passage in Congress of a bill to bail out ailing savings and loan institutions (Aug 89)	26
The Supreme Court's hearing of arguments in a Missouri abortion case (May 89)	25
The discoveries made by the spacecraft Voyager 2 (Sept 89)	22
The trial of televangelist Jim Bakker (Sept 89)	22
The April hijacking of a Kuwaiti airplane by Shiite Moslems (May 88)	22
The cease fire in the war between Iran and Iraq (Aug 88)	22
News about the presidential campaign in 1988 (May 88)	22
The charges that Pete Rose has bet on baseball games (July 89)	22
The scandal involving HUD (Aug 89)	21
The attempts by the U.S. government to depose General Noriega in Panama (May 88)	20
THE POST-SEASON BASEBALL PLAYOFFS (OCT 89)	20
THE ATTEMPTS IN CONGRESS TO REPEAL THE NEW CATASTROPHIC HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN (OCT 89)	19
The incidents of racial violence in New York City and Virginia Beach (Sept 89)	19
Discussions of a U.S. Soviet arms agreement (Sept 87)	19
The stock market crash (May 88)	18
The conflict in the Middle East between Palestinians and the Israelis in the occupied territories (May 88)	18
The nomination of Robert Bork to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court (Sept 87)	17
THE EDUCATION SUMMIT HELD BY BUSH AND THE NATION'S GOVERNORS (OCT 89)	15
The ethics committee's investigation of Speaker of the House Jim Wright (May 89)	15
News about the Democratic candidates for the presidential nomination (Oct 87)	15
Conflict of interest allegations about Attorney General Ed Meese (May 88)	15
The scandal involving HUD (July 89)	15
HOUSE APPROVAL OF A CUT IN THE CAPITAL GAINS TAX (OCT 89)	14
The spy scandal involving a U.S. Diplomat in Vienna (Aug 89)	14
Coverage of the Democratic and Republican candidates for the Presidential nomination (Sept 87)	14

	<u>Percent Very Closely</u>
The pending divorce between Mike Tyson and Robin Givens	14
News about the Republican candidates for the Presidential nomination (Oct 88)	13
Solidarity's role in governing Poland (July 89)	12
The trial of Hotel owner Leona Helmsley for tax evasion (Sept 89)	9
Stories about the 20th anniversary of the Woodstock Music Festival (Aug 89)	9
The scandal involving the Japanese Prime Minister and other high ranking officials (May 89)	6
THE SCANDAL INVOLVING CONGRESSMAN BARNEY FRANK AND A MALE PROSTITUTE (OCT 89)	6