

FOR RELEASE: SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1991, A.M.

Two In Three Want Candidates To Discuss Economic Issues

**"DON'T KNOW" LEADS KERREY IN EARLY DEMOCRATIC NOMINATION SWEEPS**

"Don't Know" leads in the early stages of the race for the Democratic presidential nomination with Senator Bob Kerrey of Nebraska coming up fast. Kerrey, who announced his candidacy less than two weeks ago, holds a marginally significant lead (21%) among Democrats and Independents who lean to the Democratic Party over Governors Douglas Wilder of Virginia (15%), Bill Clinton of Arkansas (14%) and Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa (13%). Former Senator Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts trailed the pack at 9 percent.

A survey by the *Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press* finds a public far more interested in the state of the economy than in any other potential issue in the 1992 presidential campaign. Voters say they want to hear more about where presidential candidates stand on issues than they have in past campaigns, and 66% of them say the economy is the issue they want discussed. Eighty percent of those polled by the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press respond that in 1992 they would like to see *more* media coverage of presidential candidates discussing their positions on issues, and the "overall condition of the economy" was the individual topic most frequently cited (43%), followed by unemployment (15%), and the budget deficit (8%). Education (11%), abortion (10%), health care (8%) and homelessness (8%) were other frequently cited domestic issues. Overall, 83% of Times Mirror's respondents cited domestic issues, compared to only 15% who named international issues.

The focus on the economy was common to all major voting groups. Republicans (69%) and Democrats (67%), men (69%) and women (62%), blacks (63%) and whites (66%), Bush approvers (65%), and Bush disapprovers (71%) were equally likely to cite some aspect of the economy as the campaign subject of most interest to them.

Republicans and Republican-oriented groups were more apt to express an interest in the general condition of the economy, while Democrats were more likely to mention unemployment and joblessness. Most vividly, the latter issue was mentioned by 29% of the blacks who participated in the survey, compared to only 13% of whites.

There was more demographic diversity in response to some of the less frequently mentioned subjects. Notably young people (under 30's) were twice as likely as older people to say they want to hear presidential candidates discuss their positions on *abortion (19%)*. College graduates were

more interested in the views of candidates on *educational issues (18%)*. People who say they have been following news about the Democratic candidates very closely were more interested than other people in *unemployment (26%)* and the issue of *homelessness (13%)*.

### ***Bush Beats the "Democrat of Choice"***

George Bush, despite sagging approval ratings, down from 77 percent in May to 61% last weekend, continues to be an easy winner in a test election.

In the current survey, respondents were first asked to name the candidate they most preferred for the Democratic nomination. They were then asked to pick between Bush and the Democrat of their choice if the election were to be held today. 55% said they would like to see Bush win, while 38% said they would like to see the Democrat of choice defeat Bush. (When the sample was restricted to registered voters Bush won the test election by a similar 54% to 39% margin).

Despite the president's wide lead at this early stage of the campaign, follow up questions reveal that most Americans have yet to come to a firm decision as to whether they will vote for or against Bush in 1992. Twenty-eight percent of the sample said they had pretty much made up their minds to vote for Bush against a Democratic challenger, while 22% have firmly decided to vote for a Democrat.

While it is not unusual for most people to say they have not fully made up their minds this far out from an election campaign, the findings do illustrate just how much room each side has in which to develop a winning constituency. It also illustrates each side's strengths and vulnerability.

Bush's support appears firmer among younger voters than among older ones. Men who now say they support the President show more conviction than women who say they would like to see Bush win over a Democratic challenger next November. Bush's support also tends to be more committed in the South than in other parts of the country.

Among the Democrats, white supporters show less commitment than African Americans. Older voters who say they now would support a Democratic candidate against President Bush are firmer than young people. Democratic supporters in the West are more apt to say they have made up their minds than Democratic supporters in other parts of the country.

As in all elections, political independents constitute the largest bloc of loosely committed voters. In the current survey, 23% of this group said they had made up their minds to vote for Bush and 15% reported they had made up their minds to vote against him. The single largest bloc of independents (36%) are Bush supporters who say they might change their minds.

### ***Presidential Approval Dips***

The President's overall job performance will be an overarching theme of the campaign. With 61% approving and 28% disapproving, President Bush's ratings in the current poll are about where they were just prior to the start of the Gulf War.

Approval of Bush's performance has declined most sharply among groups that typically gravitate to the Democratic party, which had been showing unusually high levels of support for the President. Since May Bush's ratings have fallen most among older people, the less well-educated, and among blacks. The black falloff is clearly the most extreme. Among African Americans the President's ratings tumbled 30 percentage points! (58% approved in May vs. 28% currently).

On balance more Democrats now disapprove of Bush (49%) than approve (40%) while the President continues to get good ratings from loyalist Republicans (85% approve). Independents fall between these extremes with a 63% approval rating.

### ***Aura of Invincibility***

The public's widespread anticipation of a Bush victory in 1992 is far ahead of the level of enthusiasm expressed for the President's candidacy. Seventy-six percent of those polled said they expected a Bush victory in 1992. Only 12% forecast a Democratic win. The survey found that even among those who are firmly committed to voting for a Democrat, 59% expected a Bush re-election.

Pessimism about a Democratic victory in '92 is even greater than it was in the waning days of the '88 campaign, when a Gallup Poll found 68% expecting a Bush victory and just 14% thinking Dukakis would be elected.

### ***Voter Interest in Democratic Contest on Par with '88***

Although most of the Democratic candidates have emerged only recently, interest in the contest for the nomination is at the same level as four years ago, when the field was crowded early and the candidates dominated news coverage. Currently 12% of the public says it has been paying very close attention to news about the Democratic nominees, while another 26% has been following this story fairly closely. In October of 1987, 15% were following the Democratic race very closely and 28% fairly closely.

The similarities in public response, despite the vast differences in the conduct of the campaigns is echoed in the way the Democratic candidates are being judged. As a group, the current crop of Democratic candidates are rated pretty much the way the contestants were evaluated 4 years ago. In the first week of January of 1988, Times Mirror found 33% of those who could evaluate the Democratic field giving the candidates excellent or good ratings. In the current poll, 27% of those who could evaluate them gave "**good**" or "**excellent**" ratings to the current field of Democrats. "**Only Fair**" was the most frequent evaluation voiced in both polls about the candidates seeking the Democratic nomination (48% in 1988, 52% in 1991).

### ***Three In Four Care About Election Outcome***

Opinions about the perceived importance of the coming presidential contest also match what the public told Times Mirror four years ago. As in 1987, three in four respondents (73%) told

us they care a great deal *who wins*, while only slightly more than half (55%) said they cared a great deal *which party* wins the White House.

These findings do not augur well for voter turnout. Four years ago this level of expressed caring about the election outcome was associated with a record low turnout. However, the '92 turnout may be further handicapped by the widespread public view that the race will be a runaway.

### *Democrats Care Less*

The traditional difficulty of the Democratic party in energizing and mobilizing its forces is reflected in this survey. Among people who have pretty much made up their mind to vote for George Bush, 81% said they care who wins this election. However, among those who say they have already decided to vote Democratic, only **70%** say they care who wins the election.

The disparity gets even larger, when those with less commitment are considered. Among weak Bush supporters, 72% say they care who wins, while only 66% of weak Democratic supporters express this view.

### *Satisfaction with Amount of Coverage*

Four years ago a solid 59% majority of the public thought that the press was overcovering the 1992 presidential campaign. Today the prevailing view (58%) is that the press is devoting the right amount of coverage to the campaign. Moreover, as it was then, the public is clear in how it would like candidates covered.

Fewer than one in ten in the current survey (7%) and four years ago (9%) said that they would like the press to concentrate on a candidate's personal character. Most in the current survey say they want to see an emphasis on the candidate's stand on issues (46%) or on a candidate's experience or qualifications (42%). Hard core Bush supporters are more likely to want to see an emphasis on the latter (50%), while Bush opponents want the media to place more emphasis on candidates' stands on issues (59%).

Opinion is even more clear cut when people are asked about the kind of coverage they want in 1992, relative to the kind of coverage they received in previous presidential elections. Eighty percent want more coverage of a candidate's positions on issues, 58% want more coverage of the candidates debating each other.

In contrast, the public is evenly divided between those who want more (44%) versus those who want less (43%) coverage of the candidates touring the country and are similarly lukewarm about coverage of the candidates discussing their personal backgrounds and experiences (46% say more of this, 41% say less of this). A resounding 73% say they want to hear less analysis and commentary of campaign commercials. Whether or not this is as much a vote against commercials as it is a vote against media coverage is an open question.

### *Nine Sundays - a Good Idea*

More than three in four thought the concept of "Nine Sundays" was a good idea. Seventy-seven percent so evaluated a plan described as having the major presidential candidates appearing on TV one evening per week for each of the nine weeks leading up to the election, discussing and answering questions about their policies and debating each other.

Times Mirror's respondents were somewhat less positive about the personal benefits arising from such a program. Forty-three percent said the plan as described would be very helpful in deciding for whom to vote, 39% somewhat helpful and 15% not helpful.

Perhaps more important than the absolute numbers was the pattern of response. Young people, who have the lowest levels of political participation were much more likely than older people to see this as a good idea and one that would personally benefit them. Eighty-six percent of respondents under 30 years of age thought this was a good idea (compared to 66% among those 50 and older), while 50% thought it would be very helpful to them (compared to 35% among older people).

COMMITMENT TO VOTING FOR BUSH VS. "DEMOCRAT OF CHOICE"

	Made up Mind to Vote for Bush	Other Probable Bush Supporters	Made up Mind to Vote for a Democratic Candidate	Other Probable Democratic Supporters	Other/ Unde- ci ded	N
Total	28	27	21	16	8	(1211)
<u>Sex</u>						
Male	31	26	21	16	7	( 608)
Female	25	28	22	17	8	( 603)
<u>Race</u>						
White	30	29	18	16	7	(1028)
Black	9	14	42	24	11	( 100)
<u>Age</u>						
Under 30	34	30	16	13	9	( 288)
30-49	28	27	20	18	7	( 532)
50+	23	25	27	17	8	( 383)
<u>Family Income</u>						
Under \$20,000	22	24	26	19	9	( 317)
\$20,000-\$29,999	28	30	17	19	6	( 239)
\$30,000-\$49,999	33	29	21	11	6	( 306)
\$50+	37	28	18	13	4	( 229)
<u>Education</u>						
College graduate	32	26	18	17	7	( 325)
Other college	25	35	21	12	8	( 325)
High school grad	30	29	19	16	6	( 426)
Less than h. s. grad	24	14	29	23	10	( 128)
<u>Region</u>						
East	25	28	19	18	10	( 297)
Midwest	25	27	20	18	10	( 333)
South	35	26	19	15	5	( 394)
West	23	28	29	13	6	( 187)
<u>Party ID</u>						
Republican	58	28	3	7	4	( 351)
Democrat	8	15	47	22	7	( 341)
Independent	23	36	15	18	8	( 480)

## **SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

The survey results are based on telephone interviews conducted among a nationwide sample of 1,211 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period October 3-6, 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 3 percentage points. For results based on respondents who consider themselves to be Democrats and Democrat-leaners (N=495), the sampling error is plus or minus 5 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 SURVEY  
 OCTOBER 1991  
 October 3-6, 1991  
 N=1,211

SEX: 1 [ ] Male 2 [ ] Female

INTERVIEWER'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

TIME STARTED: \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEWER'S I. D. : \_\_\_\_\_

TIME FINISHED: \_\_\_\_\_

PAGE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

LENGTH: \_\_\_\_\_

REPLICATE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

REGION: 1 East  
 2 Midwest  
 3 South  
 4 West

STRATUM: 1 Stratum One  
 2 Stratum Two  
 3 Remainder

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

INTRODUCTION: Hello, I am \_\_\_\_\_ calling from the Princeton Survey Research Associates from Princeton, New Jersey. We are conducting a telephone opinion survey for leading newspapers and tv stations around the country. I'd like to ask a few questions of the youngest male, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home (**IF NO MALE, ASK:** May I please speak with the oldest female, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home?)

My first question is...

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

		NEWS INTEREST INDEX				
		July 1991	May 1991	March 1991	Jan 25 1991	Jan 3 1991
61	Approve	67	77	84	79	59
28	Disapprove	23	16	10	14	24
<u>11</u> 100	Don't know	<u>10</u> 100	<u>7</u> 100	<u>6</u> 100	<u>7</u> 100	<u>17</u> 100

Q. 2 Tell me if you have followed news about the Democratic candidates for the Presidential nomination very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. (READ AND ROTATE LIST)

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK</u>
News about the Democratic candidates for the Presidential nomination (October, 1987) (n=1,501)	12 15	26 28	31 35	29 21	2=100 1=100

NOTE: Question 3 was asked in two different ways.

**FORM 1**

Q. 3 Generally speaking would you say that you personally care a good deal who wins the 92' presidential election or that you don't care very much?

	<u>May 1987</u>
73 Care a good deal	<u>76</u>
22 Don't care very much	20
<u>5</u> Don't know	<u>4</u>
100	100

**FORM 2**

Q. 3a Generally speaking would you say that you personally care a good deal which party wins the 92' presidential election or that you don't care very much?

	<u>May 1987</u>
55 Care a good deal	<u>54</u>
39 Don't care very much	40
<u>6</u> Don't know	<u>6</u>
100	100

Q. 4 Overall, what's your opinion of the men running for the **Democratic** presidential nomination? As a group, would you say they are excellent candidates, good candidates, fair candidates or poor candidates?

	Jan. <u>1988</u>
2 Excellent	3
18 Good	27
38 Fair	44
15 Poor	17
<u>27</u> Don't know	<u>9</u>
100	100

Q. 5 Can you recall the names of any Democrats who have been mentioned lately as possible presidential candidates?

Q. 5a Who?

	May <u>1991</u>
28 Could name a candidate	30
7 Douglas Wilder	
8 Robert Kerrey	
5 Tom Harkin	
3 Mario Cuomo	
3 Jesse Jackson	
10 Bill Clinton	
2 Jerry Brown	
* Dave Mc Curdy	
5 Paul Tsongas	
1 Al Gore	
3 Other _____	
72 Could not recall names	70

Q.6 I am going to read to you the names of some possible candidates for the Democratic nomination for President. After I read all the names would you tell me which one you would most like to see nominated as the Democratic parties candidate for President? (ROTATE LIST)

**IF ANSWERED '6' OTHER OR '9' DK IN Q.6 ASK:**

Q.6b Well as of today, to whom do you most lean? (REREAD LIST)

**\*BASED ON DEMOCRATS AND LEANERS**

9 Former Massachusetts Senator Paul Tsongas  
15 Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder  
21 Nebraska Senator Robert Kerrey  
13 Iowa Senator Tom Harkin  
14 Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton  
2 Other  
26 DK  
100

**ASK ALL:**

Q.7 Suppose the 1992 presidential election were being held today. If George Bush were the Republican candidate and (**candidate named above**) were the Democratic candidate, who would you like to see win?

**IF ANSWERED '3' OTHER OR '4' UNDECIDED IN Q.7 ASK:**

Q.8 As of today do you lean more to Bush the Republican or to (**named Dem**) the Democrat?

**BASED ON ALL RESPONDENTS**

55 Bush with Leaners  
38 Named Democratic candidate with Leaners  
7 Other/Undecided  
100

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS**

54 Bush with Leaners  
39 Named Democratic candidate with Leaners  
7 Other/Undecided  
100

\*n=495

**IF ANSWERED '1' BUSH IN Q. 7 OR Q. 8 ASK:**

Q. 9 Have you pretty much made up your mind that you are going to support President Bush or is there a chance you might support a Democratic candidate?

**BASED ON ALL RESPONDENTS**

28 Made up mind

21 Might support Democratic candidate

$\frac{6}{55}$  Can't say

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS**

28 Made up mind

21 Might support Democratic candidate

$\frac{6}{55}$  Can't say

**IF ANSWERED '2' DEM CANDIDATE IN Q. 7 OR Q. 8 ASK:**

Q. 10 Have you pretty much made up your mind that you are going to support a Democratic candidate against President Bush or is there a chance you might support President Bush?

**BASED ON ALL RESPONDENTS**

22 Made up mind

10 Might support Bush

$\frac{6}{38}$  Can't say

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS**

22 Made up mind

11 Might support Bush

$\frac{5}{38}$  Can't say

**ASK ALL:**

Q. 11 Regardless of who you might support, who do you think is most likely to win the coming presidential election - George Bush or a Democratic candidate?

		Late Oct. <u>1988</u>
76	Bush	<u>68</u>
12	Democratic candidate	14
<u>12</u> 100	Can't say	<u>18</u> 100

Q. 12 So far, do you think news organizations are giving too much coverage to the 1992 presidential campaign, too little coverage to the campaign, or the right amount of coverage?

		Oct. <u>1987</u>
12	Too much	<u>59</u>
22	Too little	5
58	Right amount	31
<u>8</u> 100	Don't know	<u>5</u> 100

Q. 13 In reporting on a presidential candidate, what one factor do you think news organizations should pay the most attention to: **(READ CATEGORIES 1-3)**

		Oct. <u>1987</u>
7	A candidates personal character	9
46	A candidates stand on issues	41
42	A candidates past experiences and qualifications	45
<u>5</u> 100	Don't know	<u>5</u> 100

Q.14 What one issue would you most like to hear presidential candidates talk about? (YOU MAY ACCEPT THREE MENTIONS)

- 43 The economy
- 15 Unemployment, protecting U.S. jobs
- 11 Education
- 10 Abortion
- 8 Budget deficit, national debt
- 8 Healthcare in general
- 8 Homelessness, housing
- 6 Taxes
- 5 Defense, the military
- 4 Social Security, elderly issues
- 15 Net International Issues
- 83 Net Domestic Issues
- 66 Net Economic Issues
- 5 Net Crime/Drug Issues
- 13 Don't know

**On a different subject...**

Q.15 A recent study has recommended that the major presidential candidates appear on TV one evening per week for each of the nine weeks leading up to the election. In these appearances the candidates would talk about policies they plan to follow, if elected, answer questions about their policies and debate each other? Do you think these nine appearances are a good idea or a bad idea?

- 77 Good idea
- 16 Bad idea
- $\frac{7}{100}$  Don't know

Q.16 How helpful do you think such a program of appearances would be to you in deciding for whom to vote?

43 Very helpful?

39 Somewhat helpful?

8 Not too helpful?

or

7 Not at all helpful?

$\frac{3}{100}$  Don't know

Q.17 I am going to read some things news organizations can do to cover a presidential election campaign. For each tell me if it is something you would like to see more of, or like to see less of in coverage of the 1992 campaign? First, thinking of **(ITEM - ROTATE)** would you like to see more coverage of this or less coverage of this than in previous presidential elections? **(REPEAT AFTER EACH ITEM)**

	<u>More of</u>	<u>Less of</u>	<u>(VOL)</u> <u>Same</u>	<u>Can't</u> <u>say</u>
a. The candidates debating each other	58	28	9	5=100
b. The candidates touring the country meeting voters	44	43	9	4=100
c. The candidates discussing their personal backgrounds and experiences	46	41	8	5=100
d. The candidates discussing their positions on issues	80	11	5	4=100
e. Analyses and commentary on campaign commercials	15	73	6	6=100