

Retro Poll

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Opinion Polls, Corporate Media And the Will of the People

In 2003 as millions protested in the streets worldwide, polls showed 90% of the Spanish public adamantly opposed to joining a war against Iraq. But the U.S. government had more influence upon the decisions of Spain's government than did the Spanish people. The U.S. undermined Spain's democracy, and Spain joined the U.S. invasion. On Sunday, March 14, 2004 the Spanish electorate took some revenge, replacing the governing party--which had lied about the infamous train bombings--with the Socialist Party which had vowed to withdraw Spanish troops from the U.S. sponsored forces in Iraq.

In fact, the U.S. public's view of the Iraq war was not much different from the Spanish public's once one factored out the impact of U.S. media collaboration with U.S. government deceptions. Retro Poll conducted national polls whose results suggested that 75 % of Americans who understood that there was no evidence of a relationship between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda opposed the war. Almost all of the support for the Iraq war came from people who believed the various tall tales about Iraq that the U.S. Government promoted with media assistance. No corporate media reported our findings.

Moreover, a Retro Poll in November, 2003 found that 73% of people who knew that the Al Qaeda connection to Saddam Hussein was fabricated believed the deceptions to be grounds to impeach the President. A poll 6 months later had identical findings. Though this begins to sound like Spain, the corporate media have shown no inclination to reverse their path of supporting deceptions and war.

Why would an independent media be afraid of the will of the people? As Justin Lewis, professor of media and journalism at Cardiff University (Wales) points out in *Constructing Public Opinion*, issues-focused polls consistently show that the U.S. public is far to the left of the people who are elected to Congress and the White House on almost every specific social issue one can name (including war and militarism). Almost 2/3 of the public favor National Health Insurance. Similar proportions support the right to abortion which Congress consistently votes to overturn. High percentages believe that public funds should provide full free education to all youths in the nation, that government has a role in providing child care for working families and single mothers, that government should protect the environment and so forth. Most of these concerns are blocked from the national agenda by elite power and money. Corporate media managers are aware that they downplay these anti-democratic contradictions.

As social, economic and international polarization and crises deepen, so does political polarization. Moderating this polarization has become a function of media in the U.S.--using among other tools deceptive and often meaningless poll reports. Polls are used to validate the impact of media promoted disinformation. Were investigative journalism permitted to consistently flourish unfettered in the media, we should not doubt that this might change poll results over night. which would undermine the prerogative of power and money to remove political rights. But most media producers, editors, and publishers represent large corporate interests and so are unwilling to let loose social forces that would disempower elites. The fact is that too often journalists who do take their ethical responsibility seriously are in danger of being isolated and crushed. We've seen this happen to Gary Webb at The San Jose Mercury-News and Sidney Shanburg at the NY Times just to name two egregious examples (others are well described by Studs Terkel in the video *Fear and Favor in the Newsroom*).

Retro Poll applauds those in journalism who take their public responsibility seriously and in so doing risk their lives and livelihoods. We ask that all journalists and faculty become aware of, use and support our work. We are all volunteers.

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