



**THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
For The People & The Press

**NEWS Release**  
1615 L Street, N.W., Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Tel (202) 419-4350  
Fax (202) 419-4399

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**Tuesday, May 22, 2012**

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**  
**Andrew Kohut, Director**  
**Michael Remez, Senior Writer**

## Republicans More Likely to Fault Coverage of Obama than of Romney Presidential Campaign Tops Public's News Interest

Americans focused most closely last week on news about the presidential election, as the race increasingly shifted from the Republican primary contest to the head-to-head fight between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney.

Nearly three-in-ten (28%) say the campaign was their top story, while 16% say they most closely followed news about the economy, according to the latest weekly News Interest Index survey, conducted May 17-20 among 1,004 adult by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

### News Interest vs. News Coverage

	News Interest	News Coverage
2012 election	28	17
Economy	16	7
Facebook IPO	8	5
J.P. Morgan loses \$2b	7	7
Uncertainty in Greece	6	5
Race shift in U.S. births	4	2

News interest shows the percentage of people who say they followed this story most closely, Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, May 17-20, 2012. News coverage shows the percentage of news coverage devoted to each story, Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, May 14-20, 2012.

Election news topped coverage as well, accounting for 17% of the newshole, according to a separate analysis by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ). General news about the U.S. economy made up 7% of coverage, while related news specifically about the multi-billion dollar losses at banking giant J.P. Morgan Chase

accounted for another 7%. In terms of news interest, 7% say they followed news about the troubles at J.P. Morgan most closely last week.

## Assessing Coverage of the Candidates

On balance, the public views news coverage of both Obama and Romney as fair. However, more think that coverage of Obama has been too easy than say that about coverage of Romney.

About four-in-ten (41%) say recent news coverage of Obama has been fair, 28% say it has been too easy and 19% see it as too tough. Nearly half (47%) say recent coverage of Romney has been fair, while 21% say it has been too easy and 15% say too tough. These opinions are little changed from earlier in the campaign.

Republicans are far more critical of coverage of Obama than they are of coverage of Romney.

Nearly half of Republican and Republican-leaning independents (47%) say the press has been too easy on Obama, while 33% say it has been fair. In contrast, 46% think coverage of Romney has been fair; 27% say coverage of the likely GOP nominee has been too tough, while 13% say it has been too easy.

Among Democrats and Democratic leaners, 49% say coverage of Obama has been fair; virtually the same percentage (48%) says coverage of Romney has been fair. More Democrats say press coverage of Obama is too tough than too easy (30% vs. 12%). By contrast, more say coverage of Romney has been too easy than too tough (26% vs. 7%).

---

### Plurality of Republicans Says Press Goes Too Easy on Obama

	Total	Rep/ Lean Rep	Dem/ Lean Dem
<i>Press coverage of <b>Obama</b> has been...</i>	%	%	%
Too tough	19	8	30
Too easy	28	47	12
Fair	41	33	49
Don't know	<u>13</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>10</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Press coverage of <b>Romney</b> has been...</i>			
Too tough	15	27	7
Too easy	21	13	26
Fair	47	46	48
Don't know	<u>18</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>19</u>
	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 17-20, 2012. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

---

## The Week's News

While the presidential election clearly topped the news index last week as the story Americans followed most closely, the percentages following election news *very* closely have changed little for much of 2012. The 31% that say they followed news about the candidates very closely is about the same as the 34% that said this one week earlier. Republicans (33%), Democrats (32%) and independents (30%) are about equally likely to say they followed news about the candidates very closely last week.

About a third (35%) say they very closely followed reports about the condition of the U.S. economy, while 21% say they very closely followed news about J.P. Morgan losing \$2 billion or more in high risk trading. Another 15% say they very closely followed news about political and economic uncertainty in Greece. Comparable numbers say the J.P. Morgan losses (7%) and the situation in Greece (6%) was their top story. According to PEJ, coverage of the U.S. economy and J.P. Morgan's woes together accounted for 14% of the newshole, while the economic troubles in Europe accounted for another 5%.

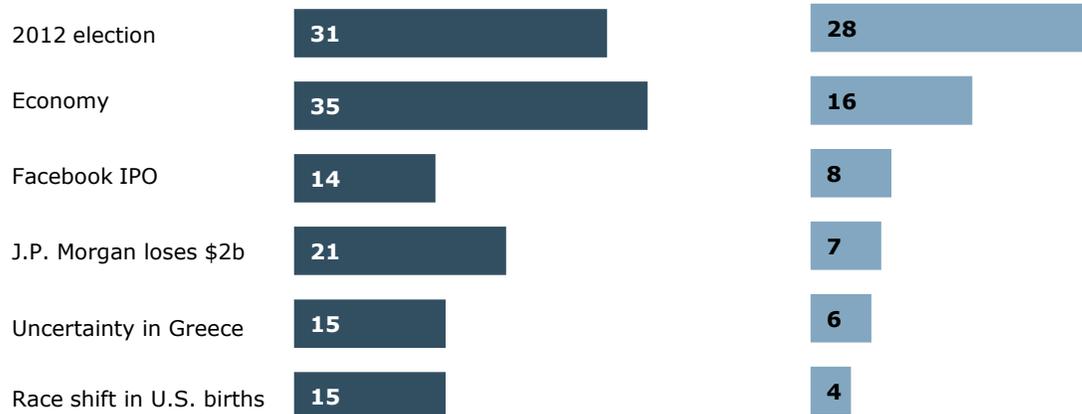
About one-in-ten (8%) say their top story of the week was Facebook's initial public stock offering; 14% say they followed this news very closely. With the start of trading last Friday, news about the stock offering accounted for 5% of coverage.

---

## News Interest

*% following each story very closely*

*Which one story did you follow most closely?*



PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 17-20, 2012.

---

Though young people are about as likely as older ones to say they followed this news very closely, more say this was their top story of the week. For example, 13% of those 18-29 say this was the news they followed most closely, compared with 5% among those 50-64 and just 2% among those 65 and older.

Overall, 15% say they very closely followed news about census data that show the number of minority births in the U.S. topped the number of white births last year; 4% say this was the news they followed most closely. News about this demographic shift accounted for 2% of coverage.

These findings are based on the most recent installment of the weekly News Interest Index, an ongoing project of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. The index, building on the Center's longstanding research into public attentiveness to major news stories, examines news interest as it relates to the news media's coverage. The weekly survey is conducted in conjunction with The Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, which monitors the news reported by major newspaper, television, radio and online news outlets on an ongoing basis. In the most recent week, data relating to news coverage were collected May 14-20, and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected May 17-20, 2012, from a nationally representative sample of 1,004 adults.

## About the News Interest Index

The *News Interest Index* is a weekly survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press aimed at gauging the public's interest in and reaction to major news events. This project has been undertaken in conjunction with the Project for Excellence in Journalism's *News Coverage Index*, an ongoing content analysis of the news. The News Coverage Index catalogues the news from top news organizations across five major sectors of the media: newspapers, network television, cable television, radio and the internet. Each week (from Monday through Sunday) PEJ compiles this data to identify the top stories for the week. (For more information about the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, go to [www.journalism.org](http://www.journalism.org).) The News Interest Index survey collects data from Thursday through Sunday to gauge public interest in the most covered stories of the week.

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted May 17-20, 2012, among a national sample of 1,004 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (604 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 400 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 158 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the March 2011 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample is also weighted to match current patterns of telephone status based on extrapolations from the 2011 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	1,004	3.6 percentage points
Republicans	270	7.0 percentage points
Democrats	312	6.5 percentage points
Independents	302	6.6 percentage points
Republican/Lean Rep	386	5.8 percentage points
Democrat/Lean Dem	445	5.4 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
**MAY 17-20, 2012 NEWS INTEREST INDEX**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**N=1,004**

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.1 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE;] [IF NECESSARY "Did you follow [ITEM] very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?"]**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
a. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy					
May 17-20, 2012	35	30	16	19	*
May 10-13, 2012	40	26	16	17	*
May 3-6, 2012	38	29	13	20	*
April 26-29, 2012	34	32	17	16	1
April 19-22, 2012	35	35	13	14	2
April 12-15, 2012	39	28	16	17	1
April 5-8, 2012	37	31	16	16	1
March 29-April 1, 2012	34	33	15	18	1
March 22-25, 2012	36	29	16	18	1
March 15-18, 2012	40	35	11	14	1
March 8-11, 2012	37	32	14	17	*
March 1-4, 2012	41	27	15	17	1
February 23-26, 2012	37	33	14	15	1
February 16-20, 2012	33	32	16	17	1
February 9-12, 2012	42	30	14	13	1
February 2-5, 2012	38	32	16	13	1
January 26-29, 2012	35	31	16	19	*
January 19-22, 2012	35	30	16	19	1
January 12-15, 2012	33	32	14	20	1
January 5-8, 2012	39	31	15	15	*
December 15-18, 2011	36	32	14	16	1
December 8-11, 2011	41	29	13	16	1
December 1-4, 2011	40	33	13	13	1
November 17-20, 2011	35	33	16	15	1
November 10-13, 2011	39	31	15	14	*
November 3-6, 2011	37	31	15	17	1
October 27-30, 2011	38	33	14	15	1
October 20-23, 2011	38	32	14	16	1
October 13-16, 2011	39	32	14	14	*
October 6-9, 2011	43	28	14	14	1
September 29-October 2, 2011	46	26	14	14	*
September 22-25, 2011	44	33	11	11	*
September 8-11, 2011	40	30	15	14	1
September 1-4, 2011	44	30	11	15	*
August 25-28, 2011	44	28	14	13	1
August 18-21, 2011	44	29	12	14	1
August 4-7, 2011	46	30	11	13	1
July 28-31, 2011	43	30	13	13	*
July 21-24, 2011	41	32	13	13	1
July 14-17, 2011	41	30	14	14	1
July 7-10, 2011	36	30	15	18	1
June 30-July 3, 2011	38	32	13	16	1
June 23-26, 2011	37	29	15	19	*
June 16-19, 2011	39	33	14	13	*
June 9-12, 2011	39	30	15	16	1
June 2-5, 2011	35	34	17	14	*
May 19-22, 2011	33	34	17	16	*
May 12-15, 2011	32	32	17	18	2

**PEW.1 CONTINUED...**

	Very <u>closely</u>	Fairly <u>closely</u>	Not too <u>closely</u>	Not at all <u>closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
May 5-8, 2011	40	35	15	9	1
April 21-25, 2011	41	33	12	14	*
April 14-17, 2011	44	30	14	12	1
April 7-10, 2011	46	30	14	10	*
March 31-April 3, 2011	42	31	16	11	0
March 24-27, 2011	36	32	17	15	*
March 17-20, 2011	38	32	17	13	*
March 10-13, 2011	40	30	16	13	*
March 3-6, 2011	37	31	17	13	1
February 24-27, 2011	49	29	11	10	*
February 17-20, 2011	35	33	14	17	*
February 10-13, 2011	36	34	13	16	*
February 3-6, 2011	35	37	14	14	*
January 20-23, 2011	37	33	14	15	1
January 13-16, 2011	37	29	15	18	1
January 6-9, 2011	39	37	11	12	1
<a href="http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Economy-Trends.pdf">SEE TRENDS FOR PREVIOUS YEARS:</a> <a href="http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Economy-Trends.pdf">http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Economy-Trends.pdf</a>					
b. News about J.P. Morgan losing \$2 billion or more in high-risk trading					
May 17-20, 2012	21	23	18	38	1
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
May 20-23, 2010: <i>Proposals for stricter regulation of banks and financial institutions</i>	22	29	21	28	1
April 30-May 3, 2010	19	28	19	33	1
April 23-26, 2012	27	26	20	27	*
June 19-22, 2009: <i>The Obama Administration's plans to expand regulations of financial institutions</i>	27	28	26	19	*
March 27-30, 2009: <i>The Obama Administration's plans to expand regulations over financial institutions</i>	36	29	19	16	*
c. News about Facebook's first public stock offering					
May 17-20, 2012	14	22	27	37	1
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
February 2-5, 2012: <i>Facebook announcing its plan for its first public stock offering</i>	7	17	25	50	1
d. Political and economic uncertainty in Greece					
May 17-20, 2012	15	22	22	41	*
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
May 10-13, 2012: <i>Reports about economic problems in several European countries</i>	17	24	24	34	*
May 3-6, 2012	16	23	24	36	*
February 16-20, 2012: <i>Efforts to deal with the debt crisis in Europe</i>	11	21	23	45	*
January 12-15, 2012	12	23	23	42	1
December 8-11, 2011	14	22	27	37	1
December 1-4, 2011	14	24	25	36	1
November 10-13, 2011: <i>Efforts to deal with the debt crisis in Greece and Italy</i>	15	23	23	38	1
November 3-6, 2011: <i>Efforts to deal with the debt crisis in Greece and other European countries</i>	18	26	21	34	1
October 27-30, 2011	12	27	24	36	*

## PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
September 29-October 2, 2011: <i>The debt crisis in Greece and other European countries</i>	15	21	24	39	1
September 15-18, 2011	16	23	24	37	1
August 18-21, 2011: <i>The debate among European leaders on how to address the region's debt crisis</i>	12	21	22	44	1
August 11-14, 2011: <i>Riots in London and other parts of Britain</i>	17	28	21	32	1
June 30-July 3, 2011: <i>The financial crisis and violent protests in Greece</i>	14	22	23	39	1
June 16-19, 2011	10	20	25	45	1
May 13-16, 2010: <i>A trillion-dollar bailout package for European governments facing debt problems</i>	21	26	24	28	2
May 7-10, 2010: <i>The financial crisis in Greece and violent protests there</i>	19	23	26	31	*
April 30-May 3, 2010: <i>The financial crisis in Greece</i>	6	15	28	51	1
October, 1998: <i>Financial instability around the world</i>	32	40	19	9	*
September, 1998: <i>Economic and political instability in Russia</i>	18	30	28	24	*
Late August, 1998: <i>Economic problems in Russia</i>	8	22	29	41	*
January, 1998: <i>The deepening financial crisis in many Asian countries</i>	15	25	27	33	*
March, 1995: <i>The financial and political instability in Mexico</i>	12	28	30	29	1
e. A U.S. Census report showing that minorities make up more than half of the babies born in the U.S.					
May 17-20, 2012	15	22	22	40	1
f. News about candidates for the 2012 presidential election					
May 17-20, 2012	31	26	19	23	*
May 10-13, 2012	34	23	18	24	*
May 3-6, 2012	29	27	19	24	*
April 26-29, 2012	29	29	18	23	1
April 19-22, 2012	29	29	20	20	1
April 12-15, 2012	32	28	16	23	1
April 5-8, 2012	31	27	18	23	*
March 29-April 1, 2012	23	29	21	27	*
March 22-25, 2012	28	28	18	25	1
March 15-18, 2012	28	31	17	24	*
March 8-11, 2012	28	27	21	23	*
March 1-4, 2012	31	24	20	24	1
February 23-26, 2012	28	29	18	24	1
February 16-20, 2012	25	29	19	25	2
February 9-12, 2012	35	25	18	20	1
February 2-5, 2012	30	27	20	21	1
January 26-29, 2012	28	30	21	21	1
January 19-22, 2012	28	30	17	24	*
January 12-15, 2012	29	29	18	23	1
January 5-8, 2012	29	30	16	25	*
December 15-18, 2011	26	24	20	29	1
December 8-11, 2011	27	27	18	28	*

**PEW.1 CONTINUED...**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
December 1-4, 2011	25	28	20	26	1
November 17-20, 2011	24	31	21	23	1
November 3-6, 2011	22	31	20	26	1
October 27-30, 2011	21	26	21	30	1
October 20-23, 2011	21	28	22	28	1
October 13-16, 2011	26	29	22	23	1
October 6-9, 2011	25	25	23	27	1
September 29-October 2, 2011	27	26	21	25	*
September 22-25, 2011	25	26	23	25	1
September 15-18, 2011	24	28	21	27	1
September 8-11, 2011	22	26	21	31	*
September 1-4, 2011	22	23	22	32	1
August 25-28, 2011	22	22	22	33	1
August 18-21, 2011	27	26	19	28	1
August 11-14, 2011	19	24	20	36	1
August 4-7, 2011	18	21	22	37	1
July 28-31, 2011	17	27	21	35	1
July 21-24, 2011	17	22	28	32	*
July 14-17, 2011	18	26	27	28	1
July 7-10, 2011	16	23	27	33	1
June 30-July 3, 2011	21	28	24	25	2
June 23-26, 2011	19	26	24	31	*
June 16-19, 2011	23	29	23	25	*
June 9-12, 2011	18	30	22	30	1
June 2-5, 2011	21	31	22	26	*
May 26-29, 2011	20	27	24	28	*
May 19-22, 2011	15	27	24	32	1
May 12-15, 2011	15	22	26	35	1
May 5-8, 2011	16	24	27	32	1
April 21-25, 2011	18	26	23	32	1
April 14-17, 2011	20	23	29	27	1
March 24-27, 2011	13	19	26	41	1
March 10-13, 2011	15	21	26	38	0
February 10-13, 2011	16	19	24	40	*
February 3-6, 2011	15	20	23	42	*

[SEE TRENDS FOR PREVIOUS YEARS:](http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Election-Trends.pdf) <http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Election-Trends.pdf>

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.2 Which ONE of the stories I just mentioned have you followed most closely, or is there another story you've been following MORE closely? **[DO NOT READ LIST. ACCEPT ONLY ONE RESPONSE.]**

May 17-20

2012

28	News about candidates for the 2012 presidential election
16	Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
8	News about Facebook's first public stock offering
7	News about J.P. Morgan losing \$2 billion or more in high risk trading
6	Political and economic uncertainty in Greece
4	A U.S. Census report showing that minorities make up more than half of the babies born in the U.S.
10	Some other story <b>(VOL.)</b>
21	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.3 Thinking about recent news coverage of some people, would you say the press has been too easy, too tough or fair in the way it has covered **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**?

	<u>Too easy</u>	<u>Too tough</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
a. Barack Obama				
May 17-20, 2012	28	19	41	13
November 3-6, 2011	26	22	41	11
July 21-24, 2011	27	23	41	9
November 18-21, 2010 <sup>1</sup>	23	21	46	9
September 9-12, 2010	27	23	37	13
July 15-18, 2010	27	24	39	10
April 9-12, 2010	29	21	42	8
October 3-6, 2008	31	7	60	2
April 25-28, 2008	26	17	52	5
March 20-24, 2008	23	15	55	7
February 29-March 3, 2008	28	8	58	6
February 1-4, 2008	23	8	61	8
b. Mitt Romney				
May 17-20, 2012	21	15	47	18
February 2-5, 2012	19	14	47	19
November 3-6, 2011	12	9	53	26
July 21-24, 2011	16	9	45	30

<sup>1</sup> For November 18-21, 2010 this question was not asked in a list. For all other trends, this was a list item.