



Times Mirror
Center for
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N E W S Release

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**CLINTON'S PRESS JUDGED AS LESS FAIR
THAN BUSH'S AND REAGAN'S**

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CLINTON'S PRESS JUDGED AS LESS FAIR THAN BUSH'S AND REAGAN'S

Many Americans think the press is being unfair to Bill Clinton, and the public most often complains that the media has come to an earlier judgment about this President's performance than it did about his predecessors.

But the public does *not blame* the press for being too critical of Bill Clinton, nor for causing his slide in the polls. Most think that the President is less popular because he has done a poor job, not because the press has picked on him.

These are the latest findings of a nationwide *Times Mirror Center* survey that found more Americans believe the media is *unfair* to Bill Clinton than thought it was unfair to George Bush and Ronald Reagan during some of the most difficult times of their administrations.

Just 51% of Times Mirror's respondents thought that news organizations are being fair to Bill Clinton, while nearly as many (43%) thought the press is unfair to the new President. In January of 1992, as George Bush's approval ratings were sinking in the face of news reports about a bad economy and criticisms from Democratic presidential aspirants, the President's press treatment was judged as fair by no fewer than 77% of Americans. Similarly, in December of 1986 when the Reagan Administration was reeling from non-stop news coverage of the Iran-Contra revelations, 67% thought the press was being fair to the President.

Although many Americans think the press has been unfair in judging Clinton too quickly, the public thinks that the President's own shortcomings are the principal reason for his fall from grace since he took office. Forty-four percent said they thought the President was less popular than a few months ago because he has not done a very good job; 31% cited an uncooperative Congress, while only 20% blamed a too critical press as the reason for the President's problems.

A Rush to Judgment

By and large, the public does not see the press as too critical either of Clinton's job performance, or his personality and style. Only one in three (35%) see the press as too critical of Clinton's policies and performance and about the same percentage (36%) think the media has been too critical of Clinton personally.

But the public believes that the media has been too *hasty* in its evaluations of Clinton's performance. Forty-five percent of those polled by the Times Mirror Center thought that compared to previous administrations, news organizations have been too quick to judge Clinton. Eight percent believed that Clinton has not been judged quickly enough, and 44% believed that the President has been judged at about the same pace as previous administrations.

Looking forward, the public does not think that media criticism of the Administration is so extensive that it will make it difficult for Clinton to succeed in Washington. In fact, most Americans (52%) believe that Clinton's problems with the press will not have such a serious effect on his presidency.

There may be some validity to that public forecast judging by how little attention Americans say they have paid to some of the most damaging episodes in Clinton's young presidency. Only one in seven Times Mirror respondents (13%) say they have paid close attention to the White House travel office controversy and just slightly more (18%) reported paying *very close* attention to Clinton's airport haircut. News about the withdrawn Lani Guinier nomination attracted a somewhat larger audience (21%).

The budget debate is attracting surprisingly little public attention, given the high level of public attentiveness to economic news and given the importance of economic evaluations to the President's overall standing with the public. Only 12% said they have been following very closely news about the debate in Congress over Bill Clinton's budget. Just a month ago, twice as many (27%) reported paying close attention to Republican opposition to the economic stimulus package.

A large number of respondents in the current poll said they were paying very close attention to the Clinton Administration's policies about Bosnia (26%) - about the same percentage that reported being attentive to this story in early May (24%). Also as in the past, respondents expressed as much interest in news about the workings of Hillary Clinton's health care reform task force, as in any facet of the Clinton administration.

Most Americans (51%) believe that Hillary Clinton herself has received neither too much, nor too little press criticism. However, somewhat more believe that coverage of the First Lady has been too critical (28%) rather than not critical enough (18%). But there is a significant gender gap on this question. Thirty-three percent of women think the press has been too critical of Hillary Clinton, while only 21% of men think so.

Both men and women who think the press has been too hard on Hillary Clinton attribute it to a press dislike for her unusual involvement in White House policy decisions. Few think the press does not like her personally (6%) or disagree with her on political and social issues (20%).

Views about the press' treatment of Bill Clinton are closely linked to partisanship. Republicans, uncharacteristically, take a more positive view of the press, with 66% thinking the media is being fair to Clinton and 32% unfair. Among Democrats the numbers are almost the reverse: (37%) fair, (57%) unfair. Independents divide 56% fair and 39% unfair. For perspective, 81% of Independents thought the press was being fair to George Bush in Times Mirror's January 1992 survey.

Most Americans (61%) also think that press scrutiny of Ross Perot is about right. Few think the press is too critical of the Texas billionaire (11%); however, somewhat more think the press has not been critical enough of Perot (22%).

FAIRNESS OF NEWS ORGANIZATIONS TO CLINTON ADMINISTRATION

	<i>Fair</i> %	<i>Unfair</i> %	<i>Don't know</i> %	<i>N</i>
Total	51	43	6=100	(1006)
Sex				
Male	54	41	5=100	(504)
Female	47	46	7=100	(502)
Race				
White	53	42	5=100	(856)
Non-white	39	54	7=100	(104)
Age				
Under 30	53	42	5=100	(223)
30-49	53	44	3=100	(447)
50+	46	45	9=100	(322)
Education				
College Grad.	48	48	4=100	(274)
H.S. Grad./Some College	53	43	4=100	(617)
< H.S. grad.	46	40	14=100	(114)
Family Income				
\$50,000+	51	45	4=100	(232)
\$30,000-\$49,999	53	46	1=100	(250)
\$20,000-\$29,999	54	41	5=100	(187)
< \$20,000	46	45	9=100	(255)
Region				
East	49	46	5=100	(200)
Midwest	45	51	4=100	(244)
South	55	38	7=100	(351)
West	52	42	6=100	(211)
Party ID				
Republican	66	32	2=100	(283)
Democrat	37	57	6=100	(339)
Independent	56	39	5=100	(352)

Question: In your opinion, are the news organizations you are familiar with being fair or unfair to the Clinton administration?

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

The survey results are based on telephone interviews conducted among a nationwide sample of 1006 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period June 11-15, 1993. 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
NATIONAL OPINION SURVEY
JUNE 11-15, 1993
N=1006

INTRODUCTION: Hello, we are conducting a telephone opinion survey for leading newspapers and tv stations around the country. I'd like to ask a few questions of the youngest male, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home (IF NO MALE, ASK: May I please speak with the oldest female, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home?)

My first question is...

Q.2 In your opinion, are the news organizations you are familiar with being fair or unfair to the Clinton administration?

		Bush		Reagan		June
		Jan	Aug	Jan	Dec	1985
		<u>1992</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1986</u>	<u>1985</u>
51	Fair	77	82	66	67	78
43	Unfair	15	12	21	25	12
<u>6</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>10</u>
		<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

Q.3 Compared to a few months ago, would you say that President Clinton is more popular or less popular than he was?

7	More popular - GO TO Q.5
87	Less popular - GO TO Q.4
3	(VOLUNTEERED) Same - GO TO Q.5
<u>3</u>	Don't know/Refused - GO TO Q.5
	<u>100</u>

IF LESS POPULAR

Q.4 In your opinion, which of the following is the most important reason why President Clinton is less popular than he was:

44	Because he has not done a very good job;
20	Because the press has been too critical of him;
31	Because the Congress has not cooperated with him;
<u>5</u>	(DO NOT READ) Don't know/Refused
	<u>100</u>

ASK ALL

Q.5 I am going to read a list of some stories about the Clinton administration covered by news organizations. As I read each item, tell me if you happened to follow this news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. (READ AND ROTATE LIST) How closely did you follow (INSERT STORY). Would you say you followed it very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>(VOL) DK</u>
a. The debate in Congress over Bill Clinton's budget	12	38	31	18	1=100
b. The controversy over Bill Clinton's \$200 hair cut on the runway in Los Angeles	18	22	26	33	1=100
c. Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton	28	38	19	15	*=100
d. Bill Clinton's nomination and then withdrawal of Lani Guinier as civil rights division head	21	30	24	24	1=100
e. The controversy over the management of the White House travel office	13	28	28	30	1=100
f. The Clinton administration's policies about the situation in Bosnia	26	38	21	14	1=100

ASK ALL

Q.6 Do you think the press has been too critical of the Clinton Administration policies and performance so far, not critical enough or do you think that the press has handled this about right?

35 Press too critical
12 Not critical enough
49 About right
4 Don't know/Refused
100

Q.7 What about Bill Clinton personally...Do you think the press has been too critical of Bill Clinton's personality and style so far, not critical enough or do you think that the press has handled this about right?

36 Press too critical
12 Not critical enough
49 About right
3 Don't know/Refused
100

Q.8 What about Hillary Clinton ... Do you think the press has been too critical of Hillary Clinton so far, not critical enough or do you think that the press has handled this about right?

28 Press too critical - GO TO Q.9
18 Not critical enough
51 About right ——— GO TO Q.10
3 Don't know/Refused
100

IF TOO CRITICAL

Q.9 Which of the following is the most important reason why the press has been too critical of Hillary Clinton?

69 The press doesn't like her unusual involvement for a First Lady in White House policy decisions

6 The press doesn't like her personally

20 The press doesn't like her political views

$\frac{5}{100}$ DK/Refused

ASK ALL

Q.10 Compared to previous administrations, do you think the press has come to a judgment about the Clinton Administration's performance too quickly, not quickly enough, or about the same as previous administrations?

45 Too quickly

8 Not quickly enough

44 About same

$\frac{3}{100}$ DK/Refused

Q.11 In your opinion, is there so much press criticism of Bill Clinton that it is very difficult for Clinton to succeed in Washington or don't you think that the press criticism of Bill Clinton is having such a serious effect?

40 So much

52 Not so serious

$\frac{8}{100}$ DK/Refused

ONE LAST QUESTION ABOUT THE PRESS...

Q.12 Do you think the press has been too critical of Ross Perot lately not critical enough or do you think that the press has handled this about right?

11 Press too critical

22 Not critical enough

61 About right

$\frac{6}{100}$ Don't know/Refused