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**The People, The Press & Politics**  
**Campaign '92:**  
**The Governor & The Press**

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Americans in the Editor's Chair

MAJORITY OF PUBLIC WOULD RUN CLINTON STORY;  
DIVIDED ON ISSUE'S RELEVANCE

The American public is divided on the issue of whether marital infidelity is something voters should consider when judging a candidate for the presidency. At the same time, a 52% majority of Americans who know of the charges against Clinton say that if they were heading a news organization they would report them. But a strong minority of 43% say they would not report these allegations about Clinton's marital infidelity to their readers or viewers.

The nationwide *Times Mirror* survey of 1008 adults found 52% of the public saying that marital infidelity has little to do with a candidate's ability to handle the job, but as many as 40% saying that this is something voters should consider in judging presidential candidates. The current findings on this question closely parallel the results of a nationwide Times Mirror poll taken four years ago after Gary Hart's candidacy came under fire for similar reasons. The January 1988 national survey found 43% saying marital infidelity should be taken into account by voters, while 50% disagreed.

The current poll finds opinions about these issues strongly linked to partisanship. Although a 54% to 39% majority of Republicans think marital infidelity is something voters should consider when evaluating a presidential candidate, only 33% of Democrats and 35% of Independents concur. Majorities of both groups feel this should *not* be a consideration (62% and 54% respectively).

Republicans and Democrats also differ on whether they would report the charges against Clinton if they headed a news organization. A 61% to 34% majority of Republicans would go with the story, while opinion divided 39% to 56% in favor of *not* running the story among Democrats. In this case Independents line up with the Republicans in favor of reporting by a 57% to 38% margin.

The Times Mirror survey was taken over a five day period (Friday to Tuesday) both before and after Clinton's appearance on *60 Minutes* and the subsequent press conference by his accuser. The survey found no significant difference in opinion between the 618 interviews conducted Friday - Sunday and the 390 interviews completed Monday and Tuesday evenings, except that awareness of the allegations against Clinton rose from 67% to 79% over that period.

As the public divides on the legitimacy of infidelity as a basis for judging a candidate, it has a mixed view on the press's performance. Forty-four percent think the press has covered the charges against Clinton *very or fairly* responsibly, but nearly as many (41%) say the press has acted *not too or not at all* responsibly in this matter. Only 8% of the Times Mirror sample had high praise for the press in rating its handling of the story as very responsible, while twice as many (17%) condemned it thoroughly in saying the press was not at all responsible in the way they covered the Clinton allegations.

A large element in the public opinion about the press is the view that news organizations are mainly interested in reporting the Clinton story because of its audience appeal. Seventy-three percent believe that press coverage has been driven by the belief that such stories draw large audiences compared with 21% who say the press is principally motivated by the feeling that voters should know about Clinton's character and personality.

## **SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

The survey results are based on telephone interviews conducted among a nationally representative sample of 1,008 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period of January 24 - 28, 1992. 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.

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 CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE PRESS  
 January 24-28, 1992  
 N = 1008

Q. 1 Have you heard or read about charges that Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, has had extramarital affairs.

All Resp.	Interviews:		
	<u>Fri-Sun</u>	<u>Mon-Tu.</u>	
71	67	79	Yes
<u>29</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>21</u>	No
100	100	100	Total
(1008)	(618)	(390)	N

Q. 2 In general, do you think marital infidelity is something voters should consider in judging a candidate for the presidency, or do you think it has little to do with a candidate's ability to handle the job of President?

All Resp.	Interviews:		
	<u>Fri-Sun</u>	<u>Mon-Tu.</u>	
40	40	39	Yes should consider
52	51	53	No should not
<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>8</u>	Can't Say
100	100	100	Total

Q. 3 Thinking about the newspapers and news programs that you see... how responsibly have these news organizations covered these charges against Clinton? ( read 1-4)<sup>1</sup>

All Resp.	Interviews:		
	<u>Fri-Sun</u>	<u>Mon-Tu.</u>	
8	10	8	Very responsibly
36	33	39	Fairly responsibly
24	23	24	Not too responsibly
17	18	14	Not at all responsibly
<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>15</u>	DK
100	100	100	Total
(743)	(423)	(320)	N

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<sup>1</sup> Asked of people who said they had heard about the charges against Clinton.

Q. 4 If you were running a news organization today would you report the charges that Bill Clinton had extramarital affairs or would you not report these charges to your readers or viewers?<sup>2</sup>

All Resp.	Interviews:		
	<u>Fri-Sun</u>	<u>Mon-Tu.</u>	
52	51	54	Yes would
43	42	43	No
<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>3</u>	DK
100	100	100	Total

Q. 5 What do you think is the main reason why news organizations are reporting these charges (read categories 1 & 2)<sup>2</sup>

All Resp.	Interviews:		
	<u>Fri-Sun</u>	<u>Mon-Tu.</u>	
21	20	23	Because they feel voters should know about the personality and character of a presidential candidate
			OR
73	73	71	Because they think such stories attract large audiences
<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>6</u>	DK
100	100	100	Total

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<sup>2</sup> Asked of people who said they had heard about charges against Clinton.