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Public Believes McCain Over *New York Times* Story 2 to 1, Annenberg Data Show

Two-thirds of adults in the U.S. heard or read about the *New York Times* February 21 story alluding to a potentially inappropriate relationship between Republican presidential hopeful Senator John McCain and a female lobbyist during his presidential bid in 2000, according to recent data collected by the University of Pennsylvania's National Annenberg Election Survey. Of those who were aware of the story, twice as many people stated that Senator McCain's version of events was more believable than those reported in the *Times* story.

Data for this study were collected between February 21 and 27 among 1,653 adults in the United States. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus 2.4 percentage points. For subsamples within the study, the margins of sample error are larger, depending on the sample sizes of the groups being analyzed.

The data show that when it came to awareness about the *New York Times* story on Senator McCain, educated, older, higher income and white respondents were more likely to know about the story than their counterparts (see Appendix). Also, people living in the Northeast and West and people living in urban and suburban areas were more likely to have heard or seen the story than people living in the Midwest or South or people living in rural areas.

Republicans and conservatives were also more likely to report being aware of the story. More than three-quarters (78.2%) of Republicans knew about the story in comparison to 66.9% of Democrats and 66.5% of independents. While 61.1% of liberals were aware of the story, 71.9% of conservatives and 71.3% of moderates knew about it.

"More Americans believed Senator John McCain's explanation than believed the allegations reported in the *New York Times* story," said Kate Kenski, a senior analyst for the National Annenberg Election Survey and an assistant professor of communication at the University of Arizona. "Republicans were over nine times as likely to report believing Senator McCain as believing the *New York Times*. Independents were about as twice as likely to say that they believed Senator McCain as report believing the allegations in the *Times*."

Statistically, the only groups more likely to believe the allegations in the *New York Times* over Senator McCain were African Americans, Democrats, and liberals.

Appendix

Table 1.

Have you heard or read about a New York Times report that states Senator John McCain had an inappropriate relationship with a female lobbyist?					
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Refused	Sample Size
Total	67.8%	30.2%	1.9%	0.1%	1652
Men	69.4%	29.1%	1.4%	0.1%	741
Women	66.1%	31.3%	2.5%	0.1%	911
High school or less	57.0%	40.1%	2.9%		484
Some college	69.0%	29.4%	1.6%		460
College degree or more	83.2%	15.9%	0.7%	0.2%	672
18-29 years old	39.1%	57.2%	3.6%		144
30-44 years old	61.7%	35.3%	3.0%		379
45-64 years old	77.0%	22.0%	0.8%	0.2%	693
65 and older	87.6%	11.7%	0.7%		397
Household income below $35,000	53.7%	43.6%	2.7%		333
$35,000 to less than $75,000	70.2%	27.8%	2.0%		488
$75,000 and over	80.0%	19.5%	0.3%	0.2%	606
Whites	69.5%	28.8%	1.6%	0.1%	1381
African Americans	60.0%	39.4%	0.6%		129
Hispanics/Latinos	51.3%	40.2%	8.5%		114
Northeast	71.9%	28.1%	0.0%	0.0%	328
Midwest	62.2%	36.5%	1.1%	0.3%	402
South	67.5%	29.2%	3.2%	0.2%	550
West	70.1%	27.4%	2.4%		372
Urban	70.3%	28.9%	0.8%	0.0%	495
Suburban	69.3%	28.6%	2.0%	0.1%	829
Rural	58.9%	37.1%	3.7%	0.3%	328
Republican	78.2%	21.0%	0.9%		502
Democrat	66.9%	30.9%	2.0%	0.2%	572
Independent	66.5%	32.1%	1.4%		442
Conservative	71.9%	25.8%	2.3%	0.0%	642
Moderate	71.3%	27.6%	0.8%	0.2%	488
Liberal	61.1%	37.9%	1.1%	0.0%	453

Table 2.

John McCain denies the New York Times report and accuses the paper of engaging in a smear campaign. The New York Times stands by its report. Who do you believe, the New York Times, Senator McCain, both or neither?
[Asked of those who were aware of the story.]

	NYT	McCain	Both	Neither	Don't Know	Refused	Sample Size
Total	20.5%	40.8%	8.1%	23.1%	6.3%	1.2%	1256
Men	18.1%	43.0%	7.0%	25.6%	5.6%	0.7%	576
Women	23.0%	38.7%	9.0%	20.7%	6.9%	1.6%	680
High school or less	18.1%	43.3%	5.3%	26.2%	6.4%	0.8%	318
Some college	17.5%	41.2%	8.0%	26.1%	5.9%	1.2%	346
College degree or more	25.8%	38.1%	11.0%	17.2%	6.3%	1.6%	576
18-29 years old	26.1%	22.7%	13.4%	35.3%	1.7%	0.8%	64
30-44 years old	24.1%	33.5%	10.9%	23.7%	6.4%	1.5%	257
45-64 years old	18.2%	43.8%	7.4%	21.4%	7.6%	1.7%	560
65 and older	19.3%	51.6%	4.3%	19.3%	5.5%		352
Household income below $35,000	27.4%	36.5%	4.6%	21.8%	8.1%	1.5%	222
$35,000 to less than $75,000	22.1%	41.6%	7.8%	23.8%	3.5%	1.2%	376
$75,000 and over	18.4%	42.3%	9.1%	23.6%	5.6%	0.9%	509
Whites	18.0%	45.3%	8.7%	21.8%	5.6%	0.7%	1069
African Americans	43.3%	9.6%	2.9%	27.9%	14.4%	1.9%	92
Hispanics/Latinos	23.5%	35.3%	11.8%	22.5%	5.9%	1.0%	69
Northeast	26.4%	38.6%	7.7%	19.9%	6.5%	0.8%	256
Midwest	16.7%	42.1%	7.7%	24.0%	8.6%	0.9%	290
South	19.4%	44.8%	6.5%	23.0%	6.0%	0.3%	419
West	20.2%	35.7%	11.2%	25.6%	4.3%	3.1%	291
Urban	24.1%	34.4%	9.5%	25.2%	6.0%	0.9%	396
Suburban	19.7%	43.7%	8.6%	19.9%	6.6%	1.5%	631
Rural	16.4%	44.1%	4.0%	29.4%	5.6%	0.6%	229
Republican	6.7%	63.3%	6.2%	19.6%	3.6%	0.6%	411
Democrat	34.7%	21.9%	9.7%	23.9%	8.5%	1.2%	435
Independent	18.7%	42.0%	8.1%	24.4%	6.0%	0.7%	332
Conservative	11.6%	55.0%	4.5%	22.1%	5.6%	1.1%	505
Moderate	19.6%	40.4%	7.4%	27.3%	4.5%	0.9%	380
Liberal	35.3%	21.2%	14.0%	20.5%	7.5%	1.4%	328

Table 3.

Have you heard or read about a New York Times report that states Senator John McCain had an inappropriate relationship with a female lobbyist?

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Refused			Sample Size
Republican							
Conservative	78.7%	20.1%	1.3%				354
Moderate	79.0%	21.0%	0.0%				114
Liberal	72.7%	27.3%					25
Democrat							
Conservative	64.8%	29.6%	5.6%	0.0%			97
Moderate	68.6%	29.3%	1.6%	0.5%			178
Liberal	65.7%	33.2%	1.1%	0.0%			270
Independent							
Conservative	66.2%	33.1%	0.7%				148
Moderate	73.3%	26.7%					161
Liberal	59.3%	39.0%	1.6%				122

John McCain denies the New York Times report and accuses the paper of engaging in a smear campaign. The New York Times stands by its report. Who do you believe, the New York Times, Senator McCain, both or neither?
[Asked of those who were aware of the story.]

	NYT	McCain	Both	Neither	Don't Know	Refused	Sample Size
Republican							
Conservative	6.3%	65.5%	4.4%	19.4%	3.6%	0.8%	293
Moderate	7.5%	56.3%	8.8%	23.8%	3.8%		95
Liberal	12.5%	58.3%	16.7%	8.3%	4.2%		18
Democrat							
Conservative	22.1%	26.5%	4.4%	35.3%	10.3%	1.5%	70
Moderate	32.3%	27.7%	7.7%	25.4%	5.4%	1.5%	138
Liberal	41.9%	16.2%	13.4%	20.1%	7.8%	0.6%	205
Independent							
Conservative	17.5%	50.5%	5.2%	17.5%	8.2%	1.0%	113
Moderate	15.1%	47.2%	5.7%	29.2%	2.8%		123
Liberal	25.0%	22.2%	16.7%	26.4%	8.3%	1.4%	88

The analysis for this release was conducted by Kate Kenski, Ph.D., a senior analyst for the National Annenberg Election Survey and an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Arizona.

About the Survey

The National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) is a survey conducted each presidential election by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. It is the largest academic election survey being conducted during the 2008 campaign. It ultimately will include between 45,000 and 50,000 rolling cross-section telephone interviews (one interview per respondent) and almost 100,000 web interviews (including up to five interviews with the same person) as the campaign evolves. The first web wave began in October 2007; the final interviews will be completed following the general election, November 4, 2008.

National Annenberg Election Surveys also were conducted in 2000 and 2004.

The 2008 survey, as with past NAES polls, will examine a wide range of political attitudes about candidates, issues and the traits Americans want in a president. It will also place a particular emphasis on the effects of media exposure through campaign commercials and news from radio, television, newspapers and the internet. Additionally, the survey measures the effects of other kinds of political communication, from conversations at home and on the job to various efforts by campaigns to influence potential voters.

Methodology

Data for this analysis comes from the NAES rolling cross-sectional telephone survey. The field period ran from February 21 through February 27, 2008. The total number of respondents interviewed during this period was 1,653.

The results have been weighted to take account of household size and number of telephone lines into the residence and to adjust for variation in the sample relating to geographic region, sex, race, age and education.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.

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