

Poll Finds Support for Press as an Adversary to Government

By MARTIN ARNOLD

A confidential Gallup poll indicates that the public supports the press's adversary role in dealing with the Government and that a majority believe that the Government tries to keep too many secrets. The poll, taken for newspapers that subscribe to the regular Gallup Poll, also questioned agreed that news reporters should be protected from being forced to disclose confidential sources—an increase of 5 percentage points over a similar Gallup poll in December, 1972, before the bulk of the Watergate disclosures. The latest poll was taken in October, 1973.

On the other hand, according to the new poll, 40 per cent of those questioned agreed with the criticism that "newspapers often make innocent persons look guilty before they are tried in court," and 37 per cent more partly agreed. Nine per cent definitely disagreed, 13 per cent partly disagreed, and 1 per cent gave no answer.

Too Much 'Wrong?'

According to the poll, much of the public also agreed that newspapers devoted too much space to what was wrong with America and not enough to what was right. Thirty-nine per cent of all respondents ac-

cepted that proposition, and 37 per cent partly agreed. Eight per cent definitely disagreed, 14 per cent partly disagreed, and 2 per cent gave no answer. The figures changed slightly by educational background. That is, 40 per cent of those with some college agreed, 43 per cent with a high school background agreed and 30 per cent with only a grade school background agreed.

And the public, for the most part, believed that newspapers "are not careful about getting their facts straight." For instance, 26 per cent of all polled definitely agreed that newspapers were not careful enough, and 41 per cent partly agreed, while only 9 per cent definitely disagreed with the proposition and 21 per cent partly disagreed. Three per cent gave no answer. The figures changed only slightly when broken down by educational background.

Assessment Difficult

The total poll results make it difficult, according to observers, to assess the impact that the Nixon Administration's attacks on the press have had on the public. For instance, the Administration is opposed to laws protecting newsmen from being forced to disclose confidential sources, yet the public supports such laws. On the other hand, the Ad-

ministration does advance the thesis that newspapers are not careful about getting their facts correct, and the public tends to agree. The question was: "Will you tell me whether you definitely agree, partly agree, partly disagree, or definitely disagree with this criticism (of newspapers in general)? Newspapers are not careful about getting their facts straight."

The responses were:

Defin- itely Agree	Partly Agree	Partly Disagree	Defin- itely Disagree	No An- swer
22	42	23	11	2
22	42	20	8	1
24	35	24	9	7

All respondents 26%
College background 41%
High school 21%
Grade school 9%
No answer 5%

To further confuse the issue, the public is nearly exactly split over whether newspapers do a good job in presenting both sides of controversial issues, and whether newspapers tend to stress news that favors the liberal side.

Spokesmen for the Administration generally contend that newspapers do not do a good job presenting both sides of issues and that they tend to favor the liberal side. The Gallup question was: "In general, how would you rate the job done by the newspapers you read in presenting both sides of con-

troversial issues—excellent, good, only fair, or poor?"

The responses:

Excel- lent	Good	Only Fair	Poor	No An- swer
8%	41%	39%	9%	3%

All respondents 8%
College background 6%
High school 41%
Grade school 38%
Grade school 44%
Democrats 6%
Republicans 9%
Independents 36%

The Gallup organization also asked: "Here are some criticisms that have been made about newspapers in general. Will you tell me whether you definitely agree, partly agree, partly disagree, or definitely disagree? Newspapers stress the news that favors the liberal side."

The responses:

Definitely agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Definitely disagree	No answer
12%	33%	35%	15%	5%
12%	33%	35%	15%	5%
12%	33%	35%	15%	5%

All Respondents 12%
College background 12%
High school 33%
Grade school 35%
No answer 5%

"Newspapers stress the news that favors the conservative side."

The responses:

Definitely agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Definitely disagree	No answer
32%	47%	15%	10%	0%
32%	47%	15%	10%	0%
32%	47%	15%	10%	0%

All Respondents 32%
College background 32%
High school 47%
Grade school 15%
No answer 10%

poll, that the Government keeps too many secrets. The latter proposition was phrased this way: the Government says it has a duty to keep certain things confidential, and the press says the Government classifies too many things as confidential. Those polled were asked who they agreed with the most, and 53 per cent said they agreed with the press, 33 per cent with the Government, and 14 per cent had no opinion.

Economically, the poll showed that the outlook for newspapers was not bad at all. For instance, 79 per cent of the people polled said they purchased a newspaper or newspapers regularly. And 88 per cent said that they would continue to get a newspaper if the price went to 15 cents, while 12 per cent said they would not or could not now say.

Further, 70 per cent said they would continue to get a daily newspaper if the price went to 20 cents per copy, while 30 per cent said they would not, or could not now say.

More of the adults questioned said they would be reached by newspapers on a typical day than said they would be reached by television or radio. But the gap between newspapers and radio is narrowing.

For instance, the percentage of all adults reached by the three news media on what the poll called a typical day was, in 1973, 70 per cent by daily newspapers, 62 per cent by television newscasts and 59 per cent by radio newscasts. In 1970, the Gallup figures were 73 per cent newspapers, 60 per cent television and 65 per cent radio.

The poll also asked: "Do you think that freedom of the press is endangered in this country or not?"

The responses:

Yes	No	Don't Know
37%	55%	10%
37%	55%	10%
37%	55%	10%

All respondents 37%
College background 25%
Grade school 42%
30-49 29%
50 & over 28%
East 30%
Midwest 32%
South 22%
West 25%
Republicans 23%
Democrats 52%
Independents 43%