

# This Just In!

Jimmy Swaggart once said, “The media is ruled by Satan,” and Jimmy Swaggart should know, having spent a lot of time becoming pretty knowledgeable about both.

Indeed, there are times when the phrase “news media” does seem to conjure up a vision of some sort of faceless, amorphous, evil—or at least obnoxious—force, when uttered by those who would decry the press’s many reputed sins. How many times have we heard politicians refer to the “media” as though it were a dirty word?

The public has a far more nuanced—and often more cordial—relationship with its news providers than these references would suggest.

True, the amount of trust and confidence Americans say they have in the mass media has declined significantly since the 1970s, and the public puts journalists at the low end of the honesty and ethics spectrum. Nearly three-quarters also think the media have too much power and influence in Washington, and that they use their influence to drive controversy rather than just report the news about it.

Majorities, some of them quite large, worry about biases they perceive in the news, and the ease with which special interest groups seem to be able to manipulate the press. And for decades, people have condemned the amount of coverage news organizations devote to such sensational stories as the O.J. Simpson trial, the death of Princess Diana, and the Monica

Lewinsky scandal—even as other indicators, such as the Pew News Interest Index, have shown that they generally follow them quite avidly.

Even journalists themselves sometimes take a rather jaundiced view of their own profession, with two-thirds majorities in a Pew Research Center poll seeing a failure to draw a clear line between reporting and commentary and an excessive predisposition to entertain.

Yet it is these very journalists who comprise the frontline of that seemingly amorphous force we call “the media,” and, despite a reputation for being cynical and hardboiled, they seem to be a pretty idealistic bunch. Nearly two-thirds feel the thing that most distinguishes journalism from anything else is the contribution it makes to society; 100% say that getting the facts right is a core principle of their profession; 96% say an important reason for being a journalist is to provide people with information they need in their lives; and 93% are proud of the work they do.

And the public, for all its professed dissatisfaction with the news media in recent years, still acknowledges the vital role a free press plays in a free society. On September 11, when there was nowhere else for millions of Americans to turn for information, we were forcibly reminded of just how much we need “the media,” and we roundly applauded their efforts.

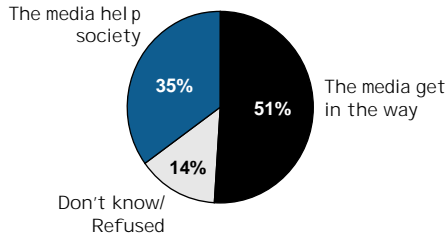
—Lisa Ferraro Parmelee, Editor



# Good News and Bad News

## Question:

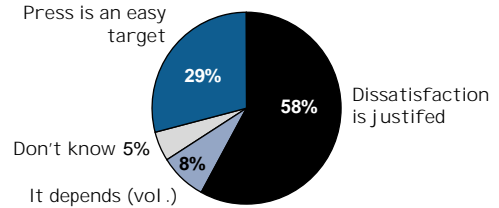
Which of the following two statements about the news media do you agree with more?... The news media helps society to solve its problems. The news media gets in the way of society solving its problems.



Source: Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates/Pew Research Center, November 13-19, 2001.

## Question:

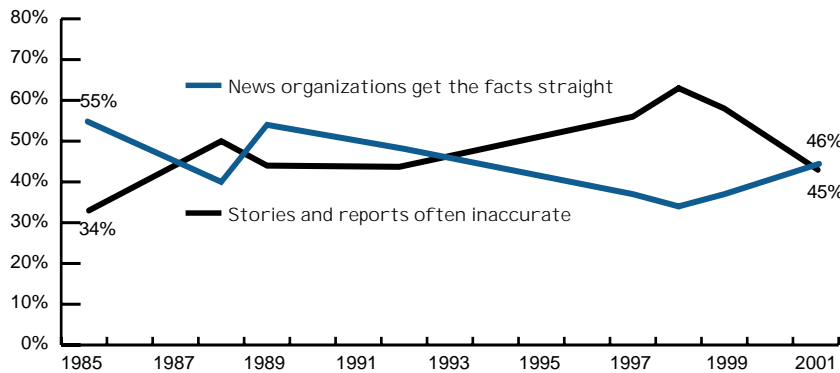
Recent nationwide polls have shown that there is increased public dissatisfaction with the press. Do you think this public dissatisfaction with the media is justified, or do you think the press is simply an easy target to blame for deeper problems in our society?



Source: Survey by Urban & Associates/American Society of Newspaper Editors, April-May 1998.

## Question:

In general, do you think news organizations get the facts straight, or do you think that their stories and reports are often inaccurate?

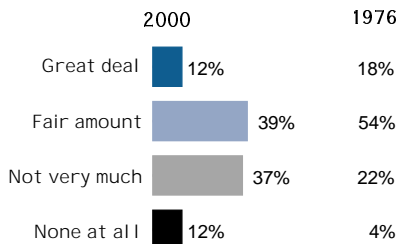


	Get the facts straight	Often inaccurate	Don't know/Refused
July 1985	55%	34%	11%
August 1988	40	50	10
August 1989	54	44	2
January 1992	49	44	7
February 1997	37	56	7
February 1998	34	63	3
February 1999	37	58	5
November 2001	46	45	9

Source: Surveys by Princeton Survey Research Associates/Pew Research Center, latest that of November 13-19, 2001.

## Question:

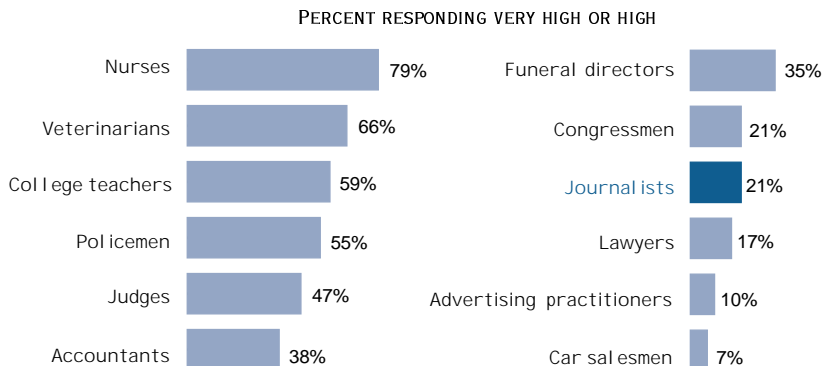
In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media, such as newspapers, TV, and radio, when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately, and fairly—a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or none at all?



Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization, latest that of July 6-9, 2000.

## Question:

Please tell me how you would rate the honesty and ethical standards of people in these different fields—very high, high, average, low, or very low?



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, November 13-15, 2000.

# Following the Leaders

**Question:**

Some people think that by criticizing 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?

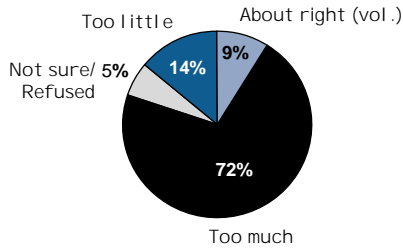


	Keeps leaders from wrongdoing	Keeps leaders from their job	Don't know/Refused
June 1985	67%	17%	16%
December 1986	60	26	14
August 1989	68	23	9
January 1994	66	24	10
February 1997	56	32	12
February 1998	55	39	6
February 1999	58	31	11
November 2001	54	32	14

Source: Surveys by Princeton Survey Research Associates/Pew Research Center, latest that of November 13-19, 2001.

**Question:**

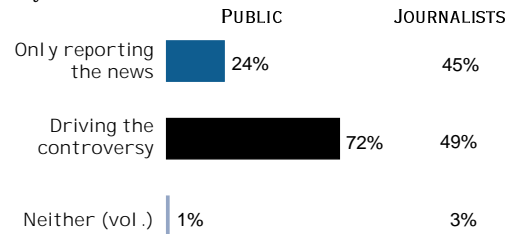
Do you think... the news media have too much or too little power and influence in Washington?



Source: Survey by Harris Interactive, February 13-19, 2002.

**Question:**

Some people say that in covering the personal and ethical behavior of public figures, news organizations are only reporting the news. Others say that news organizations are driving the controversies themselves, by devoting as much coverage to these stories as they do. Which view comes closer to your own?



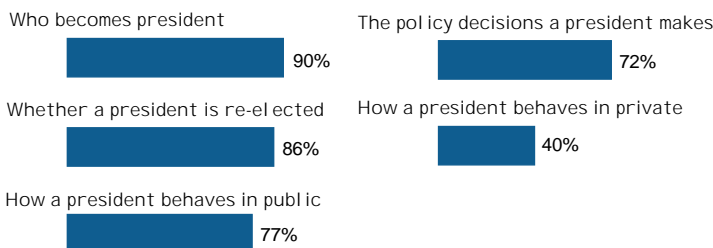
Source: Surveys by Princeton Survey Research Associates/Pew Research Center, February 18-21, 1999 (public) and November 20, 1998-February 11, 1999 (journalists). The latter survey polled 552 national and local journalists and news executives. Responses shown are those of the national news media.

## The Press and the President

**Question:**

How much influence do you feel the news media have on each of the following areas? Would you say they have a great deal of influence, a moderate amount, only a little, or no real influence at all?...

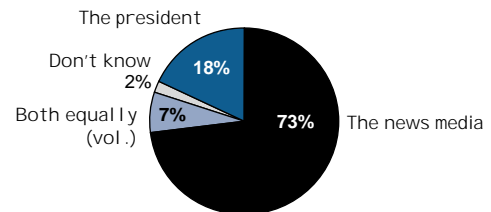
PERCENT RESPONDING GREAT DEAL OR MODERATE AMOUNT



Source: Survey by Roper Starch Worldwide/History Channel, January 27-30, 2000.

**Question:**

Thinking about... US presidents in general, who do you believe has more influence on what goes on in this country—the president or the news media?

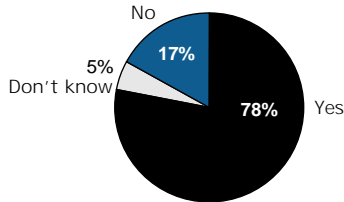


Source: Survey by Roper Starch Worldwide/History Channel, January 27-30, 2000.

# On the Bias

## Question:

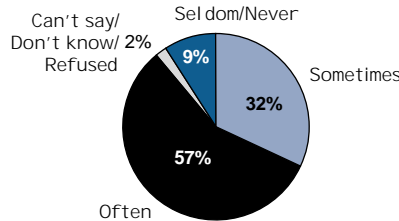
Some people say that the news media are biased, while others say that's not true. In general, do you agree with the assessment that there's bias in the news media?



**Source:** Survey by Urban & Associates/American Society of Newspaper Editors, April-May 1998.

## Question:

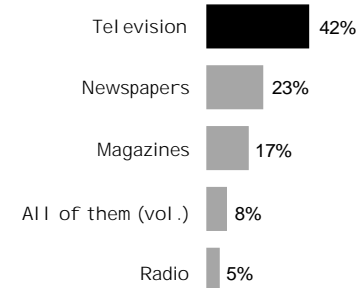
How often do you think members of the news media let their own political preferences influence the way they report the news... often, sometimes, seldom, or never?



**Source:** Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates/Pew Research Center, October 4-8, 2000.

## Question:

Which of the news media do you, personally, find to be the most biased—television, radio, newspapers, or magazines?

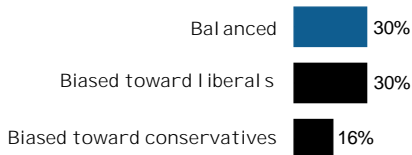


**Note:** Asked of those who said there's bias in the news media (78%).

**Source:** Survey by Urban & Associates/American Society of Newspaper Editors, April-May 1998.

## Question:

Do you think that stories in the news media are generally balanced, or are they biased toward liberal positions or biased toward conservative positions?

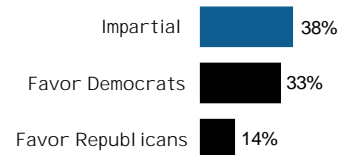


**Note:** Asked of registered voters.

**Source:** Survey by Opinion Dynamics/Fox News, January 30-31, 2002.

## Question:

In your opinion, do journalists generally favor Democrats or Republicans, or are they impartial?

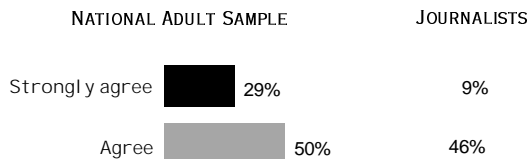


**Note:** Asked of registered voters.

**Source:** Survey by Fabrizio, McLaughlin & Associates, November 9-11, 1999.

## Question:

[Would you say that you] strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree?... I believe that it's pretty easy for special interest groups to manipulate the press.

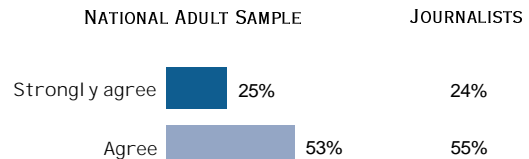


**Note:** Journalist survey used self-administered questionnaires to poll 1,714 journalists working at US newspapers with daily circulation of 5,000 or more.

**Source:** Surveys by Urban & Associates/American Society of Newspaper Editors, April-May 1998 (public) and May-June 1998 (journalists).

## Question:

[Would you say that you] strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree?... It's pretty easy for me to spot when the personal bias or preconceived notions of a reporter show up in a news story.



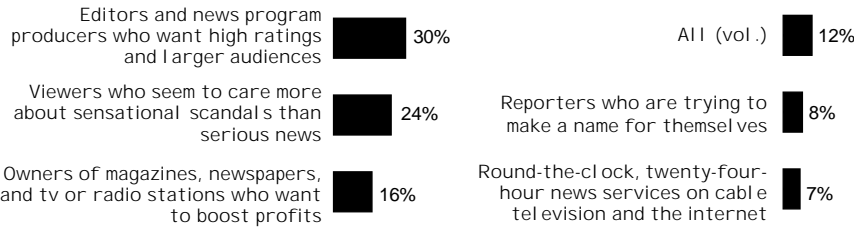
**Note:** Journalist survey used self-administered questionnaires to poll 1,714 journalists working at US newspapers with daily circulation of 5,000 or more.

**Source:** Surveys by Urban & Associates/American Society of Newspaper Editors, April-May 1998 (public) and May-June 1998 (journalists).

# It's Sensational!

## Question:

Some people feel that there has been an increase in the amount of coverage that news organizations give to sensationalized news and scandals these days. Which one of the following do you think would be most to blame for an increase in coverage of sensationalized news and scandals?...

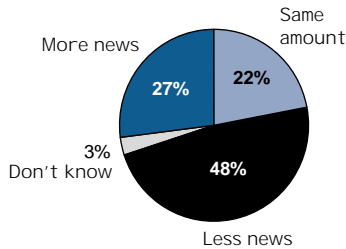


Source: Survey by NBC News/Wall Street Journal, September 10-13, 1998.

## Following Too Closely

### Question:

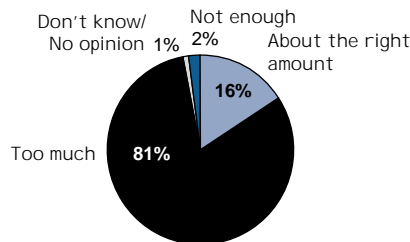
...Tell me if you would like to have more news about [what happened to Edward Kennedy at Chappaquiddick Island], less news, or about the same amount of news about it as now?



Source: Survey by the Los Angeles Times, December 16-18, 1979.

### Question:

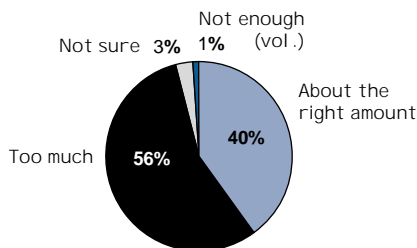
Would you say the news media have given the O.J. Simpson case too much coverage, not enough or about the right amount?



Source: Survey by ABC News, September 27, 1995.

### Question:

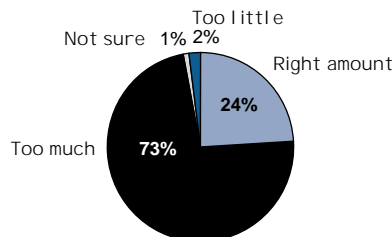
Do you think that there has been too much press coverage regarding the death of Princess Diana or that it has received that right amount of press coverage?



Source: Survey by NBC News/Wall Street Journal, September 11-15, 1997.

### Question:

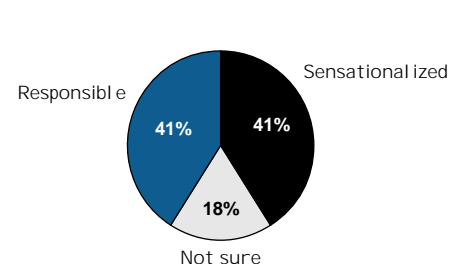
Thinking about the media's coverage of the investigation into President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky... do you think the media has paid too much attention to this story, too little attention, or the right amount of attention?



Source: Survey by Yankelovich/Time/CNN, September 16-17, 1998.

### Question:

Do you think the news media coverage of the Catholic Church sex abuse scandal has been responsible or has the coverage been sensationalized?



Note: Asked of registered voters.

Source: Survey by Opinion Dynamics/Fox News, April 2-3, 2002.

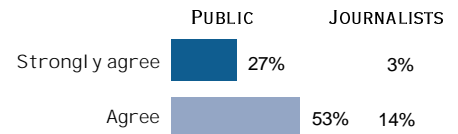
## Peddle

### Your Papers

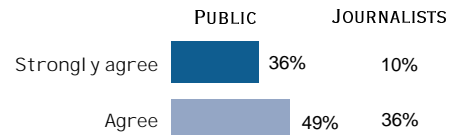
#### Questions:

[Would you say that you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree?]

Journalists chase sensational stories because they think it'll sell papers, not because they think it's important news.



I believe that newspapers frequently over-dramatize some news stories just to sell more papers.



Note: Journalist survey used self-administered questionnaires to poll 1,714 journalists working at US newspapers with daily circulation of 5,000 or more.

Source: Surveys by Urban & Associates/American Society of Newspaper Editors, April-May 1998 (public) and May-June 1998 (journalists).

# The Being of a Journalist

## Striking the Balance

All of the data on the next two pages are from *Striking the Balance*, a study of 552 news media professionals conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates for the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press. A national news media sample (n=237), a local news media sample (n=254), and an internet sample (n=61) were interviewed between November 20, 1998 and February 11, 1999. The respondents included executives, senior editors and producers, and working journalists and editors. The responses shown here are those of the national news media.

### Question:

In your opinion, what is it about journalism that distinguishes it from anything else? That is, what makes journalism, journalism?

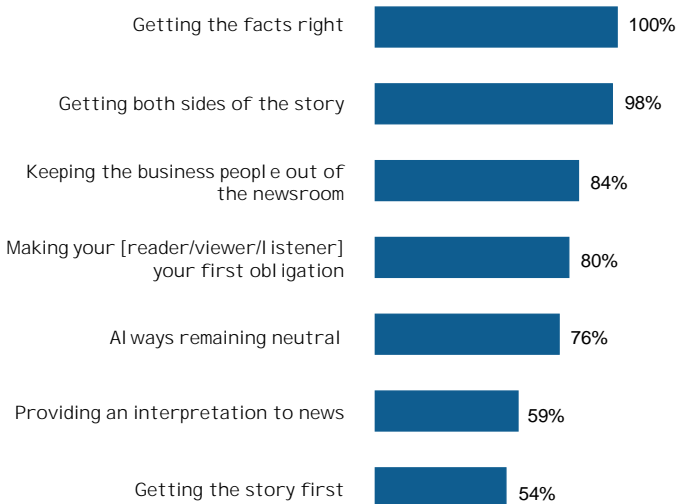


Note: Multiple responses were allowed.

### Questions:

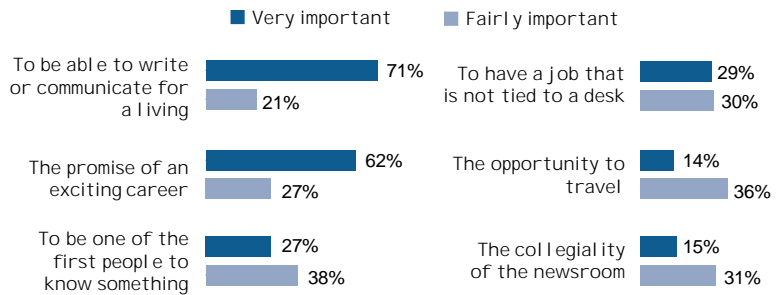
As I read from a list, please tell me whether you think this is a core principle of journalism, or not. How about...?

PERCENT RESPONDING CORE PRINCIPLE



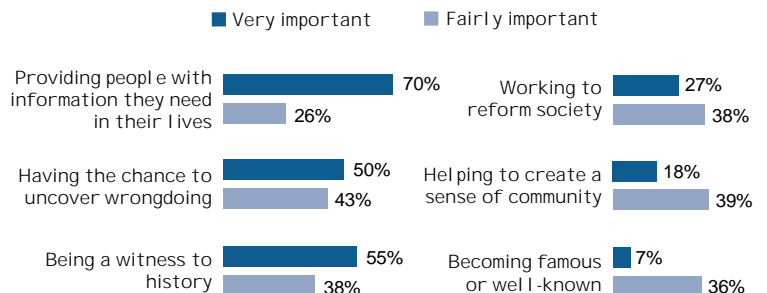
### Questions:

I'm going to read to you a list of personal reasons people sometimes give for entering journalism. As I read each, please tell me how important—if at all—it was to you. How about...? Was this very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important?



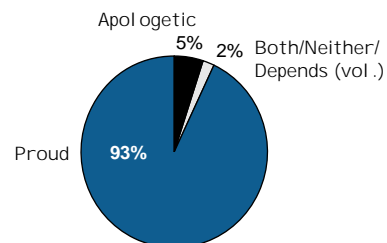
### Questions:

Now I'm going to read a list of reasons that people give for being journalists. As I read each one, please tell me how important—if at all—you think it is for journalists you know. How about...? Do you think this is very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important for journalists you know?



### Question:

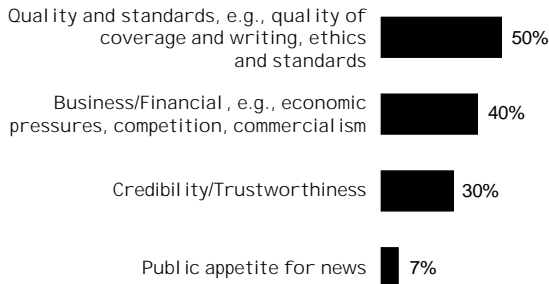
When you meet someone for the first time and tell them where you work, do you generally feel proud, or do you feel somewhat apologetic?



# Journalists on the Press

## Question:

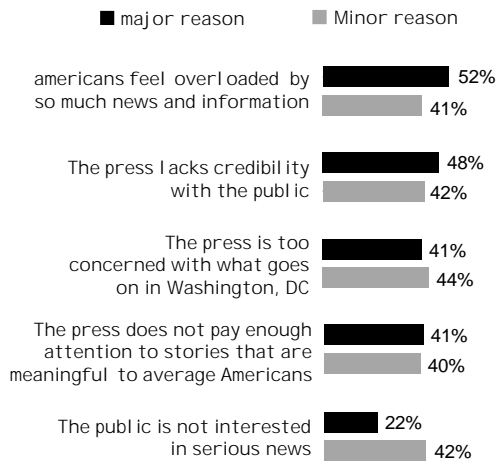
What do you feel is the most important problem facing journalism today?



Note: Multiple responses were allowed.

## Questions:

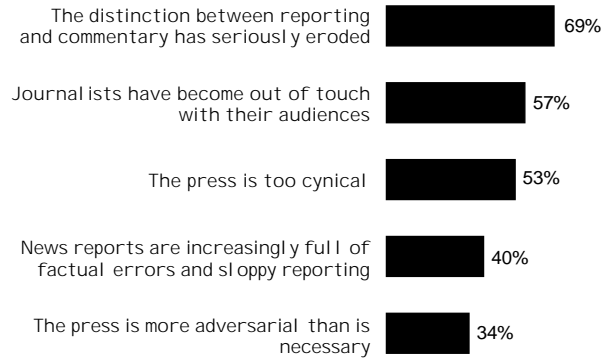
I'm going to read a number of possible reasons why some types of news media have lost audience or readership. For each one, please tell me if you think it is a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason for this problem. How about...?



## Questions:

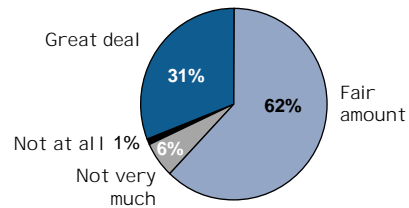
I'm going to ask you a few questions about some criticisms made of the press. For each, I would like to know if you feel this is a problem, or not. ...Overall, do you think this is a valid criticism of the news media, or not? Some critics charge that...

PERCENT RESPONDING VALID CRITICISM



## Question:

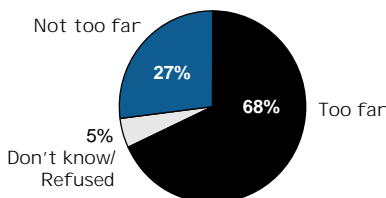
In deciding what stories to cover, how much do you think journalists should take into account what the public is interested in—a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or not at all?



## Balancing Act

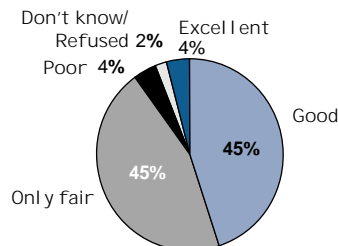
### Question:

In attempting to attract readers or viewers, are news organizations going too far in the direction of entertainment, or not?



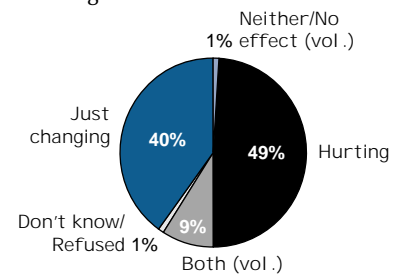
### Question:

How good a job does journalism do striking a balance between the two goals of what audiences want to know and what's important for them to know?



### Question:

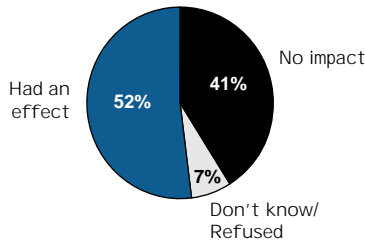
In your opinion, is increased bottom line pressure seriously hurting the quality of news coverage these days, or is it mostly just changing the way news organizations do things?



# Turning Points

## Question:

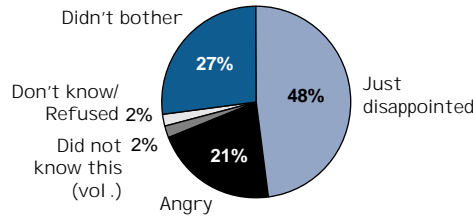
Early on election night (November 7, 2000), news organizations mistakenly declared Al Gore the winner in Florida. Do you think this mistake had any effect on how people in other parts of the country voted, or don't you think it had any impact?



Source: Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates/Pew Research Center, November 10-12, 2000.

## Question:

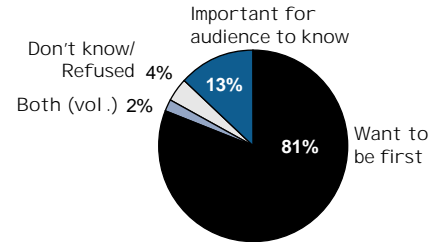
What was your reaction when you first learned that news organizations had made a mistake early Wednesday morning in declaring George W. Bush the winner of the presidential election? Were you angry with the news organizations, just disappointed in them, or didn't it bother you that much?



Source: Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates/Pew Research Center, November 10-12, 2000.

## Question:

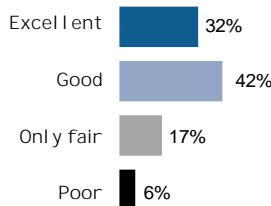
Why do you think news organizations sometimes make projections too quickly? Is it mostly because they want to be first to call the winner or mostly because they feel it is important for their audience to know the outcome as soon as possible?



Source: Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates/Pew Research Center, November 10-12, 2000.

## Question:

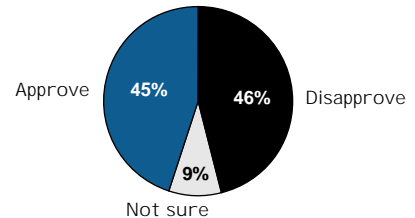
In general, how would you rate the job the press has done in covering the terrorist attacks and the war against terrorism—excellent, good, only fair, or poor?



Source: Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates/Pew Research Center, October 10-14, 2001.

## Question:

Do you approve or disapprove of the job the media is doing covering the war on terrorism?

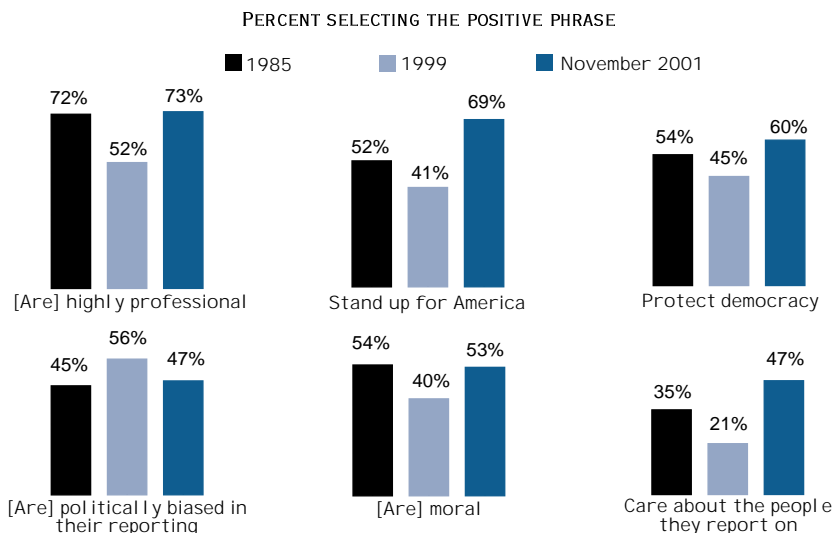


Note: Asked of registered voters.

Source: Survey by Opinion Dynamics/Fox News, October 31-November 1, 2001.

## Questions:

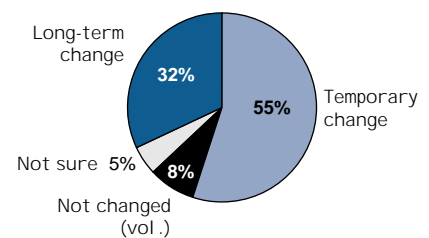
I'm going to read you some pairs of opposite phrases. After I read each pair, tell me which one phrase you feel better describes news organizations generally. [News organizations...]



Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization/Times Mirror, June 22-July 13, 1985 and Princeton Survey Research Associates/Pew Research Center, February 18-21, 1999 and November 13-19, 2001.

## Question:

[...Please tell me whether you think that this change is temporary and will return to normal after awhile, or whether you think that it is a long-term change that will last for many years.] ...The news media are paying more attention to important issues.



Source: Survey by NBC News/Wall Street Journal, December 8-10, 2001.