

## **M E M O R A N D U M**

**TO: C-SPAN**  
**FROM: PETER D. HART RESEARCH**  
**DATE: MARCH 18, 2004**  
**RE: C-SPAN AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE 25 YEARS LATER**

*This memorandum highlights findings from a survey conducted from February 2 to 4, 2004, for C-SPAN by Peter D. Hart Research on the occasion of C-SPAN's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The survey was conducted by telephone among 609 cable and satellite television viewers nationwide (defined as anyone who has a paid television service, including traditional cable, digital cable, satellite dish, or any combination of these services), in addition to an oversample of 255 C-SPAN viewers (yielding a total of 512 C-SPAN viewer interviews). For the national sample, the statistical margin of error is +/-4.0%; for C-SPAN viewers, the statistical margin of error is +/-4.4%.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

On the occasion of C-SPAN's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, C-SPAN commissioned Peter D. Hart Research to do a national survey of cable and satellite television viewers with three goals in mind.

1. To understand the size and scope of the C-SPAN audience and paint a comprehensive view of the role C-SPAN plays in their collection of news and information;
2. To understand the public's changing standards for government and its current views toward Congress, as well as the Executive and Judicial branches; and
3. To understand the public's media-consumption behaviors and attitudes, including those of the most active news consumers, the real news junkies.

The memorandum that follows summarizes the major findings from the survey in three parts: Part I. The C-SPAN Audience; Part II. Americans' Views of Government; and Part III. Profile of News and Information Consumption.

**PART I. THE C-SPAN AUDIENCE**

**C-SPAN: 25 YEARS LATER, A TRUSTED RESOURCE, A MISSION ACCOMPLISHED.**

Twenty-five years after the C-SPAN experiment began, the network has established itself as a vital, valuable, and trusted source of unbiased information for millions of Americans. C-SPAN receives high marks from its viewers on its core mission of covering Congress. Overall, viewers believe that the network has improved the way Americans view politics and current events. C-SPAN viewers are demographically similar to the nation overall but they are generally more active citizens, more knowledgeable, and more positive about Congress and their members of congress.

- ◆ C-SPAN also is viewed as a valuable resource: two in three (67%) cable viewers say that C-SPAN is a valuable resource and four in five (83%) C-SPAN viewers agree (40% say it is uniquely valuable).
- ◆ On C-SPAN’s core mission of covering Congress, the network receives the highest marks from its viewers—69% say C-SPAN does an excellent or good job in this area. C-SPAN also is considered to be very successful at hearing both sides of an argument (61% excellent or good), providing unbiased coverage (60%), and respecting viewers’ ideas no matter what they say (55%).

<b>ASPECTS IN WHICH C-SPAN DOES AN EXCELLENT OR VERY GOOD JOB</b>			
	<b>All C-SPAN Viewers</b>	<b>Viewers For Less Than Two Years</b>	<b>Viewers For More Than Two Years</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Covering Congress and related events	69	68	76
Hearing both sides of an argument	61	58	68
Providing unbiased coverage	60	58	64
Being respectful of viewers’ ideas no matter what they say	55	52	61
Providing educational programming	47	43	53
Presenting provocative and stimulating programming	38	38	41

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### AS MANY AS 20% OF CABLE VIEWERS WATCH C-SPAN AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK

Overall, 46% of cable viewers and 58% of C-SPAN viewers say that C-SPAN has improved the way Americans view politics and current events.

- ◆ One-in-five (20%) cable viewers watch C-SPAN at least once or twice a week with 10% watching C-SPAN at least several times a week, and 42% have watched the network in the past six months.
- ◆ Among C-SPAN viewers, 60% confirm that they have watched the network for more than two years.

Demographically, the C-SPAN audience looks much like the American public overall. Leaving demographics aside, however, C-SPAN viewers do differ from non-C-SPAN viewers in several key areas:

- ◆ C-SPAN viewers are more likely to be active citizens than their neighbors: 33% are defined as “active citizens” which is based on their participation in public life, compared with 18% among non-C-SPAN viewers who are active citizens.
- ◆ C-SPAN viewers follow news more closely and are more knowledgeable about government than are their neighbors.
- ◆ C-SPAN viewers have more favorable feelings toward their congressional representative (57%) than do non-C-SPAN viewers (42%).

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#### C-SPAN BY THE NUMBERS

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American cable viewers who say that...	% of cable viewers	C-SPAN estimate (in millions) <sup>1</sup>
C-SPAN is a valuable resource	67	115.4 million
C-SPAN has improved the way Americans view politics and current events	46	79.3 million
They have seen their Senator or member of Congress on C-SPAN (over the past four years)	32	55.1 million
They have watched C-SPAN at least once a week	20	34.5 million

<sup>1</sup> Estimate based on C-SPAN's analysis of telecommunications industry research

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## **PART II. AMERICANS' VIEWS OF GOVERNMENT**

**Many Americans feel that they have lost influence over their own government and are looking for ways to regain control, a new survey for C-SPAN finds.** Americans place themselves last on the list when it comes to having influence in Washington, behind lobbyists, campaign contributors, large corporations, and the media, and majorities say that the founding fathers would be “shocked” by the way all three branches of government are being run today. Moreover, Americans are roughly divided on whether they agree with the statement: “people like me do not have any say about what government does.” They are overwhelmingly supportive of changes in the political process that hold out the hope of giving the general public more control and influence over government decision-making.

### **AMERICANS VIEW THE GENERAL PUBLIC AS LEAST INFLUENTIAL IN WASHINGTON.**

The President tops the list, followed closely by large corporations, campaign contributors, lobbyists, and the media.

- ◆ Just 20% say that the general public has a great deal of influence (rating their influence as a “7” or higher on a 1-to-10 scale) when it comes to decisions that are made in Washington, D.C. This is the least influential of any group tested.
- ◆ The president is seen as most influential, with 78% saying that the chief executive has a great deal of influence.
- ◆ Individual members of Congress (42%) are seen as having far less influence, and they trail large corporations (68%), large campaign contributors (68%), lobbyists (56%), and the news media (53%).

<b>DEGREE OF INFLUENCE ON DECISIONS IN WASHINGTON D.C. (among all cable/satellite viewers)</b>	
	<b>Great Deal Of Influence (rating of 7-10)</b>
The President	78
Large campaign contributors	68
Large corporations	68
Lobbyists	56
The news media	53
Individual members of Congress	42
Congressional staffers	22
The general public	20

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Americans also are divided on their agreement with the statement: “people like me do not have any say about what government does,” with 46% agreeing and 51% disagreeing. When C-SPAN first began broadcasting in 1979, 53% agreed with the statement and 42% disagreed.

- ◆ Those who are more likely to agree with this statement include viewers age 65 and over, those lower on the socioeconomic scale, and political independents. Those who are more likely to disagree with the statement include Republicans, those higher on the socioeconomic scale, and 18- to 34-year-old viewers.
- ◆ Frequent C-SPAN viewers (who watch C-SPAN at least several times a week) are more likely to disagree with the statement (56% disagree/39% agree).

### AMERICANS OVERWHELMINGLY BELIEVE THAT THE FOUNDING FATHERS WOULD BE SHOCKED BY HOW EACH OF THE THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT IS BEING RUN.

When asked whether the nation’s founding fathers would be pleased or shocked if they were to return today and see how each branch of the government is handling its business, most cable and satellite viewers affirm that they would be shocked by all three: President and executive branch (66% shocked), Supreme Court and the judicial branch (68%), and Congress and the Senate (76%).

IF FOUNDING FATHERS RETURNED THEY WOULD BE... (among all cable/satellite viewers)		
	Pleased %	Shocked %
Congress and the Senate	11	76
Supreme Court and judicial branch	19	68
President and executive branch	18	66

### AMERICANS WANT THEIR GOVERNMENT BACK.

Americans want more control and influence over how their government is run, and cable viewers strongly support reforms that offer hope of more direct control or increased influence over the political decision-making process.

- ◆ A strong 66% majority says that congressional term limits would improve our democracy, and the same proportion (66%) believes that democracy would be improved if the Electoral College were eliminated to make the popular vote the deciding factor for presidential elections.
- ◆ Cable and satellite viewers strongly support “making greater use of referendums and ballot measures that let voters decide issues that would otherwise be decided by their elected leaders,” with 65% saying that this would improve democracy and just 17% believing that it would make democracy worse.

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- ◆ A 56% majority believes that changing the presidential primary process so small states have less control also would improve democracy.
- ◆ Americans offer relatively less support for more process-related reforms such as televising Supreme Court proceedings (40%), eliminating the filibuster (42%), and public financing of congressional campaigns (41%).
- ◆ A majority rejects the idea of allowing presidents to serve more than two terms—55% say that this would worsen our democracy.

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**STRONG SUPPORT FOR REFORMS THAT COULD INCREASE PUBLIC INFLUENCE**  
(among all cable/satellite viewers)

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	<b>Would Improve Democracy</b>	<b>Would Make Democracy Worse</b>
	%	%
Establish term limits for members of Congress	66	12
Electing the president by popular vote rather than relying on the Electoral College	66	16
Making greater use of referendum and ballot measures that let voters decide issues that would otherwise be decided by their elected leaders	65	17
Changing the presidential primary system so a few small states do not have so much control over the nomination process	56	12
Eliminating the filibuster, which allows a minority of senators to delay a vote and continue to debate an issue until sixty senators call for a vote	42	26
Having the government pay the cost for congressional campaigns so elected officials can stop fundraising	41	36
Showing all the Supreme Court proceedings on television	40	17
Allowing presidents to serve more than two terms	23	55

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### PART III: PROFILE OF NEWS AND INFORMATION CONSUMPTION.

Americans are grazers when it comes to news and information, sampling from a variety of sources and moving on to another source whenever the spirit moves them. Most Americans (82% of cable and satellite television viewers) tune into a local television newscast at least several times a week, and the majority (56%) watch a network television newscast at least that often. Still, it is only a minority of American viewers (28%) who say they follow news and current events very closely, spending hours every day reading, watching, or listening to news and being very informed about current events.

<b>WHERE AMERICANS TUNE IN FOR NEWS AND INFORMATION</b>		
	<b>Several Times A Week</b>	<b>Penetration In Past Six Months</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Local News	82	93
National Nightly Network News	56	79
CNN	46	80
Fox News Channel	44	74
MSNBC	25	64
CNBC	21	54
C-SPAN	10	42
NewsHour	10	32

- When most people think of reading “the newspaper,” they think about their local paper rather than one of the major national publications. No single newspaper is read by more than 7% of these cable/satellite viewers. The most read newspapers are *USA Today* (7%), *The New York Times* (5%), *The Wall Street Journal* (4%), *The Washington Post* (4%), and *The Daily News* (4%).
- Conservative commentators dominate the most-listened-to radio programs, with Rush Limbaugh (18%), Bill O’Reilly (11%), and Sean Hannity (6%) topping the list and the rest garnering mentions in the low single digits.
- Roughly one-third (31%) of cable viewers (including satellite television viewers) affirm that the Internet is a major or secondary source for staying informed or participating in the political system. Among those under age 35, 51% use the Internet as a major or secondary source, whereas just 16% of those age 65 and over do so.
- One in ten (10%) cable viewers (including satellite television viewers) are news junkies (defined as following the news very closely and watching, reading, or listening nearly every day to at least five of nine news sources tested). News junkies are a special group of citizens but they are not an abnormal group:

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- News junkies are more informed about their government.
- News junkies are more likely to watch C-SPAN—22% watch daily, 42% watch weekly.
- News junkies are older, 37% are age 65 and over.
- While older, 37% of news junkies also name the Internet as a major or secondary source of information.
- One in four news junkies read national newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and/or *USA Today*, and one in three listen to Limbaugh, O'Reilly, and/or Hannity.
- By more than two to one, news junkies are conservative rather than liberal, but they are divided about evenly in identifying themselves as Democrats or Republicans.