

The Year Was...

1986

The latter part of the twentieth century produced a veritable avalanche of technological and scientific advances, spewing forth discoveries and inventions at a rate that eventually made even the most amazing developments seem almost routine.

It was, therefore, all the more shocking when, in a single year, there was not just one, but two catastrophic failures of technology. On January 28, 1986, only two days after Voyager 2 began reporting on the mysteries of Uranus to spellbound scientists back on Earth, the space shuttle Challenger exploded, claiming the lives of all on board. And on April 26, an accident at a nuclear power plant in Chernobyl killed or contaminated thousands in the Soviet Union and sent a radioactive cloud wafting over much of Europe.

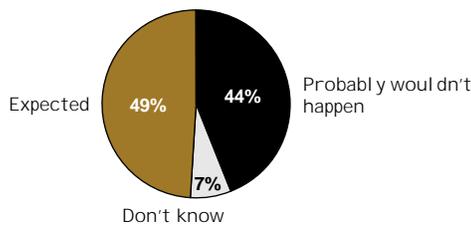
It must have been something of a relief to the public to turn its attention to a far more benign encounter with technology, as Americans were presented for the first time with the opportunity to see US Senate proceedings on television. Judging by their survey responses before and after the fact, though, the prospect of watching their government in action was far more appealing than actually doing so.

Possibly more satisfying was the celebration that summer of the centennial of the Statue of Liberty. It offered a chance to feel proud and patriotic, to honor the generations of immigrants who had helped build the modern nation, and to appreciate the reassuringly enduring quality of a decidedly low-tech symbol that had stood the test of time.

—Lisa Ferraro Parmelee

Question:

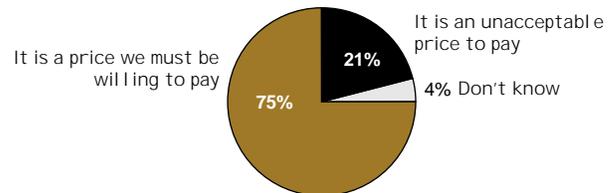
As you know, the space shuttle Challenger exploded this Tuesday just over a minute after liftoff... and the seven people aboard it were killed. Is this something you've been expecting to happen for some time, or did you think our repeated successes in space meant that a tragedy of this kind probably wouldn't happen?



Source: Survey by the Roper Organization/US News and World Report, January 29-30, 1986.

Question:

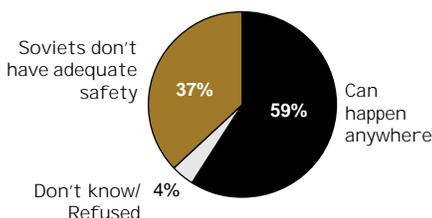
...Please tell me which... you agree with more. [The destruction of the space shuttle Challenger] is a regrettable disaster but nevertheless a price we must be willing to pay for the exploration and mastery of space, [or] it is not only a regrettable disaster but an unacceptable price to pay for the exploration and mastery of space.



Source: Survey by the Roper Organization/US News and World Report, January 29-30, 1986.

Question:

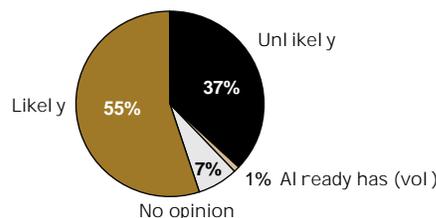
As you may know, there's been a major disaster at a nuclear power plant in the Soviet Union. Please tell me which one of the two following statements comes closer to your point of view. This disaster happened because the Soviets don't have adequate safety at nuclear power plants, [or] this kind of accident can happen anywhere.



Source: Survey by Gordon S. Black Company/USA Today, April 30-May 1, 1986.

Question:

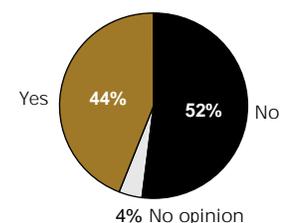
A few days ago there was a major accident at a nuclear power plant in the Soviet Union. Do you think that kind of accident is likely to happen in the United States, or would it be unlikely?



Source: Survey by CBS News, April 30-May 1, 1986.

Question:

Are you concerned that nuclear fallout from the accident in the Soviet Union could affect you?

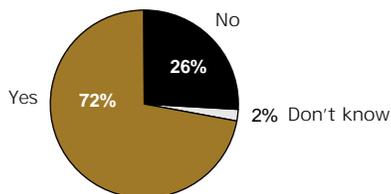


Source: Survey by CBS News, April 30-May 1, 1986.

Senate Cam

Question:

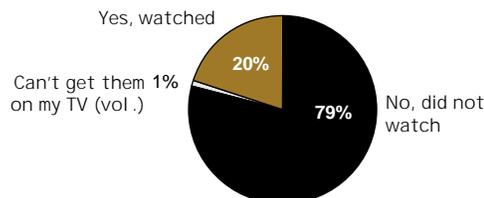
Do you personally think you would watch the televised coverage of the US Senate if it were available to you, or not?



Source: Survey by the Associated Press/Media General, April 3-11, 1986.

Question:

As you may know, the US Senate began televising its sessions on June 2. Have you yourself watched part of any of those sessions on TV since then?

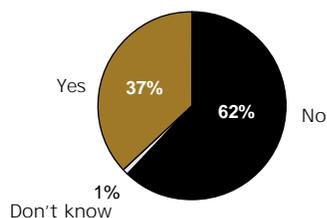


Source: Survey by the ABC News/Washington Post, June 19-24, 1986.

Watch It Later

Question:

Do you happen to own a video cassette recorder with which you can tape shows that appear on TV, or not?

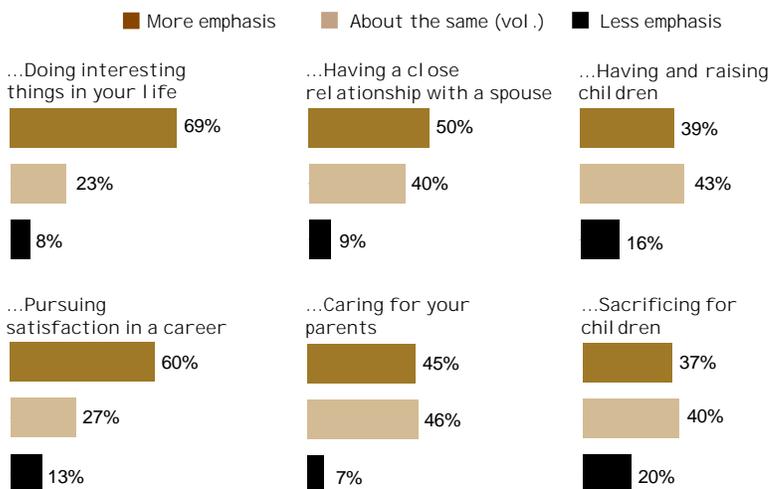


Source: Survey by The Roper Organization, September 20-27, 1986.

Boomers in Their Prime

Questions:

Compared to your parents, would you say that you personally place more emphasis, about the same emphasis, or less emphasis on...?



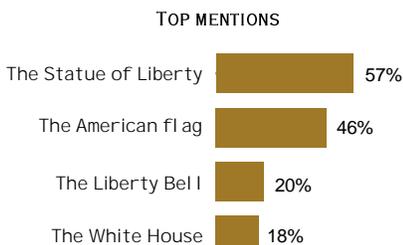
Note: Asked of those aged 30-40 years.

Source: Surveys by Yankelovich Clancy Shulman/Time, April 15-17, 1986.

100 Years Beside the Golden Door

Question:

This country has many symbols which are important to it. Which one or two of these best represent America to you?



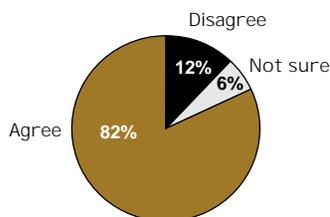
Note: Multiple responses were allowed

Source: Survey by the Roper Organization/US News and World Report/CNN, June 11-15, 1986.

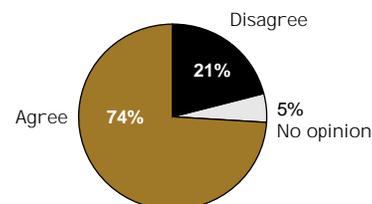
Questions:

Now let me read you some statements about the Statue of Liberty celebration. For each, tell me if you agree or disagree...

...As a nation founded by immigrants from many countries, it is right to have a national celebration to honor them.



...It gives you a real up feeling to hear, see and participate in all the patriotic talk and fanfare.



Source: Survey by Louis Harris and Associates, June 11-16, 1986.