

The Press and The Public Are Worlds Apart

By James Glassman

The headline on my copy of a touted new survey by the Pew Research Center read, "Press Going Too Easy on Bush."

Now *there's* a story!

It was late May, and the media had spent the past three months celebrating vicious antagonists of the administration like Richard Clarke, trashing not only George Bush himself but also practically all of his policies and key advisors: Rumsfeld, Rice, Ashcroft, Wolfowitz. It was odd, I thought, that under these circumstances the public would think the press was going easy on the President.

Then I read the report.

The opiners described in that headline weren't average Americans. They were members of the press corps itself. The Pew study found that 55 percent of national journalists believed that "press treatment of Bush was not critical enough." Only 8 percent thought it was "too critical."

The public, however, had the opposite view: 24 percent thought the press was going too easy on Bush; 34 said it was too tough.

The press and the public remain, in the words of the Media Research Center, "worlds apart."

This split has been visible ever since a groundbreaking article 23 years ago in AEI's *Public Opinion* magazine. In it, academics Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman presented results of a careful study of media elites. They discovered that from 1964 to 1976, 81 percent of

journalists voted for the Democratic Presidential candidate.

A later survey by Freedom Forum found that 89 percent of Washington-based reporters voted for Bill Clinton in 1992 and only 7 percent for George H. W. Bush. Meanwhile, 59 percent viewed the 1994 Republican "Contract with America" as a "campaign ploy," while just 3 percent called it a "serious reform proposal." The public disagreed, and the GOP captured the House for the first time in four decades.

Today, the media and the public are drifting even farther apart. In the new Pew study, 34 percent of national journalists describe themselves as "liberal," compared with 22 percent in 1995. Only 7 percent of reporters say they are conservative at present. For the general public, the results are again reversed: 33 percent of Americans call themselves conservatives; 20 percent, liberals.

On social issues, the gap is even wider. For example, the national press states by a margin of 91 percent to 6 percent that "belief in God is not necessary to be moral." The general public says, to the contrary, that belief in God is necessary, by a margin of 58 percent to 40 percent.

The Pew study appeared the same week as a new book by David Brock titled *The Republican Noise Machine: The Right-Wing Media and How It Corrupts Democracy*. Brock's book comes on the heels of *What Liberal Media? The Truth About Bias and News*, by Eric Alterman, and *Big Lies: The Right-Wing Propaganda Machine and How It Distorts the Truth*, by Joe Conason.



This fantasy that the Left gets a raw deal from the national press is broadly shared by journalists. Incredibly, Pew found that only 2 percent of the national press corps identified CNN, CBS, NBC, ABC, or National Public Radio as liberal—though 69 percent leapt to call FOX News conservative.

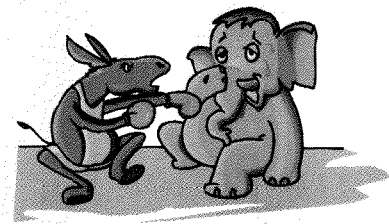
But, in one hopeful sign, many in the press understand that the *New York Times* is increasingly a journal of liberal advocacy, not the "newspaper of record." Among national journalists, 20 percent identify the *Times* as liberal, while only 4 percent attach that label to the *Washington Post*.

In their commentary on the Pew study, executives of the Committee of Concerned Journalists and the Project for Excellence in Journalism suggested, "The fact that journalists are more likely to see a conservative tilt in the news than a liberal one... could be a sign of liberal bias."

No kidding. In recent years the Left has convinced itself that its defeats have been caused by FOX News and conservative talk radio shows distorting national opinion. The truth is that thanks to growing public skepticism of broadcast and print journalism that is often openly biased, and new access to direct news sources through the Internet, people are making up their own minds.

That's the big new media story of the last decade: "Americans Tune Out Biased Press, Form Own Views." Read all about it!





Trench Warfare 2004

By Grover Norquist

On May 10, pollster John Zogby boldly predicted: "John Kerry will win the election."

He reported that in his latest poll only 43 percent of voters believed Bush deserves to be re-elected, and 51 percent said it's time for someone new. Bush and Kerry are in a statistical tie, with very few undecided voters (who historically tend to be against the incumbent when they finally make up their minds). Among voters who cite the economy as most important, Kerry leads Bush 54 to 35 percent; those who cite Iraq also favor Kerry 54 to 35 percent; and those who cite the general war on terrorism prefer Bush 64 to 30 percent. In April, the proportion of Americans who cite Iraq as their top concern rose from 11 to 20 percent. Zogby states that Kerry has been a "good closer"—at least in Massachusetts elections and within the Democratic Presidential primary—and posits that even the improving economic news is too late to save Bush.

This writer looks at that same polling data and the current landscape and sees an increasingly likely Bush victory.

The Gallup poll had Bush and Kerry at 49 to 48 percent in the first week of February, and 48 to 47 percent in the first week of May. Between those two surveys, anti-terrorism "czar" Richard Clarke published a book undermining the President as a leader in the war on terrorism, the 9/11 hearings further questioned the Bush administration's preparation and response to terrorism, American deaths in Iraq climbed sharply, and horrific

photos of idiot sadism in an American-run prison were released. Yet the Bush-Kerry polling numbers didn't budge.

From this, we learn that candidate George W. Bush does not have a glass jaw. And the 2004 election begins to look like World War I trench warfare, where month-long artillery barrages and attacks fail to move the battle lines. Why don't war, terrorism, and foreign policy news move voters? Perhaps because America is not at war.

Yes, there are more than 130,000 U.S. soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, and war news is a constant presence on television. But there is no draft, nor even fear of one. This contrasts with Vietnam, where every year 2 million 18-year-old males and their families and friends watched the draft lottery to see if they would be sent into the fray. That makes this war less real to many Americans.

The increased focus on Iraq has given Ralph Nader what he lacked: a rationale for his campaign. Nader is now the "peace candidate" and potential home for disaffected Dean voters who see Kerry and Bush as equally committed to continuing the Iraq occupation. Further problems in Iraq might benefit Nader rather than Kerry.

One wild card: How would another terrorist attack on America move voters? One could imagine this breaking either way—highlighting Bush's admonition that the world is too dangerous to leave to liberal Democrats, or supporting Kerry's claim that Bush has not done enough to stop such an attack.

The prime minister of Spain didn't

lose because voters were cowed by a terrorist attack on Madrid, but because of his own poor reaction—falsely claiming it was committed by Basque separatists. Similarly, if the Bush campaign suggested the terrorists used an attack to vote for Kerry, or Kerry blamed Bush for the acts of terrorists, voters would react poorly. The first campaign to speak publicly following an attack on the U.S. could lose.

If an unrelenting series of assaults on Bush's leadership over Iraq and foreign policy has failed to break his Presidency, what will happen on the economic front? Unlike Iraq, one can now predict with some certainty how the economy will play out over the next six months.

GDP has been growing at an average quarterly rate of 5.5 percent, 1.1 million jobs have been created since August, and 340,000 jobs were created in March, followed by another 288,000 in April. Between now and the election there will be five more monthly announcements of job creation that should average 250,000 to 300,000 every month. How will Kerry's current lead on "ability to handle the economy" hold up in the wake of economic reality?

The Kerry campaign has tried its hardest to undermine Bush's perceived strength as a leader in the war on terror and the Iraq war. This has not moved voters.

The campaign now turns to the issue of job creation and tax cuts. These issues do move voters, and the trend favors Bush.

