



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
For The People & The Press

JANUARY 22, 2013

Public Closely Tracking Gun Debate

---

## Mixed Reactions to Obama's Gun Proposals

---

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

**Michael Dimock**

Director, Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

**Carroll Doherty**

Associate Director

**Alec Tyson**

Research Associate

1615 L St, N.W., Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Tel (202) 419-4372  
Fax (202) 419-4399  
[www.people-press.org](http://www.people-press.org)

---

## Public Closely Tracking Gun Debate

# Mixed Reactions to Obama's Gun Proposals

With the public paying close attention to the national debate over gun control, Barack Obama's gun proposals receive a mixed rating from the public. A 39% plurality say Obama's proposals are about right while another 13% say they do not go far enough. About three-in-ten (31%) say the president's proposals go too far; 17% do not offer an opinion.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted Jan. 17-20 among 1,006 adults, finds that the public is closely tracking the gun debate: 43% followed news about Obama's proposals very closely and an additional 29% followed the news fairly closely.

There are wide partisan divides in views of Obama's proposals. A 57% majority of Republicans say the proposals go too far, just 7% say not far enough and 25% say they are about right. By contrast, a majority of Democrats (55%) say the proposals on guns are about right, 21% say they do not go far enough and 10% say they go too far. Independents are divided: 36% say Obama's gun proposals are about right, while about as many (33%) say they go too far; few independents say the proposals do not go far enough (9%).

Men are somewhat more likely than women to say Obama's proposals go too far in addressing the nation's gun laws (36% vs. 26%). As many college graduates say the proposals go too far (25%) as not far enough (24%). By contrast, among those without a college degree, more say the proposals go too far than not far enough. Slim pluralities of all education groups say the proposals are about right. The balance of opinion on Obama's gun proposals is similar among those who are following the debate very closely and those who are following less closely.

---

### Views of Obama's Gun Proposals

<i>Obama's gun proposals go ...</i>	<b>Too far</b>	<b>Not far enough</b>	<b>About right</b>	<b>DK</b>
	%	%	%	%
Total	31	13	39	17=100
Men	36	13	37	14=100
Women	26	12	41	20=100
College grad+	25	24	35	16=100
Some college	33	6	43	18=100
HS or less	34	10	38	18=100
Republican	57	7	25	10=100
Democrat	10	21	55	14=100
Independent	33	9	36	22=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Jan. 17-20, 2013.  
 Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.  
 Gun policy question asked Jan. 18-20, 2013, N=744

---

## Gun Debate Tops Public's News Interests

About four-in-ten (43%) say they very closely followed news about President Obama announcing proposals for strengthening gun laws; another 29% followed this story fairly closely. Interest in the gun proposals outpaced interest in all other news stories last week, including economic news (36% very closely). Interest in the gun control proposals was about as high among Republicans (44% very closely) as Democrats (47% very closely).

The public paid less attention to the hostage situation in Algeria (17% very closely). And two sports-related controversies, Lance Armstrong admitting he used performance-enhancing drugs and an alleged hoax involving Notre Dame football player Manti Te'o and false claims about his deceased girlfriend, garnered little public attention: just 11% followed Armstrong news very closely and 10% followed news about Manti Te'o very closely.

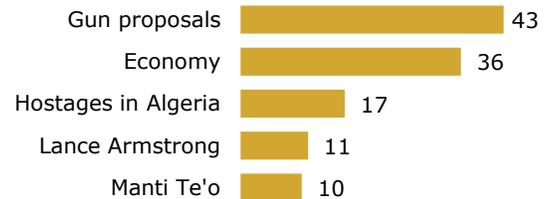
In the first week of January, the resolution to the fiscal cliff topped the public's news agenda with 38% saying they followed that story very closely. Economic news (34% very closely) and the debate over gun control (34% very closely) also received significant public attention in the Jan. 3-6 survey.

---

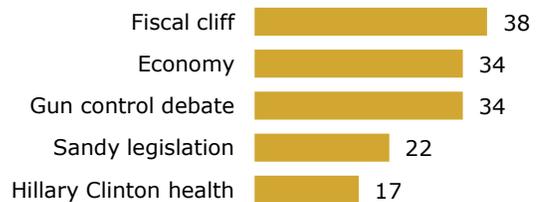
### News Interest

*% following very closely*

#### January 17-20, 2013



#### January 3-6, 2013



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Jan. 17-20, 2013; Jan. 3-6, 2013.

---

## About the Surveys

Most of the analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted January 17-20, 2013 among a national sample of 1,006 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (503 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 503 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 242 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source 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. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

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 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2012 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 among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted 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>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample. Asked news interest items.	1,006	3.7 percentage points
PEW.2 (Jan. 18-20). Asked gun proposals question.	744	4.3 percentage points
<i>Jan. 18-20</i>		
Republicans	203	8.3 percentage points
Democrats	246	7.5 percentage points
Independents	231	7.7 percentage points

Some of the analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted January 3-6, 2013 among a national sample of 1,003 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (501 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 502 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 241 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source 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. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

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 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2012 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 among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted 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>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	1,003	3.7 percentage points
Republicans	242	7.6 percentage points
Democrats	335	6.4 percentage points
Independents	348	6.3 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**  
**January 17-20, 2013, OMNIBUS**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**N=1,006**

**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					
January 17-20, 2013	36	32	15	16	*
January 3-6, 2013	34	32	18	16	1
December 6-9, 2012	38	30	16	14	1
November 8-11, 2012	41	31	15	12	1
November 1-4, 2012	38	30	16	14	1
October 25-28, 2012	44	30	14	11	1
October 18-21, 2012	39	36	12	12	1
October 12-14, 2012	42	28	14	15	1
October 4-7, 2012	40	29	13	17	*
September 27-30, 2012	34	37	13	15	1
September 20-23, 2012	36	32	17	15	*
September 13-16, 2012	38	32	17	12	1
September 7-9, 2012	36	31	17	15	2
August 31-September 3, 2012	33	31	20	16	1
August 23-26, 2012	38	30	15	16	1
August 16-19, 2012	33	32	16	19	*
August 9-12, 2012	30	31	20	18	1
August 2-5, 2012	33	29	20	17	1
July 26-29, 2012	32	30	20	19	*
July 19-22, 2012	39	29	16	16	*
July 12-15, 2012	32	33	18	17	1
July 5-8, 2012	34	28	18	19	1
June 28-July 1, 2012	38	28	15	18	1
June 21-24, 2012	33	32	17	17	*
June 14-17, 2012	39	28	15	17	*
June 7-10, 2012	35	32	15	18	*
May 31-June 3, 2012	37	34	13	14	1
May 24-27, 2012	33	31	19	16	1
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

**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
January 5-8, 2012	39	31	15	15	*
<a href="http://www.people-press.org/files/2013/01/NII-Economy-trend.pdf">SEE TREND FOR PREVIOUS YEARS: http://www.people-press.org/files/2013/01/NII-Economy-trend.pdf</a>					
b. President Obama announcing proposals for strengthening gun laws January 17-20, 2013	43	29	15	13	1
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
January 3-6, 2013: Debate over gun control in the U.S.	34	30	18	16	1
June, 1999: <i>Debates about gun control legislation in Congress and state legislatures</i>	28	37	22	12	1
c. Lance Armstrong admitting that he used performance-enhancing drugs January 17-20, 2013	11	30	31	27	1
October 18-21, 2012: <i>Nike and other companies ending their sponsorship of Lance Armstrong because of evidence he used performance enhancing drugs</i>	8	22	29	40	1
d. Hostages, including some Americans, taken by Islamic militants in Algeria January 17-20, 2013	17	31	23	29	*
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
July 3-7, 2008: <i>The rescue of 15 hostages held by rebels in Colombia</i>	17	27	23	32	1
April 5-9, 2007: <i>Fifteen British sailors and marines held captive and later releases by the Iranian government</i>	31	37	18	14	*
March 30-April 2, 2007: <i>Fifteen British sailors and marines held captive by the Iranian government</i>	27	28	22	22	1
November, 1990: <i>The plight of American hostages and other Westerners detained in Iraq and Kuwait</i>	49	33	13	4	1
October, 1990	47	37	11	5	*
September, 1990:	57	30	9	3	1
August, 1989: <i>The murder of Marine Lt. Col. Higgins, in Lebanon, and negotiations to free the other hostages in the Mideast</i>	49	34	12	4	1
e. The FAA grounding Boeing's 787 aircraft over safety concerns January 17-20, 2013	9	19	25	46	1
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
April 7-10, 2011: <i>Safety checks on Boeing 737 airplanes after a piece of the roof came off during a Southwest Airlines flight</i>	20	28	26	26	*
November 4-7, 2010: <i>An engine failure on a Qantas flight that caused the airline to ground some of its planes</i>	13	23	22	40	1
April 11-14, 2008: <i>Widespread airline delays and cancellations due to safety concerns</i>	19	30	30	21	*
March 28-31, 2008: <i>Issues with safety inspections on commercial airlines</i>	14	26	27	32	1

**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>
f. An alleged hoax involving Notre Dame football player Manti Te'o and false claims about his deceased girlfriend January 17-20, 2013	10	26	25	39	*

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.2 From what you've read and heard, do you think Barack Obama's proposals on guns go too far, not far enough or are about right in addressing the nation's gun laws?

Jan 18-20

2013

31	Too far
13	Not far enough
39	About right
17	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>

**PEW.2 ASKED ONLY ON THE FINAL THREE NIGHTS OF THE SURVEY (JAN.18-20), N=744.**

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
**January 3-6, 2013, OMNIBUS**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**N=1,003**

**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					
January 3-6, 2013	34	32	18	16	1
December 6-9, 2012	38	30	16	14	1
November 8-11, 2012	41	31	15	12	1
November 1-4, 2012	38	30	16	14	1
October 25-28, 2012	44	30	14	11	1
October 18-21, 2012	39	36	12	12	1
October 12-14, 2012	42	28	14	15	1
October 4-7, 2012	40	29	13	17	*
September 27-30, 2012	34	37	13	15	1
September 20-23, 2012	36	32	17	15	*
September 13-16, 2012	38	32	17	12	1
September 7-9, 2012	36	31	17	15	2
August 31-September 3, 2012	33	31	20	16	1
August 23-26, 2012	38	30	15	16	1
August 16-19, 2012	33	32	16	19	*
August 9-12, 2012	30	31	20	18	1
August 2-5, 2012	33	29	20	17	1
July 26-29, 2012	32	30	20	19	*
July 19-22, 2012	39	29	16	16	*
July 12-15, 2012	32	33	18	17	1
July 5-8, 2012	34	28	18	19	1
June 28-July 1, 2012	38	28	15	18	1
June 21-24, 2012	33	32	17	17	*
June 14-17, 2012	39	28	15	17	*
June 7-10, 2012	35	32	15	18	*
May 31-June 3, 2012	37	34	13	14	1
May 24-27, 2012	33	31	19	16	1
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

**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
January 5-8, 2012	39	31	15	15	*
<a href="http://www.people-press.org/files/2013/01/NII-Economy-trend.pdf">SEE TREND FOR PREVIOUS YEARS: http://www.people-press.org/files/2013/01/NII-Economy-trend.pdf</a>					
b. Debate over gun control in the U.S.					
January 3-6, 2013	34	30	18	16	1
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
June, 1999: <i>Debates about gun control legislation in Congress and state legislatures</i>	28	37	22	12	1
c. Congress and the president passing legislation to avoid the Fiscal Cliff					
January 3-6, 2013	38	26	16	21	1
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
December 13-16, 2012: <i>The debate in Washington over automatic spending cuts and tax increases that would take effect in January unless the president and Congress act</i>	37	28	16	18	1
December 6-9, 2012	37	26	17	20	1
November 29-December 2, 2012	40	26	14	20	1
November 15-18, 2012	33	24	16	25	1
November 8-11, 2012	38	20	20	20	*
July 19-22, 2012	23	21	22	33	1
February 16-20, 2012: <i>Congress passing a bill to extend payroll tax cuts and unemployment benefits<sup>1</sup></i>	24	27	21	27	1
August 4-7, 2011: <i>Congress and the president agreeing to cut federal spending and raise the debt limit</i>	46	25	13	14	1
December 16-19, 2010 <sup>2</sup> : <i>The extension of tax cuts and unemployment benefits approved by Congress and signed by President Obama</i>	37	27	15	19	1
December 9-12, 2010: <i>The agreement reached between Barack Obama and Congressional Republicans to extend tax cuts and unemployment benefits</i>	37	29	15	17	1
December 2-5, 2010: <i>The debate in Washington over the federal income tax cuts passed when George W. Bush was president</i>	39	26	17	17	1
September 16-19, 2010: <i>The debate in Washington over competing Democratic and Republican tax plans</i>	21	24	21	34	*
September 9-12, 2010	16	19	22	42	1
May 8-11, 2009: <i>The debate in Washington over the federal budget</i>	22	28	19	31	*
March 27-30, 2009: <i>Debate over Barack Obama's budget proposal</i>	28	34	18	19	1

<sup>1</sup> The wording of item PEW.1d was changed after the first night of interviewing (February 16, 2012) to reflect Congress passing this legislation. On February 16, 2012, the item wording was "Negotiations in Congress to extend payroll tax cuts and unemployment benefits."

<sup>2</sup> The wording of item PEW.1c was changed after the first night of interviewing (December 16, 2010), to reflect Congress passing and Obama signing this legislation. On December 16, 2010 the item read "The debate in Washington over extending tax cuts and unemployment benefits."

**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>
February 27-March 2, 2009: <i>Barack Obama's budget proposal for next year that raises taxes on wealthy Americans and increases spending on health care, education and other programs</i>	47	34	9	10	*
May, 2003: <i>George W. Bush's tax cut and economic stimulus plan</i>	25	36	22	15	2
February, 2003	26	33	23	16	2
January, 2003	28	34	21	15	2
February, 2002: <i>Debate in Congress over G.W. Bush's budget and tax cut plan</i>	17	31	28	23	1
April, 2001	24	38	20	18	*
February, 2001: <i>G.W. Bush's tax cut plan</i>	31	35	19	14	1
September, 1999: <i>The debate in Washington over how much to cut taxes</i>	18	30	28	23	1
July, 1999	14	34	21	31	*
June, 1997: <i>Competing proposals on ways to cut taxes as part of the recent bipartisan budget agreement</i>	11	27	28	33	1
September, 1992 (RVs): <i>George Bush's plan to improve the economy by cutting government spending and cutting taxes</i>	28	44	18	9	1
d. Hillary Clinton's recent health problems January 3-6, 2013	17	24	23	34	2
e. Congress delaying a vote on Hurricane Sandy relief January 3-6, 2013	22	24	26	27	1
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
November 8-11, 2012: <i>The impact of Hurricane Sandy</i>	46	33	12	9	1
November 1-4, 2012	53	31	9	6	1
October 25-28, 2012: <i>Hurricane Sandy</i>	28	24	22	25	1

**PEW.2-PEW.8 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**