

TIMES MIRROR III
- THE PRESS AND THE PRESIDENCY -

**A Survey of Public Attitudes
Toward the Press in Light
of the Iran-Contra Affair**

Conducted for:

TIMES MIRROR

Conducted by:

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MAJOR FINDINGS

1. While President Reagan has lost public esteem as a consequence of the Iran-Contra arms scandal, so have other institutions, including the press.

Favorability and believability ratings have declined for newspapers, network TV news and the leading news anchors.

2. A major contributor to the declining favorability and believability ratings for news organizations is a political backlash against the press by Reagan supporters and conservatives generally.

More than a third of strong conservatives now have an unfavorable opinion of network TV news, double the proportion reported last July.

3. Despite the decline in press favorability and believability, news organizations continue to receive higher ratings than the President and the Congress.

Network TV news (66%) and daily newspapers (63%) receive believability scores substantially higher than the President (52%), Congressional Democrats (44%) and Congressional Republicans (41%).

4. The press is most often credited with playing the largest role in getting to the bottom of the Iran-Contra affair -- it is cited more than twice as often as Congress.

Even Republicans and the very conservative see the press as doing more to get at the truth than the President and his staff.

5. Support for the watchdog role of the press has changed little, despite some conservative backlash.

The political right has been less enthusiastic about the press' role as a check on the politicians in the midst of the President's troubles; nonetheless, the large majority of Americans continue to feel press criticism keeps the politicians honest.

6. One of the consequences of the Iran arms scandal is increased politicization of attitudes toward the press.

The proportion who see the press as having a political point of view -- either liberal or conservative has increased from 60% to 80% since 1985. At that time, 33% described themselves as having different political views from those they ascribed to the press; currently 45% report such dissonance.

7. Politicization notwithstanding, the public still feels the press is fair to Ronald Reagan.

While only a minority (39%) see the press as generally fair in its coverage of political and social issues, two-thirds (67%) say the press is fair to Reagan, down from 78% in 1985.

8. The survey shows an amazing lack of public attentiveness to this story.

One-third of the public say they are not closely following news coverage of the Iran-Contra affair; only a fifth are following it very closely. By comparison, previous survey data shows that 80% very closely followed the Challenger disaster and 46% so closely followed Chernobyl.

9. The story is being more closely followed by the President's critics and his strong supporters than by the larger group in the middle of the political spectrum.

One-quarter of those with very favorable or unfavorable views of Reagan are following the story very closely. Only half as many (13%) moderate Reagan supporters show such interest.

10. Although a two-thirds majority rate the press coverage of the story positively, it gets more criticism than other news events tracked by our research.

Only one in five following the Iran story rates the coverage as excellent; a 57% majority so rated coverage of the Challenger disaster.

11. In its coverage of this story, the press is most often criticized for the amount of coverage, its consequences to the country's image, and a tendency to rely too much on unverified information.

Conservatives, Reagan supporters and Republicans are most prone to hold these views.

12. A large majority of the public believe news coverage of the plight of the American hostages placed at least some pressure on the Reagan Administration to deal with Iran.

Four in ten feel such coverage placed a great deal of pressure on the President. Such views are as common among liberals as among conservatives.

13. Most Americans feel the press is properly doing its job of getting the facts in the Iran story rather than using the coverage to attack the President -- and few see the press as enjoying Reagan's difficulties.

The majority (56%) see the main objective of the press coverage as learning and reporting the facts. Even among the 35% who see the press as primarily interested in going after the President, there is not tendency to see the press as motivated by personal dislike or partisanship.

SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

Reagan's Fall

The extent to which President Reagan's image has been tarnished by the Iran-Contra arms scandal has been evident in the major public opinion surveys released over the last month. The current Gallup/Times Mirror survey results further document Reagan's fall. The numbers themselves -- the proportion of Reagan supporters versus critics -- are less important than the dynamics and character of the change in public opinion. In fact, Reagan's approval rating has rebounded somewhat since early December and a greater number now approve (52%) than disapprove (39%) of how the President is handling his job. (This probably does not reflect significant sympathy for the President associated with his recent medical procedures -- the large majority of interviews were conducted before he entered the hospital last Sunday.) Such an approval rating is actually somewhat above the norm for a President at this point in his term. But while positive evaluations of the President's performance outnumber negative ones, his critics are more critical than his supporters are supportive. Over half (52%) of those who disapprove of Reagan's job performance give him the lowest possible rating on a four-point scale measuring his believability. Nearly three-quarters (73%) say the Iran-Contra affair is so serious that they now question the President's ability to run the country. Over two-thirds of these Reagan critics (68%) suspect that he is withholding information about the

Iran-Contra affair to protect himself or others. Americans who express no opinion of the President's performance (9%) generally say they like him -- they divide 56% favorable vs. 27% unfavorable -- but do not necessarily believe what he says -- 46% "not believable" vs. 42% "believable."

The shift in opinion of Reagan from positive to negative has occurred primarily among whites, people over 50, Democrats, and those with moderate to conservative political views. These are the characteristics of a traditionally Democratic group who nonetheless voted for Ronald Reagan in large numbers in 1984. For the time being, at least, many have turned against the President, joining non-whites and the political left, the most consistent Reagan critics.

Fallout on Other Institutions

Although Ronald Reagan seems to have been damaged most by the Iran-Contra affair, all of the players in the affair and the investigation have lost some public esteem -- including the press. The severity of the damage to the President is best demonstrated by comparing the ratio of very positive to very negative Reagan favorability scores between now and last summer. In July 1986, very favorable ratings of Reagan outnumbered negative ratings by 30% to 4%. Currently, as many have a very unfavorable opinion (18%) as a very favorable one (18%). Two other institutions involved or associated with the arms trading and secret diplomacy -- the military and the CIA -- also show some damage to their public image. Benefiting, no doubt, from the popularity of the Libyan operation in early 1986, the military's favorability score had improved to the point where 31% expressed very positive views last summer. That number is down to 19% since the revelations about Iran, and one in six (16%) now has an unfavorable opinion

of the military, up from 10% in the previous survey. The CIA's overall favorability score has also fallen, from 50% very or mostly favorable in July to 38% currently. One-third (34%) now have an unfavorable view of the intelligence agency.

While some journalists have taken great pains to point out that it was not the press who decided to sell arms to Iran or to secretly funnel money to the Contras, the press has not been able to escape damage from a situation that has depressed the mood of the nation. Favorability ratings for print ("the daily newspaper you are most familiar with") and broadcast media ("network TV news") have both been affected. Like the military and Ronald Reagan, daily newspapers and network TV news have experienced roughly a 10-percentage point decline in proportion rating them very favorably. Network TV news, which has focused on the story to a greater degree than local newspapers, has also seen its unfavorable rating expand from 14% to 22%.

Congress, active in investigating the Iran-Contra affair, also shows falling favorability ratings. The decline in the ratings, however, is relatively moderate. Opinion on Congress divided 59% favorable to 31% unfavorable in the current survey and 67% to 26% in the 1985 survey, the last time a rating for Congress was obtained.

TABLE 1: DECLINING FAVORABILITY RATINGS

	June 1985 %	August 1985 %	July 1986 %	Current %
<u>Most Familiar Daily Newspaper</u>				
Very favorable	25	25	28	19
Mostly favorable	56	52	51	57
Mostly unfavorable	8	10	11	13
Very unfavorable	3	5	6	6
No opinion	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
	100	100	100	100
<u>Network TV News</u>				
Very favorable	25	30	30	19
Mostly favorable	59	51	53	55
Mostly unfavorable	8	8	10	16
Very unfavorable	2	4	4	6
No opinion	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
	100	100	100	100
<u>The Military</u>				
Very favorable	24		31	19
Mostly favorable	53		53	54
Mostly unfavorable	13	NOT ASKED	7	11
Very unfavorable	5		3	5
No opinion	<u>5</u>		<u>6</u>	<u>11</u>
	100		100	100

Continued.

TABLE 1: DECLINING FAVORABILITY RATINGS

	June 1985 %	August 1985 %	July 1986 %	Current %
<u>Ronald Reagan</u>				
Very favorable	26	25	30	18
Mostly favorable	43	52	53	43
Mostly unfavorable	18	10	10	19
Very unfavorable	10	5	4	18
No opinion	<u>3</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100	100	100
<u>The Congress</u>				
Very favorable	9			7
Mostly favorable	58			52
Mostly unfavorable	21	NOT ASKED	NOT ASKED	23
Very unfavorable	5			8
No opinion	<u>7</u>			<u>10</u>
	100			100
<u>The CIA</u>				
Very favorable	7		7	6
Mostly favorable	42		43	32
Mostly unfavorable	23	NOT ASKED	18	23
Very unfavorable	10		6	11
No opinion	<u>18</u>		<u>26</u>	<u>28</u>
	100		100	100

Effects On Basic Press Attitudes

Results to questions repeated from the original Times Mirror People & the Press survey show, for the most part, little or no change in basic attitudes toward the press. Questions measuring attitudes toward overall fairness on political and social issues, intrusiveness, effects on democracy, pro- or anti-Americanism, and the presence of political bias yield results that are statistically similar to those recorded in previous surveys. There are, however, two important effects on overall press attitudes, aside from declining favorability, that are evident. First, the press has lost some credibility. Believability scores for both news organizations and major news personalities have decreased substantially. Second, in the highly politicized climate of the Iran-Contra affair investigations, the public has become more prone to feel that the press has a point of view -- be it liberal or conservative.

The decline in press believability scores parallels its fall in public favorability. The proportion according a highly believable rating (a "4" on a 4-point scale) to their daily newspaper and network TV news has decreased by 11 and 12 percentage points, respectively, since June 1985. The proportion giving each type of news organization a below par believability rating (a "2" or "1" on the 4-point scale) has also increased by roughly 20 percentage points. One-third of the public now find network TV news (32%) and the newspaper they are most familiar with (33%) to be essentially not believable.

The best known and liked news media personalities -- network evening news anchors -- have not escaped the fallout from the Iran situation. Dan Rather, Peter Jennings, and Tom Brokaw have all seen their credibility hurt, but the CBS anchor, whose broadcast topped the ratings at the time of the 1985 survey, seems

to have lost the most. In 1985, 40% placed Rather at the top on the believability scale. Now only 28% do so. One-fourth (25%) -- compared with 10% in 1985 -- give him a subpar believability rating.

	<u>June 1985</u> %	<u>Current</u> %
<u>Network TV News*</u>		
4 -- Believe	32	20
3	51	46
2	11	28
1 -- Cannot Believe	1	4
No opinion	<u>5</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100

Most Familiar Daily Newspaper

4 -- Believe	28	17
3	52	46
2	13	28
1 -- Cannot Believe	2	5
No opinion	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>
	100	100

Dan Rather

4 -- Believe	40	28
3	41	41
2	8	17
1 -- Cannot Believe	2	8
No opinion	<u>9</u>	<u>6</u>
	100	100

*In June 1985, separate ratings were obtained for ABC, CBS, and NBC News. All organizations, however, received statistically similar ratings. For this table, the 1985 figures shown represent an average rating for the three network news departments.

Continued. . .

	<u>June 1985</u>	<u>Current</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Peter Jennings</u>		
4 -- Believe	33	25
3	41	41
2	8	18
1 -- Cannot Believe	1	5
No opinion	<u>17</u>	<u>11</u>
	100	100
 <u>Tom Brokaw</u>		
4 -- Believe	29	24
3	40	42
2	8	19
1 -- Cannot Believe	1	5
No opinion	<u>22</u>	<u>10</u>
	100	100

While there is little doubt that the press has suffered some erosion of its believability -- a quality that has been one of its strongest suits -- two points should be made. News organizations are in the process of reporting on a story that many Americans find deeply disturbing -- this is the type of bad news the public tells us there is too much of. No doubt most people would prefer not to believe that a popular President's administration sold weapons to the Ayatollah's regime, traded arms for hostages despite a strong public stance against negotiating with terrorists, and diverted some arms sales profits to the Nicaraguan contras, at a time when Congress expressly prohibited such aid. The public's aversion reaction to this news story will be discussed later in this report.

It should also be emphasized that, despite their decreased credibility, news organizations and prominent journalists remain more believable to people than the Reagan Administration or its friends and foes in Congress. The President's ratings have decreased to the point where about half of the public (46%) feel they can't believe most of what he says. Attorney General Edwin Meese, who told the press that only Colonel Oliver North and national security advisor John Poindexter knew about the contra diversion, is regarded as not believable by nearly two-thirds (64%) of those who have an opinion of Meese. Neither major party's delegation in Congress is able to muster a believability score above 50%. Congressional Democrats receive a 44% score and Congressional Republicans a 41%. In contrast, 66% give network TV news a positive believability score.

The second major change in basic press attitudes since the Iran-Contra affair came to light is probably a product of the highly charged political atmosphere surrounding the investigation. While two years ago 60% told Gallup they believed the press has a particular political point of view -- either liberal or conservative -- fully 80% now feel this way. The ratio between those

who see a liberal press and a conservative press has remained constant -- by a 2-to-1 margin, those who think news organizations have a point of view feel it is liberal rather than conservative. The significance of this finding is that an increasing number of Americans see themselves at odds politically with news organizations. In 1985, a third (33%) perceived a conflict between their own political views and those of the press. Today, close to half (45%) see such a conflict. Because of their sheer numbers and some internal survey evidence, conservatives who view the press as liberal are probably a more important source of press criticism than liberals who think the press is conservative. Both groups, however, have increased in size.

TABLE 3: PERCEIVED POLITICAL DIFFERENCES WITH PRESS

<u>Political Views of Self vs. Press</u>	<u>June 1985 %</u>	<u>Current %</u>
Total with opposing views	33	45
Self conservative; press liberal	26	31
Self liberal; press conservative	7	14
No conflict in views reported	59	48
Not classified to ideology	8	7
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	100

There is ample evidence in the survey results to suggest a conservative backlash against the press related to the Iran coverage. The proportion of strong conservatives who feel the press has been unfair to the Reagan Administration is twice what it was in the 1985 survey (42% vs. 21%). Moreover, strong conservatives -- the President's "true believers" -- are seemingly less supportive of the press as a check on the politicians when their political hero is in the hotseat. Forty-one percent of the very conservative now feel press criticism of political leaders keeps politicians from doing their job rather than keeps them honest. Only about half that number (22%) felt this way in the 1985 survey.

TABLE 4: CONSERVATIVE BACKLASH

	<u>Based on the Very Conservative*</u>	
	<u>July 1985</u>	<u>Current</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Feel news organizations are unfair to the Reagan Administration	21	42
Feel press criticism of political leaders keeps them from doing their job	22	41
Number of Interviews	(458)	(277)

*Those who rated themselves a "1" or "2" on a 6-point scale ranging from very conservative to very liberal.

Conservatives appear to have turned their ire on the TV network news departments more than on the print press. (It should be noted, however, that the survey did not question them about news magazines or nationally influential newspapers.) The increase in unfavorable ratings for network TV news has come disproportionately from the right -- rising by 17 percentage points among strong conservatives, with only a 4-point increase seen among the very liberal. No such relationship exists between ideology and favorability ratings for daily newspapers.

How the Story is Playing

The public displays an amazing lack of attentiveness to news coverage of the Iran story, despite the heavy coverage in the news media. This has all the characteristics of being a "Washington" story that is intensely followed by the politicians but often ignored by the average American. Two-thirds (67%) of the public say they have followed this story at least fairly closely but only one in five (20%) has given it very close attention. To put these figures in perspective, they can be compared with results for other recent major news stories from the July 1986 Gallup/Times Mirror survey. By comparison, four times as many (80%) say they very closely followed coverage of the Challenger disaster, and more than twice as many (46%) paid such close attention to the Chernobyl story. In fact, none of the news stories tracked by Gallup -- even the Achille Lauro hijacking -- registers such a low level of attention.

Whether because of lack of interest or a conscious avoidance of an unpleasant story, one-third of the public (33%) say they have not followed the story even fairly closely. Roughly one in six (16%) claim to have never heard of Oliver North -- a name even the most casual newspaper reader or TV news viewer would find difficult to avoid these days.

No population subgroup analyzed is following coverage of the Iran-Contra affair in large numbers. Even among those who report the highest level of attention to the story -- people over 50 and college graduates -- only about three in ten are paying it very close attention. Those who have a strongly positive (25%) or a negative opinion (25%) of Ronald Reagan are more likely than those in the middle (13%) -- the largest share of public who have moderately favorable views of the President -- to be very attentive to this story.

Although positive evaluations of how the press has covered the Iran story outnumber negative evaluations by more than two to one (68% excellent/good vs.

31% only fair/poor), the level of dissatisfaction with the coverage is high relative to news coverage of other major news stories. No other story tracked by Gallup has received high negative performance ratings. Among those who very or fairly closely followed Chernobyl, 27% evaluated the press negatively -- this was the lowest performance rating previously recorded.

Only one in five people following the story (19%) consider the coverage of the Iran-Contra affair to be excellent. No group has been highly pleased with coverage but liberals, Democrats, and Reagan critics have generally found it to be more satisfactory than conservatives, Republicans and Reagan supporters. Seventy percent of strong liberal, compared with 55% of strong conservatives, give Iran coverage a positive evaluation. Even among strong liberals and Reagan critics, however, fewer than three in ten rate coverage as excellent.

TABLE 5: PUBLIC ATTENTION/EVALUATION OF IRAN
COVERAGE RELATIVE TO OTHER NEWS STORIES

<u>News Story</u>	<u>How Closely Followed News Story</u>			<u>Evaluation of News Organizations' Performance</u>			
	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Total Very/ Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
The explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger**	80	16	= 96	57	33	7	2
The U.S. air strikes against Libya*	58	27	= 85	28	52	16	3
The TWA hostage crisis (Beirut, Lebanon, 1985)*	48	31	= 79	30	50	15	2
The nuclear accident at Chernobyl*	46	34	= 80	21	50	21	6
The hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise ship*	35	33	= 68	26	54	16	2
The Iran-Contra affair	20	47	= 67	19	49	22	9

**Results based on those who "very" or "fairly" closely followed the story.
"Don't knows" not shown.

*Results taken from a July 1986 Gallup Times Mirror survey.

Public Criticisms of News Coverage of the Iran-Contra Affair

The survey finds three major areas of public criticism about the way news organizations are covering the Iran-Contra affair. They are as follows: 1) the belief that the press gives too much play to stories that cannot be verified; 2) the feeling that too much space and air time is being devoted to the story; and 3) the concern that all this press scrutiny hurts the country's image overseas.

- Fully half (50%) of those interviewed and nearly two-thirds (64%) of those critical of the news coverage feel that the press has overemphasized rumors and unconfirmed accounts in telling the story about what happened. Four in ten (38%) disagree, saying that news organizations have been careful to keep such reporting in perspective.
- A large minority of the total public (44%) and close to two-thirds (64%) of those critical of press performance feel there has been too much coverage. A somewhat higher number of the public felt this way about the amount of news coverage devoted to terrorism when interviewed last July (51% overall). Currently, about half (51%) say there is not too much Iran-Contra affair coverage.
- Close to half of Americans (46%) feel, on balance, that the press preoccupation with the Iran story is bad for the country and damaging to our image in the world. A statistically equal proportion (45%) disagree, believing that the benefits of press scrutiny in getting the facts to the public outweigh any negative effects on the national image.

Given the sharply partisan nature of attitudes toward press coverage of this story, it is important to point out that people unfavorable toward the President do not, for the most part, share these criticisms of the press. While two-thirds of strong Reagan partisans see the news media as overemphasizing rumors and overdoing the coverage, only about half as many Reagan critics take this view (see table 5). The criticism that heavy press coverage of this story hurts the U.S. image, however, is cited by Reagan critics more often than the other major criticisms (40%). In fact, even among those who feel the President is covering up what he knows to protect himself or others, close to four in ten (39%) still feel press scrutiny to learn the truth is not worth it because of potential negative effects to the country's image.

TABLE 6: THE POLITICAL DIMENSION TO CRITICISM
OF PRESS PERFORMANCE

	<u>Opinion of Ronald Reagan</u>		
	<u>Very Favorable</u>	<u>Mostly Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Feel press overemphasizes rumors and unconfirmed stories in Iran reporting	66	56	35
Feel too much news coverage is given to the Iran-Contra affair	65	48	29
Feel the Iran coverage is bad for the country's image in the world	59	47	40
Number of Interviews	(285)	(671)	(522)

Areas of Public Satisfaction with News Coverage

The public is most supportive of the press for their coverage of the Iran story in two areas. First, they are more than twice as likely to credit the press as to credit Congress or the Reagan White House for playing the largest role in getting to the bottom of the Iran-Contra affair. Close to half (47%) give news organizations the most credit; one-fifth (20%) credit Congress, while fewer credit the President (14%) or his White House staff (6%). Despite the conservative backlash, the public continues to express strong support for the role of the press as a watchdog on the powerful. Even among Republicans and the very conservative, the press is cited more often than Ronald Reagan or his staff for getting to the truth.

Second, the public feels that in covering this story, the press is doing the job it is supposed to -- collecting and reporting the facts -- rather than seeking to destroy Ronald Reagan's Presidency. The majority (56%) feel the main concern of news organizations in covering the Iran arms scandal is to learn and report the facts; a little over a third (35%) see the press as engaged in President bashing. Even among those who feel the press is attacking the President, very few feel this is happening because the press dislikes Reagan personally (5%) or disagrees with his policies (21%). Overwhelmingly, they feel instead that the press thinks this makes a good story. Ben Bradlee's comment that the press hasn't had this much fun with a story since Watergate may not have filtered down to the general public. Very few respondents (17%) tell us they feel journalists are taking personal enjoyment from the President's difficulties.

As expected, Republicans (51%), the very conservative (50%) and strong Reagan supporters (58%) are more likely than others to see the press as more concerned about attacking the President than finding the truth. These groups,

however, overwhelmingly attribute such behavior to press attempts to get a good story, rather than an attempt to destroy a political opponent. Moreover, they are as likely to see journalists as personally unhappy with the situation, as to see them as gleeful about it.

The survey asked a series of parallel questions about Nixon and Watergate so that perceived press treatment of Ronald Reagan can be put in perspective. The public generally does not feel the press was out to get Nixon during the time of that Presidential crisis. The margin between the proportion who saw the press as doing its job and the proportion who saw it as attacking Nixon during Watergate, however, is smaller than the corresponding margin seen for Reagan in his current crisis. Also, Americans who felt the press was out to get Richard Nixon (20%) are more likely to view it as a personal attack than are those who now feel the press is out to get Ronald Reagan (5%).

TABLE 7: PUBLIC VIEWS OF PRESS TREATMENT OF REAGAN AND NIXON IN A PRESIDENTIAL CRISIS

	Ronald Reagan and the Iran- Contra Affair %	Richard Nixon and Watergate %
<u>Main Concern of News Organizations</u>		
Learning and reporting the facts	56	48
Attacking the President	35	38
Don't know	<u>9</u>	<u>14</u>
	100	100
<u>Perception of Journalists Personal Feelings</u>		
Enjoy(ed) President's difficulties	17	19
Unhappy about situation	42	35
Don't (didn't) much care	34	34
Don't know	<u>7</u>	<u>12</u>
	100	100

White House Secrecy and Openness

While many Washington observers feel that too much secrecy on the part of the White House may have permitted the Iranian arms sales to develop into a full-blown scandal, White House secrecy and openness are not much of an issue with the public. Only 12% of those polled say they feel the White House should relax its policies to maintain secrecy and prevent news leaks as a result of the Iran-Contra affair. In fact, nearly half (46%) would prefer tougher policies. In interpreting such results, it should be kept in mind that, as reported in the July 1986 Gallup/Times Mirror survey, half of the public doesn't know what a "news leak" is.

Relatively few Americans (31%) viewed the Reagan White House, prior to the Iranian arms revelations, as less open and cooperative with the press. The majority saw the administration as just as open with the press as previous administrations (39%) or even more open and cooperative (25%).

Press Responsibility for Iran Arms Initiative

Large numbers of Americans see the press as having at least an indirect role in bringing about the Iran arms sales or in permitting them to go on unreported. Three-quarters of the public (74%) feel that press coverage of the American hostages situation in Beirut put at least some pressure on the Reagan Administration to deal with Iran in an attempt to win their release. Fully 40% feel such news coverage exerted a great deal of pressure on the administration. These attitudes are shared across the board, bearing little or no relationship to partisanship. Roughly equal proportions of Republicans (43%) and Democrats (39%) feel news organizations placed a lot of pressure on the White House through their coverage of the plight of the hostages.

Finally, slightly more than a third of the public (36%) believes that the press went too easy on the President prior to the Iran arms controversy, which one might interpret as a failure to properly perform its watchdog role. Over half (53%) take the opposite view, saying that the press is working just as hard in investigating the Reagan Administration as they did during other administrations. This is a case where the correlation between the press criticism and political partisanship runs opposite to the norm. Most likely to feel press scrutiny of the Administration was inadequate are Democrats (47%), the very liberal (45%), and those with unfavorable views of Ronald Reagan (53%).

Survey Methodology

For this survey, The Gallup Organization interviewed a nationally representative sample of adults, age 18 years and over, by telephone during the period December 27, 1986 through January 4, 1987. The margin of sampling error is ± 3 percentage points.

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TIMES MIRROR SURVEY
-- THE PRESS AND THE PRESIDENCY --

INTRODUCTION: Hello, I am _____ calling from The Gallup Organization in Princeton, New Jersey. I would like to ask a few questions of the youngest male/oldest female 18 years of age or older who is now at home.

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ronald Reagan is handling his job as President?

		<u>6/85</u>	<u>Newsweek 12/4-5/86</u>
52	1[] Approve	60	47
39	2[] Disapprove	29	44
9	0[] Don't know	11	9
100		100	100

2. Now I'd like your opinion of some people and organizations. First, is your opinion of Ronald Reagan very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable or very unfavorable? (RECORD RESPONSE BELOW) Next, what is your overall opinion of (INSERT NEXT ITEM)? REPEAT FOR REST OF LIST.

	<u>Very Favorable</u>	<u>Mostly Favorable</u>	<u>Mostly Unfavorable</u>	<u>Very Unfavorable</u>	<u>Never Heard Of</u>	<u>Can't Rate</u>		
Ronald Reagan 6/85	18 26	43 43	19 18	18 10	— —	2 3	=	100 100
The Congress 6/85	7 9	52 58	23 21	8 5	— *	10 7	=	100 100
The CIA 6/85	6 7	32 42	23 23	11 10	— 2	28 16	=	100 100
The military 6/85	19 24	54 53	11 13	5 5	— *	11 5	=	100 100
The daily newspaper you are most familiar with 6/85	19 25	57 56	13 8	6 3	— *	5 8	=	100 100
Network TV news 6/85	19 25	55 59	16 8	6 2	— *	4 2	=	100 100

3. Next, please rate the believability of some people and organizations on a scale of 4 to 1. Let a '4' mean you can believe all or most of what they say and a '1' mean you can believe almost nothing of what they say. First, how would you rate (INSERT FIRST ITEM) on this scale of 4 to 1? ASK FOR REST OF LIST.

	<u>Believe</u>			<u>Cannot Believe</u>	<u>Never Heard Of</u>	<u>Can't Rate</u>		
The daily newspaper you are most familiar with	17	46	28	5	0	4	=	100
6/85	28	52	13	2	*	5	=	100
Network TV news	20	46	28	4	0	2	=	100
6/85*	32	51	11	1	--	5	=	100
Democrats in Congress	10	34	40	12	*	4	=	100
Republicans in Congress	8	33	38	16	0	5	=	100
Ronald Reagan	18	34	23	23	0	2	=	100
6/85	28	39	20	12	--	1	=	100
Edwin Meese	6	24	35	18	4	13	=	100
Dan Rather	28	41	17	8	1	5	=	100
6/85	40	41	8	2	4	5	=	100
Tom Brokaw	24	42	19	5	3	7	=	100
6/85	29	40	8	1	11	11	=	100
Peter Jennings	25	41	18	5	2	9	=	100
6/85	33	41	8	1	8	9	=	100

Now I have some questions about how well news organizations do their job. . .

4. In presenting the news dealing with political and social issues, do you think that news organizations deal fairly with all sides or do they tend to favor one side?

		<u>6/85</u>
39	1[]Fairly with all sides	34
54	2[]Favor one side	53
7	0[]Can't say	13
<u>100</u>		<u>100</u>

5. Are the news organizations you are most familiar with fair or unfair to the Reagan Administration?

		<u>6/85</u>
67	1[]Fair	78
25	2[]Unfair	12
8	0[]Don't know	10
<u>100</u>		<u>100</u>

*Average of rating for ABC, CBS and NBC News

6. Next I'm going to read you some pairs of opposite phrases. After I read each pair, tell me which one phrase you feel better describes news organizations generally. If you think neither phrase applies, please say so. (READ. START AT 'X')

		<u>6/85</u>
41	a. 1[]Care about the people they report on? <u>OR</u>	35
45	2[]Don't care about the people they report on?	48
9	3[]NEITHER APPLIES	10
<u>5</u>	0[]DON'T KNOW	<u>7</u>
100		100
54	b. 1[]Liberal? <u>OR</u>	41
26	2[]Conservative?	19
12	3[]NEITHER APPLIES	20
<u>8</u>	0[]DON'T KNOW	<u>20</u>
100		100
52	c. 1[]Protect democracy? <u>OR</u>	54
27	2[]Hurt democracy?	23
13	3[]NEITHER APPLIES	13
<u>8</u>	0[]DON'T KNOW	<u>10</u>
100		100
53	d. 1[]Stand up for America? <u>OR</u>	52
35	2[]Too critical of America?	30
8	3[]NEITHER APPLIES	10
<u>4</u>	0[]DON'T KNOW	<u>8</u>
100		100
47	e. 1[]Politically biased in their reporting? <u>OR</u>	45
39	2[]Careful that their reporting is <u>not</u> politically biased?	36
7	3[]NEITHER APPLIES	7
<u>7</u>	0[]DON'T KNOW	<u>12</u>
100		100

7.	Do you feel news organizations often invade people's privacy or do they generally respect people's privacy?	<u>6/85</u>	
75	1[]Invade people's privacy	73	
19	2[]Respect people's privacy	21	
<u>6</u>	0[]Don't know	<u>6</u>	
100		100	
8.	Some people think that by criticizing political leaders, news organizations keep political leaders from doing their job. Others think that such criticism is worth it because it keeps political leaders from doing things that should not be done. Which position is closer to your opinion?	<u>6/85</u>	
26	1[]Keep political leaders from doing job	<u>17</u>	
60	2[]Keep political leaders from doing things that should not be done	67	
<u>14</u>	0[]Can't say	<u>16</u>	
100		100	
9.	Some people think that by criticizing the military, news organizations weaken the nation's defenses. Others think that such criticism helps keep our nation militarily prepared. Which position is closer to your opinion?	<u>6/85</u>	
31	1[]Weakens defenses	<u>31</u>	
57	2[]Keeps nation prepared	51	
<u>12</u>	0[]Can't say	<u>18</u>	
100		100	
10.	Prior to the recent Iran arms controversy, do you think the Reagan Administration was more open and cooperative with the press, less open and cooperative, or about the same as previous administrations?		
25	1[]More open and cooperative		
31	2[]Less open and cooperative		
39	3[]About the same		
<u>5</u>	0[]Don't know		
100			

Next, I have some questions about the secret arms sales to Iran and the apparent diversion of arms profits to the Nicaraguan contras. . .

11. How closely would you say you have followed this news story: very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?

		<u>CHALLENGER</u>	⁸⁶ <u>CHERNOBYL</u>
20	1[]Very closely	80	46
47	2[]Fairly closely	16	34
23	3[]Not too closely	3	15
10	4[]Not at all closely	1	5
	0[]Can't say		
<u>*</u>		<u>*</u>	<u>*</u>
<u>100</u>		<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

GO TO Q. 13

12. In general, how would you rate the job news organizations have done in covering the Iran-Contra affair: excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

19	1[]Excellent	57	21
49	2[]Good	33	50
22	3[]Only fair	7	21
9	4[]Poor	2	6
1	0[]Don't know		
<u>1</u>		<u>*</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>100</u>		<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

ASK ALL:

13. Do you think news organizations have given the Iran-Contra affair too much news coverage, too little coverage, or about the right amount?

		<u>TERRORISM (86)</u>
44	1[]Too much	51
9	2[]Too little	7
43	3[]About right	40
4	0[]Don't know	2
<u>4</u>		<u>2</u>
<u>100</u>		<u>100</u>

14. Do you think the Iran-Contra affair is so serious that it makes you doubt Ronald Reagan's ability to run the country or is it not serious enough to make you question Reagan's ability to do his job?

42	1[]So serious that Reagan's ability is doubted ...
53	2[]Not serious enough
5	0[]Don't know
<u>5</u>	
<u>100</u>	

15. In your opinion, who has done the most to get to the bottom of the Iran-Contra affair? (READ)

14 1[] President Reagan

6 2[] The White House staff

20 3[] Congress, or

47 4[] News organizations?

1 5[] OTHER (SPECIFY): _____

12 0[] DON'T KNOW

12
100

16. In their coverage of the Iran-Contra affair, do you think news organizations are more interested in learning and reporting the facts OR more interested in attacking Ronald Reagan?

56 1[] Learning and reporting the facts -- GO TO Q. 18

35 2[] Attacking Reagan

9 0[] Don't know -- GO TO Q. 18

9
100

17. Why do you think news organizations are so interested in attacking Reagan: (READ, CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

5 1[] They don't like Reagan personally,

21 2[] They don't like Reagan's policies, or

77 3[] They think it makes a good story?

1 4[] OTHER (SPECIFY): _____

0[] DON'T KNOW

3
107

(Multiple Response)

ASK ALL:

18. How do you think most journalists personally feel about the President's recent troubles? Do you think. . . (READ. ACCEPT ONLY ONE ANSWER)

- 17 1[] They enjoy Reagan's difficulties?
- 42 2[] They are unhappy about the situation? OR
- 34 3[] They don't much care one way or the other?
- 7 0[] DON'T KNOW

100

19. Thinking back to news coverage of Watergate, do you think news organizations were more interested in learning and reporting the facts OR more interested in attacking Richard Nixon?

- 48 1[] Learning and reporting the facts -- GO TO Q. 21
- 38 2[] Attacking Nixon
- 14 0[] Don't know -- GO TO Q. 21

100

20. Why do you think news organizations were so interested in attacking Nixon: (READ. CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

- 20 1[] They didn't like Nixon personally,
- 23 2[] They didn't like Nixon's policies, or
- 67 3[] They thought it made a good story?
- 1 4[] OTHER (SPECIFY): _____

0[] DON'T KNOW
(Multiple Response)

1
112

ASK ALL:

21. How do you feel most journalists personally felt about President Nixon's troubles during Watergate? Do you think. . . (READ. ACCEPT ONLY ONE ANSWER)

- 19 1[] They enjoyed Nixon's difficulties?
- 35 2[] They were unhappy about the situation? OR
- 34 3[] They didn't much care one way or the other? ...
- 12 0[] DON'T KNOW

100

22. In covering the Iran-Contra affair, do you feel news organizations have generally been careful not to overemphasize rumors and stories that cannot be independently confirmed, or have they given too much emphasis to rumors and unconfirmed stories?

38 1[] Careful not to overemphasize rumors and unconfirmed stories

50 2[] Too much emphasis on such stories

12
100 0[] Don't know

23. Some people feel that the amount of coverage news organizations are giving to the Iran-Contra affair is good for the country because it is important that all the facts get out. Others feel it is bad for the country because such news coverage of our government's mistakes makes the U.S. look bad in the eyes of the world. Which comes closer to your view?

45 1[] Good for the country

46 2[] Bad for the country

9
100 0[] Don't know

24. Prior to the Iran arms controversy, do you feel news organizations worked hard enough in investigating the Reagan Administration's actions, or were they too easy on the Reagan Administration compared with the way they investigated previous administrations?

53 1[] Worked hard enough

36 2[] Too easy on Reagan

11
100 0[] Don't know

25. As a result of the Iran-Contra affair, do you feel the Reagan Administration should relax its policies to maintain secrecy and prevent news leaks, put tougher policies in place, or not change current policies?

12 1[] Relax

46 2[] Tougher

31 3[] No change

11
100 0[] Don't know

26. How much do you feel news coverage of the American hostages' situation pressured the Reagan Administration to deal with Iran in an attempt to get the hostages released? Do you feel news coverage put a great deal of pressure, some pressure, only a little pressure, or no pressure on the Reagan Administration?

40 1[]A great deal
 34 2[]Some
 13 3[]Only a little
 9 4[]No pressure
 4 0[]Don't know
100

27. Do you feel Ronald Reagan is doing all he can to get to the bottom of the Iran-Contra affair, OR do you feel he is holding back to protect himself or others, OR do you feel he is holding back to protect national security?

28	1[]Doing all he can	<u>Newsweek, 12/86</u> 23
38	2[]Protecting himself and others	38
26	3[]Protecting national security	29
8	0[]Don't know	<u>10</u> 100
<u>100</u>		

And now, just a few questions so that my office will have some information about the background of each respondent.

101. In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?

1[]Republican
 2[]Democrat
 3[]Independent
 4[]Other party
 0[]No answer

102. If "1" represents someone who is very conservative in politics and "6" represents someone who is very liberal, where on this scale of 1 to 6 would you place yourself? You may, of course, choose any number between 1 and 6. (CIRCLE RESPONSE)

CONSERVATIVE

LIBERAL

1 2 3 4 5 6 0[]DK