

FOR RELEASE: THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 1991, A.M.

## **The People, The Press and The War In The Gulf**

### **A Special Times Mirror News Interest Index**

*FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:*

Donald S. Kellermann, Director  
Andrew Kohut, Director of Surveys  
Carol Bowman, Research Director  
Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press  
202/293-3126

## THE PEOPLE, THE PRESS, AND THE WAR IN THE GULF

The American public gives high marks to media coverage of the war in the Gulf at the same time as it calls for increased military control of how the news is covered. A fifty-seven percent majority believes that the military should increase its control over reporting of the war while 34% believe that such editorial decisions should be left to the media itself.

Nearly eight in ten Americans (78%) say they believe the military is not hiding bad news from them and is telling as much as it can under the circumstances and a similar percentage (72%) believe that news organizations are attempting to deliver to the public an objective picture of the conflict. The press gets a positive rating for its coverage of the Gulf War from eight in ten Americans, with 36% rating its performance as excellent and 42% good. Sixty-one percent feel that news coverage of the war has been for the most part accurate with only 18% saying that too many mistakes have been made.

### *Somber Views*

Americans of all ages, from all parts of the country and all walks of life offer somber views of the war and its effects as the conflict entered its second full week. But the conflict in the Gulf appears to be taking a far heavier psychological toll on women than on men. Overall, the percentage of Americans who described themselves as not happy with things these days rose from 9% a year ago to 33% currently. Among women, 41% said they were not happy compared to 23% among men. America's unhappy mood reflects in part the effects of massive television coverage of the first war in history to be brought into peoples' living rooms on a real time basis.

### *Watching the War*

As higher news ratings and newspaper sales indicate, the American public is staying extremely close to news of the Gulf War. Eighty-one percent of the public says it is keeping TV or radio tuned to the news and 51% say they are reading newspapers more closely. Sixty-seven percent reported following the war *very closely*, 28% fairly closely and 5% not closely.

For many, news about the Gulf is akin to an addiction - 50% agreed with the statement that they can't stop watching news about the war. Among this half of the public, reports of war-related stress are twice as high as among those who don't feel a compulsion to watch Gulf war news.

- \* 21% of war news addicts say that because of the war they have had trouble concentrating on their jobs or normal activities (vs. 9% among others)
- \* 18% cited war-related insomnia (vs. 8% among others)
- \* 18% reported being fatigued by the way they feel about the war (vs. 7% among others).

Younger people, who generally have followed the situation in the Gulf less closely than older people, are more apt to say they can't stop watching - 58% among those under 30 years of age versus 42% among those over 50 years of age.

While half of the public feels compelled to watch war news, the most prevalent reactions to viewing the war on TV are feelings of sadness (74%), fear (67%), and sometimes confusion as to what's going on (65%).

Significantly fewer but still sizable numbers report that the war doesn't seem real (33%) and that the coverage tires them out (34%).

Women are much more likely than men to say they feel fear (80% vs. 52%), sadness (87% vs. 59%) and confusion (71% vs. 58%) while watching the war on TV.

### *War Mood of Men and Women Vastly Different*

Reactions to war coverage are just one indication of how differently men and women are experiencing the war in the Gulf.

Overall, half of the public reported they were feeling depressed by the war (50%). However, the gender gap on this measure is 31 percentage points with 33% of men reporting depression, compared to 64% of women. Manifestations of war-related stress as measured in the survey are three to five times as great among women as among men.

- \* Twenty-one percent of women report trouble sleeping because of the war, compared to 4% among men.

- \* Twenty-one percent of women report difficulty in concentrating, compared to 8% among men,

- \* Nineteen percent of women report being tired or fatigued because of their feelings about the war, compared to 5% among men.

Women also express more fear-related behavior. Eighteen percent of women say they are considering canceling an airplane trip, and 14% are considering canceling a trip to a major city. Among men, these figures were 10% and 8% respectively.

### *The "War in the Gulf" Channel*

For most Americans, Cable News Network's performance sets the pace for war coverage. CNN is seen as the network doing the best job of covering the Gulf by a margin that is twice as great as it achieved for Gulf coverage in a Times Mirror survey conducted three weeks ago.

Over six in ten Americans (61%) think that CNN is doing the best job of covering the war, compared to 12% for ABC, 7% for CBS and 7% for NBC. In Times Mirror's January 3-6 survey, CNN was chosen as the network doing the best job by 30%.

Despite public admiration for CNN, ABC's anchor Peter Jennings is most often selected as the journalist doing a particularly good job in reporting the war; 16% cited Jennings, 9% Dan Rather, 8% Tom Brokaw, 6% Bernard Shaw and 5% Peter Arnett.

Broadcasts of Iraqi-censored news is the only American media practice that comes under fire from the public. A 45% plurality of the public disapproves of news organizations broadcasting news from Iraq that has been censored by the Iraqi government, while 43% approve. Majority approval for this reporting is evident only among college graduates whose opinions divide 53% approve, 39% disapprove. Among people who choose CNN as the network doing the best job of covering the war, opinions divide 45% approve, 43% disapprove.

If Vietnam was America's first TV war, the war in the Gulf may be TV's first military exclusive. By a margin of 75% to 7%, the public thinks television reporters are digging harder to get the news than newspaper reporters. And among people who say they have read accounts in newspapers of events in the Gulf that they have previously seen on TV, 73% say newspaper accounts pretty much cover the same ground, while 23% say they have been given a better understanding of what they have seen on TV.

Overall, 79% approve of the way George Bush is doing his job and 73% feel that the U.S. made the right decision in using force against Iraq. Among women, Bush's approval rating is 76% and 72% of women think the U.S. made the right choice in pursuing the military action.

The climate of opinion about the conflict and news coverage has sharply changed since January 15, 1991 as illustrated in the way people now feel about dissenting voices. In September 1990 and January 1991, Times Mirror surveys found pluralities of the public saying they wished to hear more about the views of Americans who opposed sending forces to the Gulf. In the current survey, a 47% plurality say they have heard *too much* about the views of Americans who oppose the war in the Gulf.

On a much smaller scale, the number of Americans who say they have attended a peace rally (3%) is one third the number who say they have attended a rally in support of the U.S. war effort (9%).

### *Public Confident of Victory, Worried about Casualties*

Seventy-seven percent of the public say they are not worried much that the U.S. will lose the war with Iraq, while only 8% say they worry a great deal and 12% say they worry a fair amount about this. In contrast, 57% of Americans worry a great deal that U.S. forces will sustain a lot of casualties and 30% worry a fair amount about this. One in three said they worry a great deal about a terrorist strike in the U.S. and 38% worry a fair amount about this. A comparable level of public concern was expressed over the possibility that many Iraqi civilians will be killed (33% a great deal, 35% a fair amount).

People 50 years of age and older expressed more fears about both American and Iraqi casualties than younger people - 61% of those 50 & older worry a great deal about U.S. military casualties and 38% a great deal about Iraqi civilian casualties. Among people under 30 years of age, these figures were 48% and 30% respectively.

### *Many Report Fearful Children*

Two in three Americans with children aged 5-12 report that their children are following the war in the Gulf closely. Only one in three say they are restricting how much war coverage their children watch and 43% reported that children in the household have expressed fears about the war. As was the case with their own fears, female respondents were more likely to report fearful children than were men (49% vs. 36%).

Women also reported more often than men that they were praying more frequently because of the Gulf war (77% vs. 50%).

## **SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

The survey results are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among 924 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period January 25-27, 1991. 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 4 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.

# **THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

TIMES MIRROR  
 THE PEOPLE, THE PRESS, AND THE GULF WAR  
 January 25-27, 1991  
 n=924

Q. 1 Do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling his job as President?

		<u>JANUARY 1991 NEWS INTEREST INDEX</u>
79	Approve	59
14	Disapprove	24
$\frac{7}{100}$	Don't know	$\frac{17}{100}$

Q. 2 Taken all together, how would you say things are these days--would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?

		<u>GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY-1990 NORC</u>
12	Very happy	33
52	Pretty happy	58
33	Not too happy	9
$\frac{3}{100}$	Can't say	$\frac{1}{100}$

Q. 3 Do you think the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force against Iraq?

77	Right decision
15	Wrong decision
$\frac{8}{100}$	Don't know

Q. 4 How closely have you been following news about the War in the Gulf very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?<sup>1</sup>

		<u>JANUARY 1991 NEWS INTEREST INDEX</u>
67	Very closely	59
28	Fairly closely	31
4	Not too closely	7
1	Not at all closely	2
<u>0</u> 100	Don't know	<u>1</u> 100

Q. 5 In general, how would you rate the job the press has done in covering the War in the Gulf; excellent, good, only fair, or poor?<sup>2</sup>

		<u>FOLLOWING VERY CLOSELY<sup>3</sup></u>	<u>JANUARY 1991 NEWS INTEREST INDEX</u>
36	Excellent	40	31
42	Good	39	47
15	Only Fair	14	15
5	Poor	4	5
<u>2</u> 100	Don't know	<u>2</u> 100	<u>2</u> 100

---

<sup>1</sup> In the January News Interest Index, respondents were asked how closely they were following "Iraq's occupation of Kuwait and the presence of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf".

<sup>2</sup> In the January News Interest Index, this question was asked of those who reported that "Iraq's occupation of Kuwait and the presence of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf" was the story they had followed most closely in the past month.

<sup>3</sup> Respondents who report that they are following news about the war in the Gulf "Very Closely".



Q. 6 In your opinion, which TV network is doing the best job of covering the War in the Gulf - ABC, CBS, NBC or CNN?<sup>4</sup>

		JANUARY 1991 <u>NEWS INTEREST INDEX</u>
12	ABC	18
7	CBS	17
7	NBC	13
61	CNN	30
$\frac{13}{100}$	Don't know	$\frac{22}{100}$

Q. 7 Have you heard too much, too little, or the right amount about the views of Americans who oppose the War in the Gulf?<sup>5</sup>

		JANUARY 1991 <u>NEWS INTEREST INDEX</u>
47	Too much	18
13	Too little	42
33	Right amount	31
$\frac{7}{100}$	Don't know	$\frac{9}{100}$

Q. 8 Have you yourself felt depressed by the Gulf War?

50	Yes
49	No
$\frac{1}{100}$	Don't know

---

<sup>4</sup> In the January News Interest Index, respondents were asked which network was doing the best job of covering the "crisis in the Gulf".

<sup>5</sup> In the January News Interest Index, respondents were asked about the "views of Americans who oppose sending U.S. forces to the Gulf".

**IF ANSWERED '1' YES IN Q. 8 ASK Q. 8A, B & C:**

Q. 8a Have you had any difficulty concentrating on your job or your normal activities because of the way you feel about the war?

15 Yes

85 No/Don't know  
100

Q. 8b Have you had any trouble sleeping because of the way you feel about the war?

13 Yes

87 No/Don't know  
100

Q. 8c Have you been tired or fatigued because of the way you feel about the war?

12 Yes

88 No/Don't know  
100

**ASK ALL:**

Q. 9 I'd like to ask you a few questions about how you feel when you are watching coverage of the war on TV. For each statement that I read tell me if you strongly agree, agree or disagree.  
(INTERVIEWER: REPEAT STRONGLY AGREE?, AGREE? OR DISAGREE? AFTER EACH PHRASE)

	<u>Total</u> <u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly</u> <u>Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Dis-</u> <u>agree</u>	<u>DK</u>
a. I can't stop watching news about the war	50	11	39	48	2
b. I feel sad when watching	74	22	52	25	1
c. It's frightening to watch	67	17	50	32	1
d. It tires me out to watch	34	6	28	64	2
e. The war doesn't seem real	33	7	26	66	1
f. It's sometimes hard to understand what's happening	65	14	51	34	1

Q. 10 To the best of your knowledge are news reports from the Gulf being censored by the American military?

76 Yes, censored

14 No

$\frac{10}{100}$  Don't know

**IF ANSWERED '1' YES, CENSORED IN Q. 10 ASK Q. 10A & B:**

Q. 10a Do you think such restrictions on news reports are a good idea or bad idea?

79 Good idea

16 Bad idea

$\frac{5}{100}$  Don't know

Q. 10b Are both newspapers and tv reports from the Gulf being censored or is it only tv or only newspapers that are being censored?

76 Both

13 Only TV

1 Only newspapers

$\frac{10}{100}$  Don't know

**ASK ALL:**

Q. 10c Do you approve or disapprove of American news organizations broadcasting news from Iraq that has been censored by the Iraqi government?

43 Approve

45 Disapprove

$\frac{12}{100}$  Don't know

Q. 11 Has the news coverage of the War been accurate for the most part or have too many mistakes been made?

61 Accurate

18 Too many mistakes made

21 Don't know  
100

Q. 11a Can you name any individual news people who are doing a particularly good job of reporting the war?

16 Peter Jennings

9 Dan Rather

8 Tom Brokaw

6 Bernard Shaw

5 Peter Arnett

14 Other

60 Can't name any

Q. 11b Just your impression, who's been digging harder to get the news in the Gulf TV reporters or newspaper reporters?

75 TV

7 Newspaper

5 Same **(VOLUNTEERED)**

13 Don't know  
100

Q. 12 Do you think the U.S. military is hiding bad news from the public or do you think it is telling the public as much as it can under the circumstances?

19 Holding back bad news

78 Telling as much as it can

3 No opinion  
100

Q. 13 Just your impression are news organizations trying as hard as they can to get as much information about the way the war is going or are they pretty much accepting the information they get from official military sources?

72 Trying as hard as they can

23 Accepting official sources

$\frac{5}{100}$  Don't know

Q. 14 Have you read accounts in newspapers of events in the Gulf war that you have seen previously on TV?

69 Yes

27 No

$\frac{4}{100}$  Don't know

**IF ANSWERED '1' YES TO Q. 14 ASK Q. 14A:**

Q. 14a Do you find that newspaper accounts give you a better understanding of what you have seen on tv or do they pretty much cover the same ground?

23 Better understanding

73 Same ground

$\frac{4}{100}$  Don't know

**ASK ALL:**

Q. 15 How much confidence do you have that the military is giving the public an accurate picture of how the war is going? **(READ CHOICES 1-4)**

29 A great deal of confidence

58 A fair amount of confidence

9 Not too much confidence

2 No confidence at all

$\frac{2}{100}$  Don't know

Q. 16 How much confidence do you have that the press is giving the public an accurate picture of how the war is going? (READ CHOICES 1-4)

26 A great deal of confidence

59 A fair amount of confidence

11 Not too much confidence

2 No confidence at all

$\frac{2}{100}$  Don't know

Q. 17 How worried are you that..... - a great deal, fair amount or not much? (REPEAT CATEGORIES AFTER EACH PHRASE)

	<u>Great Deal</u>	<u>Fair Amount</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>DK</u>
a. The U.S. might lose the war	8	12	77	3
b. U.S. forces might sustain a lot of casualties	57	30	12	1
c. Terrorists might strike within the U.S.	33	38	28	1
d. Many Iraqi civilians might be killed	33	35	28	4
e. U.S. troops will be involved in the Mideast for years to come	38	30	29	3

Q. 18 How many children between the ages of 5 and 12, if any, are living in your household?

73 None - **SKIP TO Q. 19**

14 One - **ASK Q. 18A, B&C**

$\frac{13}{100}$  More than one - **ASK Q. 18A, B&C ABOUT OLDEST CHILD**

Q. 18a Has your child been following news about the war closely?

69 Yes

29 No

$\frac{2}{100}$  Don't know

Q. 18b Have you been trying to restrict how much tv war coverage he/she watches?

30 Yes

69 No

$\frac{1}{100}$  Don't know

Q. 18c Has your child expressed any fears about the war?

43 Yes

57 No

$\frac{*}{100}$  Don't know

**ASK ALL:**

Q. 19 As a result of the war in the Gulf are you? (INTERVIEWER: READ THIS PREFACE BEFORE EACH PHRASE)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>DK</u>
a. Reading newspapers more closely	51	48	1
b. Keeping TV or radio tuned to the news	81	18	1
c. Considering canceling an airplane trip	14	85	1
d. Considering canceling a trip to a major city	11	89	0
e. Praying more	65	35	0

**HAVE YOU:**

f. Attended a peace rally	3	97	0
g. Attended a rally showing support for the U.S. war effort	9	90	1

Q. 20 In trying to keep the public informed, are news organizations giving Saddam Hussein too much opportunity to promote his cause or are news organizations being careful not to give Saddam Hussein too much opportunity to promote his cause?<sup>6</sup>

THE PEOPLE, THE  
PRESS  
AND TERRORISM  
OCTOBER, 1986

44 Too much opportunity

56

44 Being careful

34

$\frac{12}{100}$  No opinion

$\frac{10}{100}$

Q. 21 Do you think the military should exert more control over how news organizations report about the war or do you think that most decisions about how to report about the war should be left to news organizations themselves?<sup>7</sup>

THE PEOPLE, THE  
PRESS  
AND TERRORISM  
OCTOBER, 1986

57 Give military more control

29

34 News organizations should decide

64

$\frac{9}{100}$  Don't know

$\frac{7}{100}$

**ON ANOTHER SUBJECT...**

Q. 22 How closely have you been following news about the unrest and violence in the Baltic Republics of the Soviet Union - very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?

12 Very closely

40 Fairly closely

35 Not too closely

13 Not at all closely

$\frac{0}{100}$  Don't know

---

<sup>6</sup> In the 1986 survey respondents were asked if news organizations give "terrorists" too much opportunity to promote their cause.

<sup>7</sup> In the 1986 survey, respondents were asked if the government should have more control over how news organizations report on "terrorist incidents".