

# Polls show support for Elian's return to father

by William E. Gibson and

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WASHINGTON — In the immediate aftershock of Saturday morning's raid in Little Havana, a majority of Americans appeared to support the federal government's decision to wrest Elian Gonzalez from his Miami relatives.

Early polling results and other signs of public reaction in the calm of Easter Sunday indicated that most people continue to support Elian's return to his father, although many were appalled by the disturbing scenes of gun-wielding marshals swarming around the Little Havana home.

From church pulpits in South Florida and across the country, ministers cited Elian's story, some to decry the show of force during his abrupt removal from Miami, some to celebrate his return to his father, but most to pray for a time of healing and reconciliation.

In the aftermath, many people said the change of custody should have occurred long ago — before it became a flashpoint. Some blamed the Miami relatives for refusing to cooperate with Attorney General Janet Reno's demand that they release the boy. Others agreed with the return of Elian to his father but wondered why the government had to resort to armed marshals to carry it out.

The prevailing public reaction threatens to undermine the Cuban-exile cause of clinging to Elian, though that cause is still backed by a significant number of Americans and by Republican leaders on Capitol Hill.

At the same time, Reno and the Clinton administration faced a new round of tear-streaked fury from the Miami relatives who cared for the boy for five months. Defensive and angry, family members appealed for public support at a press conference in Washington on Sunday.

"I want to address everybody that has been looking at this from afar and doesn't know," said Georgina Cid, one of Elian's cousins in Miami. "We've never been violent. We've always tried to negotiate. We've always tried to be good. We've always tried to give love

to Elian, and we've always tried to love our cousin and our family in Cuba. All we've wanted was for this family to reunite.

"I think that people have to see us, people have to support us," Cid said. "We are here. We are Americans. We live in this country. Don't let any Cubans come to this country and tell us what to do. We need you."

While federal officials took a breather from the traumatic episode, Elian and his father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, remained secluded at their temporary housing inside the well-guarded gates of Andrews Air Force Base just outside of Washington.

Gleeful over a lunch of black beans and rice and playful in the arms of his father, Elian spent a quiet Easter, according to his father's attorney, Gregory Craig. And while his Miami relatives, bearing Easter candy, were turned back by a sentry, Elian got a visit from the Easter Bunny, who distributes treats to children living on Andrews Air Force Base.

The elder Gonzalez has insisted on time alone with his wife and two sons after five months of separation from Elian, Craig said.

"We're trying to re-establish some normal routine," Craig said. "They needed the down time. The relatives have got to respect that."

Gonzalez has agreed to remain in this country while the custody case remains under appeal. Speculation turned to a remote retreat along the Wye River in eastern Maryland as a likely site for the Cuban family to settle during the court action.

While Elian settled in with his family, life returned to near normal in Miami, where the action shifted from protests in the streets to exile leaders planning a general strike for Tuesday.

"We're asking Cuban Americans not to go to work on Tuesday, and when our bosses ask us why, we'll say it's because of Elian," said Jorge A. Acosta, leader of Agenda Cuba.

But the demonstrations and all the attention surrounding the Cuban boy's case have produced a backlash elsewhere, particularly in the black community.

At Greater Mt. Olive Missionary

Baptist Church in Delray Beach, Fla., the Rev. Lenard C. Johnson told his congregation: "A Cuban child got more recognition than we do in recognizing a savior that died for the whole world. Look at how many Haitian folks who drowned at sea and their children made it in, and they sent them right back."

More typical was a message from the Rev. Brian O'Reilly, who said at the St. Juliana Catholic Church in West Palm Beach: "We pray for the people in Miami at this time of confusion and heartbreak. We ask that God will continue to bless them."

Public opinion and political consequences have long been an important factor in the handling of Elian's case. Though convinced she had the legal authority to seize

Elian, Reno waited many weeks to force his removal from Miami in hopes of avoiding the kind of disturbing scene that played out on Saturday.

The immediate reaction was widespread dismay with the federal tactics in the early morning raid, yet majority support for Reno's decision to take action at long last.

A clear majority, 57 percent, approved of removing Elian from the Little Havana home to reunite him with his father, according to a CNN-Gallup poll, while 37 percent disapproved. Two-thirds of men but just less than half the women in the poll supported the action.

But 40 percent of those polled said

government agents used too much force in removing Elian, while 36 percent said they used the right amount of force. A majority, 54 percent, said the government did all it could to settle the situation without using force, while 38 percent disagreed.

"It's unfortunate they had to use force, but they [the family] brought that on themselves," said Michelle Smith, 29, of Fort Lauderdale, in a commonly expressed response. "They called [Reno's] bluff, and that's what she had to do."

The poll results and range of reactions indicated some disenchantment with both the government and the Miami family.

"Most people thought the boy should be returned to his father, but the man-



KRT PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF GREGORY CRAIG'S OFFICE

ABOVE: Elian Gonzalez plays with his father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, in their temporary apartment at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, Sunday, April 23, 2000.



KRT PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF GREGORY CRAIG'S OFFICE

ABOVE: Elian Gonzalez sits with his father Juan Miguel Gonzalez, his stepmother Nancy Carmenate Castillo, and six-month-old half-brother, Hianny, at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland on Sunday, April 23, 2000.

ner in which it was done bothers a lot of people," said Peter Feaver, a political scientist at Duke University and executive secretary of the Triangle Institute for Security Studies, a foreign policy think tank. "This was viewed not as strong leadership, but strong-

tion has never once, not once, done something in the boy's best interest," said Florida's Republican Sen. Connie Mack.

Saturday's raid, while controversial, succeeded at least in asserting the attorney general's authority while put-

ting the government firmly in charge. With Elian no longer in their care, the Miami relatives resorted to stalking outside the gates of Andrews Air Force Base in frustration, unable to deliver Easter candy to the boy.

While still seeking redress in the courts, the family desperately tried on Sunday to turn public opinion in their favor.

"This entire situation has been basically and simply to protect the child whose mother brought him here to a country of freedom," Lázaro Gonzalez, the boy's great uncle, told reporters in Washington.

"What's happening?" he implored. "It's time for everyone to be concerned. What are we, just wallpaper? It's too much, what's happened to this family?"

Sun-Sentinel writers Rafael Olmeda, C. Ron Allen, and Rafael Lorente contributed to this report.

## Sexual slavery trade flourishing in Kosovo

by Peter Finn

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PRISTINA, Yugoslavia — The trafficking of East European women into sexual slavery, one of the major criminal scourges of post-Communist Europe, is becoming a serious problem in Kosovo where porous borders, the presence of international troops and aid workers, and the lack of a working criminal justice system have created almost perfect conditions for the trade, U.N. police officers, NATO-led peacekeepers, and humanitarian workers say.

In the past six months, U.N. police and peacekeeping troops here have rescued 50 women — Moldovan, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, and Romanian — from brothels that have begun to appear in cities and towns Kosovo, a province of Serbia, the dominant republic of Yugoslavia. Police and aid workers fear hundreds more, lured from their impoverished homelands with the promise of riches, may be living in sexual servitude.

"These women have been reduced to slavery," said Col. Vincenzo Coppola, regiment commander of the Italian Carabinieri, a police force with military powers in Kosovo that has rescued 23 women on raids of brothels in Pristina and Prizren.

According to police sources and aid workers, the women — and some as young as 15 — were transported along a well-established organized crime network from Eastern Europe to Macedonia, which borders Kosovo to the south. There, they were held in motels and sold to ethnic Albanian pimps in auctions for \$1,000 to \$2,500. The pimps work under the protection of major crime figures in Kosovo, officials said, including some with links to the former rebel fighting force, the Kosovo Liberation Army.

The women were stripped of their passports as soon as they left their homelands and were then frequently held in unheated rooms with primitive sanitary conditions in Kosovo and

forced to have unprotected sex, sometimes up to 16 times a night for no payment, according to U.N. police officers who spoke to the women and requested anonymity because of U.N. regulations limiting their ability to talk to the media.

Police, peacekeepers, and aid workers here have been slow to respond to the problem. The undermanned U.N. police force is hard-pressed by a variety of criminal activities, and there are limited humanitarian resources to protect the women once they seek sanctuary.

Moreover, officials here said, the trade has flourished because of a lack of applicable law on trafficking or prostitution and because some countries with military forces here have tended to dismiss the activity as simple prostitution. German peacekeepers in southern Kosovo, for instance, have taken a benign view of the phenomenon in part because prostitution is tolerated in Germany; international aid workers are trying to convince them that these women are victims.

"It's not classic prostitution," said one international aid worker who has interviewed the rescued women and is working on a draft U.N. regulation to punish people involved in the slave trade. "They are not paid. They are never paid. Of the 50 women we have seen, not one has received a single deutschmark. And they are often held in horrendous conditions."

According to authorities, the women were told that before they could keep any of their earnings, they had to pay off the pimps for their purchase price. Often, however, they found themselves fined for infractions such as not smiling at customers, so there was no way they would ever have enough money to complete the payoff. The women said that if they protested, they were beaten.

A number of the women appear to have contracted sexually transmitted diseases, officials said, and international groups are attempting to get them treatment either in Kosovo or when they return to their homelands.

## Oklahoma City, Columbine communities linked by tragedies

by Larry Fish  
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OKLAHOMA CITY (KRT) — At 9:02 a.m. Wednesday, April 19, it was five years since the bombing of the federal building here; the memorial to its 168 victims was to be dedicated on this anniversary.

Beside scarring Oklahoma City and the nation forever, the experience made this city's survivors and helpers reluctant pioneers in publicly dealing with grief.

It made them, in one survivor's words, into "new people," for better or worse. And it served to bind them in sympathy with those suffering in the aftermath of the massacre at Columbine High School — which marked its one-year anniversary Thursday, April 12.

The Oklahoma City Survivors Association has reached out to those in Littleton, Colo., in several ways, among them a gift of a "survivors' tree" that is now planted in the park next to Columbine High. (Oklahoma City has a similar tree.) Last week, one of the group's leaders wrote an open letter to Denver's newspapers, and placed a copy of it on the memorial fence outside the bomb site.

"Dear Denver, families, and others affected by the tragic events of 4-20-99," Paul A. Heath's letter began. "... Oh! how we wish we had a secret recipe that would guarantee each of you and ourselves the experience of an ever-present joy of those we loved that were taken from us by these unnecessary acts of violence."

The two tragedies are linked by more than their April anniversaries and the random nature of both crimes. The federal trials of Oklahoma City bombing defendants Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols were moved to Denver in 1997, and during the months that each trial lasted, survivors and witnesses grew close to many who offered support for them there.

As Littleton continues to grieve, many who were directly touched by the Oklahoma bombing have offered what they can. They understand

what it means to be mourning — a deeply intimate process — in the public eye.

Heath was a psychologist working in the Veterans Administration office on the fifth floor of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995, and has become one of the most visible and active members of the survivors association.

He was standing behind an interior wall — one of the few that withstood the blast — and was virtually unhurt. Some of his coworkers were killed.

Last week, seated on a curb across from the building site — now a striking memorial occupying nearly a full city block — Heath said that much of what he and other survivors went through applies to families in Colorado.

"First of all, the acknowledgment no one can feel what any other person feels when they lose a person they love is such an important concept," Heath said. "Let people feel what they feel."

Robin Finegan is another link between the cities. A native of Oklahoma City, she moved to Denver 13 years ago and became head of a rape crisis center there. When the Oklahomans came to Denver to testify or watch the bombing trials, she was there to provide counseling and support.

Those directly affected by the bombing and the school shootings have some things in common with rape victims, Finegan said. But the high public profile makes a big difference.

At first, she said, Oklahoma City and Columbine survivors found comfort in the national and international outpouring of support. But where obsessive media and public interest "becomes detrimental," she said, is when the survivors begin to tell their stories, conflicts arise. Did the police act quickly enough? Should somebody have been able to prevent the tragedy?

And the constant attention, Finegan said, "takes a private grief and loss and makes it a public grief and loss."

Suddenly, people everywhere are aware of what those affected are feeling, and in one way or another they make judgments. The mourning process is laid bare.

"We treat them as if we have a right to have a public opinion on how they act and feel and what they say," the counselor said, "as if we were voting on the Broncos' stadium."

In both Oklahoma City and Columbine, many have found comfort in working toward a goal. Some have embraced causes such as gun control or working to lessen violence — or in memorializing the dead and injured.

At Columbine, efforts have been geared to replacing the library where most of the 13 murders occurred, and placing a memorial — the design is yet to be chosen — in the adjacent park.

Oklahoma City's memorial, its design chosen by the survivors association and built and endowed with almost \$29 million in government and private funds, has replaced the Murrah building with a grassy slope overlooking a shallow, black-bottomed reflecting pool. The gateways or arches at each end of the block are inscribed with the times 9:01 and 9:03 a.m.; the large space between them symbolizes the world-altering moment when the blast went off.

The most striking feature is on the sloping lawn, where 168 stylized chairs symbolize each life lost.

Nineteen of the chairs, smaller than the others, represent the children.

Even before the completion of the memorial, which is to be run by the National Park Service, up to 800 visitors have visited each day since the bombing. The survivors insisted on one touch in the otherwise sleek design of the memorial. A portion of the original chain-link fence erected around the explosion site — where visitors have affixed poems, teddy bears, T-shirts, and countless other memorabilia — will remain.

Many of the poems and messages, protected by plastic lamination, have been written and posted by Heath, a former president of the survivors as-

sociation who says he never wrote much of anything before the blast. Now, he says, he realizes that many people think he devotes too much energy to things surrounding an event five years past.

"Even my family thinks I've invested too much time in making sure that the story gets told," he said.

Like many survivors, Heath said, he had to work through feelings of guilt, but he said he overcame them. "I know who blew up this building, and it was not me," he said. "As soon as I got that into my head, I was fine."

He said that with Wednesday's dedication of the memorial, and the creation of the nonprofit Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism to be housed in a nearby building, he thought he would be able to spend more time on other things.

Oklahoma City's experience contains another possible lesson for Columbine. After five years, the emotional toll may continue to rise.

Project Heartland, a program designed to offer mental health services to those affected by the bombing, still counsels a couple of hundred clients a year, although its purpose has been to provide short-term counseling, not long-term guidance. The toll is sometimes more delayed than anyone expected, director Gwen Allen said.

Oklahoma City's first-year anniversary was the peak for counseling survivors and their families, Allen said.

What is now taking place, and what she expects will be the case at Columbine, too, is that years later the rescuers — police, firefighters, paramedics, and others who saw horrific things and were unable to save everyone — begin coming in.

Heath, the psychologist, said that everyone involved in the bombing, the school shootings, or any other catastrophe has to come to grips with a new reality.

"Closure is the wrong word," he said. "... The way I've experienced it with myself and others is that you become a new person. It's up to you as to what kind of new person you become."