



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
 Andrew Kohut, Director
 Carroll Doherty, Associate Director

Leaks Seen as Motivated More by Personal Than Political Reasons
NEWS LEAKS REMAIN DIVISIVE, BUT LIBBY CASE HAS LITTLE IMPACT

The recent conviction of former White House aide Scooter Libby for perjury and obstruction of justice focused renewed attention on the subject of news leaks – the unofficial dissemination of newsworthy, politically sensitive information to the press and public. Libby’s case centered on the leak of former CIA operative Valerie Plame’s identity, although no one was actually charged with revealing Plame’s status.

Libby’s trial drew extensive press coverage, but it has had little apparent impact on views about whether news leaks help or harm the public’s interest. Attitudes about news leaks are virtually the same now as they were in 1986, during Ronald Reagan’s second term. Currently, 42% of those who are aware of what news leaks are say they serve the public’s interest by providing Americans with information they should have; about as many (44%) believe such leaks hurt the public interest by revealing information that people should not have.

News Leaks: Divisive in Any Era		
	<u>1986</u>	<u>2007</u>
	%	%
Know what a news leak is	55	55
<i>News leaks mostly*...</i>		
Serve public’s interest	43	42
Harm public’s interest	42	44
Don’t know	<u>15</u>	<u>14</u>
	100	100

* Based on those who know what a news leak is.

Like many of the public’s attitudes about the press, opinions about news leaks are more politicized than during the mid-1980s. In 1986, there were only modest differences between Republicans and Democrats in views of whether news leaks help or hurt the public’s interest; among those familiar with news leaks, 48% of Democrats said they served the public’s interest, compared with 39% of Republicans. But in the current survey, about twice as many Democrats as Republicans say leaks serve the public’s interest (53%-26%, based on those who know what a news leak is).

More Partisanship, But Libby Has Little Effect		
<i>News leaks serve the public’s interest*</i>		
	<u>1986</u>	<u>2007</u>
	%	%
Total	43	42
Republican	39	26
Democrat	48	53
Independent	44	40
<i>Heard about Libby trial...</i>		
A lot	n/a	43
Little/nothing	n/a	41

* Based on those who know what a news leak is.

Notably, people who say they have heard a lot about the Libby trial have similar opinions about news leaks as those who have heard little or nothing about the case. Roughly four-in-ten (43%) of those who have heard a lot about Libby’s trial – and are familiar with news leaks – say they generally serve the public’s interest. This compares with 41% of those who are aware of how leaks occur and have heard little or nothing about the trial.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted March 21-25 among 1,503 adults, finds that the public’s overall familiarity with the practice of news leaks is the same as it was in 1986. Somewhat fewer say they have heard the term “news leak” (75% vs. 84% in 1986). But an identical percentage is aware that leaks happen when an official gives newsworthy information to a reporter (55%).

People who are aware of how news leaks occur generally believe that government officials who disclose sensitive information are motivated by personal, rather than political, reasons. About a quarter (26%) say officials leak information for personal advancement or to fulfill their personal agenda. This also was the top reason cited for news leaks in 1986 (33%).

Evaluating the Motives behind News Leaks	
	March <u>2007</u>
<i>Why do officials leak information?*</i>	%
For personal advancement	26
Influence press/public	12
For a worthy cause	11
Partisan political purposes	10
To seek revenge	8
* Open ended question asked of those who know what a news leak is; top five responses shown.	

About one-in-ten of those familiar with how leaks occur (12%) say officials provide information to influence or manipulate the press or public, while 11% say officials leak “for a worthy cause,” and 10% cite partisan political factors. Somewhat fewer (8%) say that officials generally leak information to the press to seek revenge against an opponent. For the most part, the motives cited for news leaks have changed little since 1986.

Government, the Press and National Security

Generally, the public takes a skeptical view of the government's complaints about press coverage of national security issues. Nearly six-in-ten (58%) say the government often criticizes such stories because it is trying to cover up problems with national security; just 32% say the government believes these stories would harm national security. In 1986, opinion about government criticism of national security stories was more evenly divided: 49% said the government was trying to cover up problems with the nation's defenses, while 39% said the government believed that the stories would hurt the nation's defenses.

Partisan differences over the reasons for government complaints about national security stories have increased considerably over the past two decades. In 1986, 57% of Democrats and 37% of Republicans said the government often criticized stories on national security

issues more because it was trying to cover up problems than because it felt such stories would harm national security. But the partisan gap has nearly doubled in the current survey, with 79% of Democrats and just 30% of Republicans now saying the government criticizes national security stories to cover up problems.

	Total %	Rep %	Dem %	Ind %
<i>March 2007</i>				
To try to cover up problems with national security	58	30	79	57
Because it believes the stories hurt national security	32	61	14	33
Don't know	<u>10</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>10</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>July 1986</i>				
To try to cover up problems with national security	49	37	57	51
Because it believes the stories hurt national security	39	52	32	35
Don't know	<u>12</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>14</u>
	100	100	100	100

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 1,503 adults, 18 years of age or older, from March 21-25, 2007. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on Form 1 (N=753) and Form 2 (N=750) the sampling error 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.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
MARCH 2007 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
March 21-25, 2007
N=1503

QUESTIONS 1 THROUGH 6 ALREADY RELEASED

Q.7 Now thinking about some groups and organizations ... Is your overall opinion of [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE; OBSERVE FORM SPLITS] very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly UNfavorable, or very unfavorable?

		-----Favorable-----			----Unfavorable----			(VOL.) Never	(VOL.) Can't
		<u>Total</u>	<u>Very</u>	<u>Mostly</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Very</u>	<u>Mostly</u>	<u>Heard of</u>	<u>Rate/Ref.</u>
a.	The news media	45	7	38	49	17	32	*	6=100
	Early January, 2007	45	8	37	49	17	32	*	6=100
	April, 2006	48	8	40	46	15	31	*	6=100
	February, 2006	59	12	47	37	10	27	0	4=100
	Late October, 2005	52	11	41	42	13	29	0	6=100
	Mid-March, 2005	56	12	44	40	13	27	0	4=100
	December, 2004	43	8	35	51	18	33	*	6=100
	Late October, 2000 (RVs)	50	7	43	45	14	31	0	5=100
	February, 1999	49	6	43	49	15	34	0	2=100
	March, 1998	48	9	39	50	16	34	*	2=100
	October, 1997	50	7	43	48	14	34	*	2=100

QUESTION 8 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

QUESTIONS 9 THROUGH 35 ALREADY RELEASED

ASK ALL:

On another subject...

Q.36 Have you ever heard the term "news leak"?

IF YES IN Q.36, ASK:

Q.37 In your opinion does a news leak happen when a reporter finds out something newsworthy on his own or when a government official gives newsworthy information to a reporter?

BASED ON TOTAL:

		July <u>1986</u>
75	Yes	84
12	Reporter finds on his own	19
55	Gov't official provides information	55
8	Don't know	10
25	No	16
*	Don't know	*
<u>100</u>		<u>100</u>

Q.38 Why do you think, generally, that officials leak information to the press? [OPEN END; ACCEPT MULTIPLE RESPONSES. PROBE FOR CLARITY – DO NOT PROBE FOR ADDITIONAL MENTIONS. IF MORE THAN ONE MENTION, RECORD ALL IN ORDER OF MENTION]

BASED ON THOSE WHO HAD HEARD OF A NEWS LEAK (1 ON Q.36) AND WHO IDENTIFIED IT AS A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL PROVIDING INFORMATION (2 ON Q.37) [N=893]:

		July <u>1986</u> ¹
26	For personal advancement/personal agenda	33
12	To influence or manipulate the press/public	2
11	For a worthy cause/public interest ²	15
10	For partisan political purposes	15
8	To seek revenge against an opponent	4
7	To get the information out there	-
4	To put something out there without being held accountable	-
4	To stir things up (generally)	-
3	Dissatisfaction/disagreement with government handling/policy	2
3	For financial gain/to get paid	-
2	To test public opinion/reaction	5
2	To gain favor with reporters	7
1	Inadvertently/mistakenly/unintentionally	3
1	Intentional “unofficial” announcements	12
0	To help enemies of the U.S.	1
13	Other	6
8	Don’t know/Refused	13

Q.39 Which comes closer to your opinion: news leaks serve the public interest more by providing Americans with information they should have OR news leaks harm the public interest by revealing information that people ought not to have?

BASED ON THOSE WHO HAD HEARD OF A NEWS LEAK (1 ON Q.36) AND WHO IDENTIFIED IT AS A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL PROVIDING INFORMATION (2 ON Q.37): [N=893]

		July <u>1986</u>
42	Serves public interest	43
44	Harms public interest	42
<u>14</u>	Don’t know	<u>15</u>
100		100

¹ The July 1986 trend on this question is for broad comparisons only. Because the original verbatim answers are not archived, the current coding may not match the procedures used in 1986 exactly. In particular, the current category for “influence or manipulate the press/public” is a more inclusive code than the 1986 category “manipulate the press.”

² In July 1986, the category was: “for a worthy cause.”

ASK ALL:

Q.40 Why do you think the government often criticizes the press for reporting stories about national security issues?

		July <u>1986</u> ³
32	More because the government believes the stories would harm national security	39
	OR	
58	More because the government is trying to cover up problems with national security	49
<u>10</u>	Don't know	<u>12</u>
100		100

Q.41 How much, if anything, have you read or heard about the trial of former vice presidential aide Lewis "Scooter" Libby for perjury and obstruction of justice? **[READ]**

25	A lot
39	A little
35	Nothing at all
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused [VOL. DO NOT READ]
100	

³ Question wording in July 1986 was: "Why do you think the government often criticizes the press for reporting stories about national security issues? More because the government believes the stories would harm the nation's defenses? OR More because the government is trying to cover up problems with the nation's defenses?"