



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

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2011: A Year of Big Stories Both Foreign and Domestic

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2011: A Year of Big Stories Both Foreign and Domestic

The threat of nuclear disaster in Japan and the killing of Osama bin Laden by Navy SEALs were two of the breaking news stories that captured the greatest amount of public attention in 2011. But Americans also kept a steady watch on the economy at home. More than half said they followed news about rising fuel prices very closely in April, while the struggling economy remained a top story throughout the year.

In the week after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, 55% said they were following news about the disaster very closely, the highest for any news story over the course of the year. News about the situation in Japan proved to be the most closely followed news story for six consecutive weeks, as the extent of damage to a nuclear power complex became a more grave concern.

But 2011 was a year of many big stories. In early May, half (50%) of Americans very closely followed news about Osama bin Laden's death. And on the domestic front, 53% said they tracked news about rising gas and oil prices very closely in mid-April. The January shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and others in Tucson, Arizona was closely tracked by 49%.

Since the meltdown of 2008, the economy has routinely been among the public's top stories. And across most of the 2011 weekly News Interest Index surveys, about four-in-ten said they followed news about the economy very closely. About half (49%) said this in late February, a high point for 2011.

Public's Top Stories for 2011

			Followed very closely %
1	Japan disaster	Mar 17-20*	55
2	Gas and oil prices	Apr 14-17*	53
3	bin Laden killed	May 5-8*	50
4	Economy	Feb 24-27*	49
5	Ariz. Shootings	Jan 13-16*	49
6	Gov't shutdown fight	Apr 7-10	47
7	Debt limit deal	Aug 4-7	46
8	Midwest tornadoes	May 26-29	45
9	Southern storms	Apr 28-May 1	45
10	Hurricane Irene	Aug 25-28*	45
11	9/11 anniversary	Sept 8-11	42
12	30 U.S. troops killed	Aug 11-14	39
13	Egypt protests	Feb 10-13*	39
14	Violence in Libya	Feb 24-27*	38
15	July heat wave	July 21-24	38
16	Libya air strikes	Mar 31-Apr 3*	37
17	Wisc. labor disputes	Feb 24-27*	36
18	Jobs debate	Sept 22-25*	35
19	Iraq troop withdrawal	Dec 15-18*	34
20	Penn State scandal	Nov 10-13*	34

PEW RESEARCH CENTER 2011 News Interest Index. Dates show field period of each survey.

* Interest was tracked over multiple weeks; highest weekly interest is shown here.

In 2011, economic news at times merged with the political as Democrats and Republicans battled in Washington over how to boost the economy and rein in the national debt and deficit.

Though many inside-Washington stories attract only modest public interest, two confrontations that threatened to have real consequences proved to be top stories this year. Nearly half (47%) said they very closely followed news about a federal budget showdown in April that nearly led to a government shutdown. Then in August, 46% very closely followed the fight over raising the government debt ceiling as a critical deadline approached.

A separate analysis by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) shows that news about the economy made up a greater share of coverage this year than any other major story. Economic news accounted for 20% of the newshole in 2011. The various story lines involving the Arab Spring accounted for 12% and the presidential campaign ranked third at 9% of coverage. (For more, see: "[The Year in the News](#)," Dec. 21, 2011).

Major Breaking News Stories

Starting shortly after New Year's Day, 2011 proved a year of major breaking stories – both foreign and domestic – that captured the public's attention for weeks at a time.

A Jan. 8 shooting rampage in Tucson, Ariz., left six dead and 13 injured, including Giffords. For the next three weeks, Americans said they followed developments in this story more closely than any other news. In the first full week after the shootings, 49% said this was the news they followed most closely. News about the shootings accounted for 57% of coverage that week, according to PEJ.

In early February, the public and media focus shifted to the massive protests in Egypt that led to the ouster of long-time president Hosni Mubarak. The public followed events in Egypt more closely than any other top story for three weeks. This news topped coverage for much of that period as well.

Week-by-Week Look at 2011's Top Stories

	#1 Most closely followed story	#2 Most closely followed story
Jan 6-8	Economy	New GOP House majority
Jan 9	Ariz. Shooting	Economy
Jan 13-16	Ariz. Shootings	Winter storms
Jan 20-23	Ariz. Shootings	Economy
Jan 27-30	Ariz. shootings	State of the Union address
Feb 3-6	Egypt	Winter storms
Feb 10-13	Egypt	Economy, Giffords
Feb 17-20	Egypt	Economy, State & local budgets
Feb 24-27	Oil prices	Violence in Libya
Mar 3-6	Violence in Libya	Wisconsin dispute
Mar 10-13	Japan disaster	Wisconsin dispute
Mar 17-20	Japan disaster	Gas and oil prices
Mar 24-27	Japan disaster	Air strikes in Libya
Apr 1-3	Japan disaster	Economy
Apr 7-10	Japan disaster	Gov't shutdown fight
Apr 14-17	Japan disaster	Gas and oil prices
Apr 21-25	Economy	Deadly storms
Apr 28-May 1	Deadly storms	Gas and oil prices
May 5-8	Death of bin Laden	Tornadoes and floods
May 12-15	Death of bin Laden	Miss. River flooding
May 19-22	Death of bin Laden	Miss. River flooding
May 26-29	Midwest tornadoes	Federal budget deficit
Jun 2-5	Economy	Afghanistan
Jun 9-12	Economy	Weiner scandal
Jun 16-19	Economy	Weiner resigns
Jun 23-26	Economy	Troops in Afghanistan
Jun 30-Jul 3	Economy	National debt/deficit
Jul 7-10	Casey Anthony trial	Economy
Jul 14-17	National debt/deficit	Economy
Jul 21-24	National debt/deficit	Economy
Jul 28-31	National debt/deficit	Norway massacre, Economy
Aug 4-7	Debt limit deal	Economy
Aug 11-14	Troops killed in crash	Stock markets
Aug 18-21	Economy	2012 elections
Aug 25-28	Hurricane Irene	Economy
Sep 1-4	Hurricane Irene	Economy
Sep 8-11	9/11 anniversary	Economy
Sep 15-18	Jobs legislation	2012 elections
Sep 22-25	Economy	Jobs, deficit debate
Sep 29-Oct 2	Economy	2012 elections
Oct 6-9	Economy	Steve Jobs
Oct 13-16	Economy	Wall Street protests
Oct 20-23	Economy	Wild animals released, Gadhafi death and 2012 elections
Oct 27-30	Economy	2012 elections
Nov 3-6	2012 elections	Economy
Nov 10-13	Penn State scandal	Economy
Nov 17-20	Penn State scandal	Economy
Dec 1-4	Economy	2012 elections
Dec 8-11	2012 elections	Economy, Penn State
Dec 15-18	Economy	2012 elections

PEW RESEARCH CENTER 2011 News Interest Index. Multiple stories listed if tied.

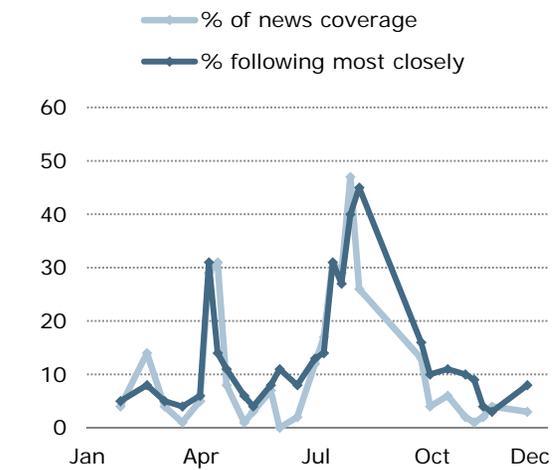
Then, the devastation caused by the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan topped news interest for six weeks. The week of March 14-20, the first full week after the disasters hit, 57% said they were following news about developments in Japan most closely; news about Japan accounted for 57% of coverage. Asked which element of the story they were following most closely, 51% cited the damaged nuclear plants. Fewer cited the extent of destruction and relief efforts (23%) or the economic impact (11%).

Then, at the start of May, U.S. forces killed Osama bin Laden in a raid on his hideout in Pakistan. His death and related developments topped the public's news interest for three weeks. The week of the raid, the bin Laden story accounted for 69% of coverage examined by PEJ, the biggest one-week story since monitoring began in early 2007.

In early June, the public started to focus more intently on news about the nation's struggling economy. With the recovery seemingly stalled and worries about a new recession, the economy – or a related news theme – proved to be a top or second ranked story for most weeks through the rest of the year. For much of July into early August, the public's top story was the debate in Washington over what to do about the national debt and then the debt limit deal reached at the start of August.

The public paid far less attention to the work of the legislative “super-committee” authorized by that deal. As the panel's deadline approached in mid-November, just 3% said this was the news they followed most closely. With no immediate consequences for failing to reach an agreement – and with failure expected – coverage also was limited (4%).

U.S. Debt and Deficit Debate

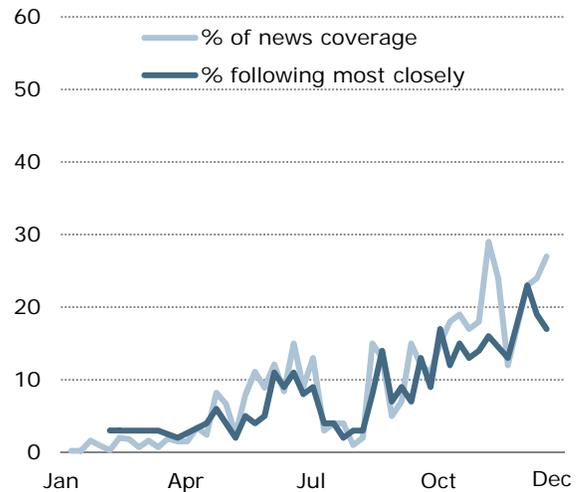


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While the public initially paid only modest attention to the early stages of the fight for the Republican presidential nomination, by fall interest in the campaign began to grow. Heading toward the first contests of 2012, coverage increased as well. Late in the year, the child sex abuse scandal at Penn State University became a top story. Meanwhile, the debt crisis playing out in Europe generated only modest attention.

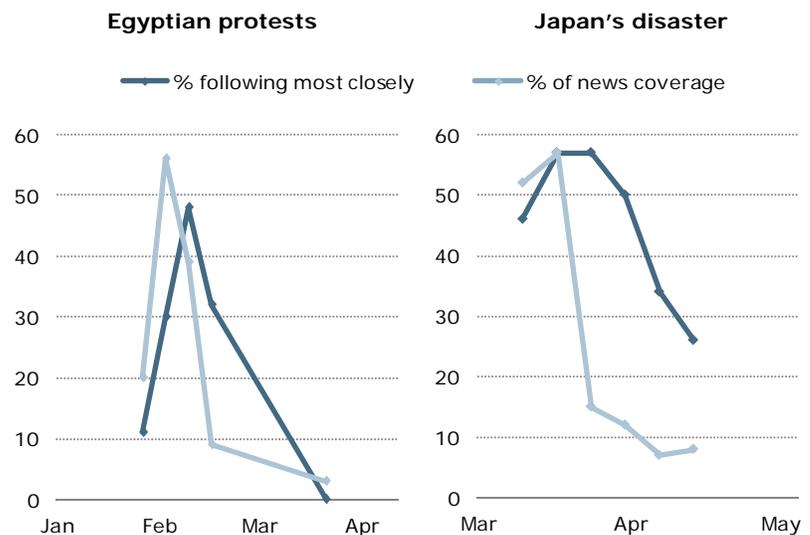
While the Arab Spring developments in Egypt generated strong public interest early in the year, the Oct. 20 death of Moammar Gadhafi in Libya attracted much less attention. That week, 13% said the death of the former Libyan leader was the news they followed most closely. Public interest was divided among five top stories, none followed most closely by more than 15%. Gadhafi's death, which came after rebels had taken control of the Libyan government, accounted for 17% of coverage that week.

2012 Presidential Campaign



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Interest and Coverage Track Closely During Protests in Egypt and the Disaster in Japan



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Public, Media Often in Sync

As the major stories of 2011 unfolded, the public and the media were often in sync on the top stories of any given week. That was the case immediately after the Japan disaster and the Arizona shootings, as well as the week that Hosni Mubarak resigned in Egypt.

But over the course of the year, there were instances where the public stayed with a story longer than the media, largely because the media shifted to other breaking stories.

For example, the week of March 21-27, nearly six-in-ten (57%) continued to follow the disaster in Japan more closely than any other story, but the media devoted more coverage to the start of the American and NATO air campaign in Libya. That week, events in Libya accounted for 41% of coverage, while coverage of the aftermath of Japan's disaster dropped to 15% from 57% one week earlier.

Similarly, the public continued to closely track news about the shootings in Arizona into late January, though the media shifted focus toward the end of the month. The week of Jan. 24-30, nearly four-in-ten (38%) said the aftermath of the shootings was their top story, more than double any of the other choices. This news, though, accounted for just 4% of coverage. The media devoted far more attention to the growing unrest in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East (20%) and Barack Obama's state-of-the-union address (17%).

On Many Big Stories, Intense Interest and Heavy Coverage

	% followed most closely	% of newshole
Japan disaster (Mar 17-20)	57	57
Arizona shootings (Jan 13-16)	49	57
Mubarak resigns (Feb 10-13)	48	39
bin Laden killed (May 5-8)	42	69
Debt limit debate (July 28-31)	40	47
Govt shutdown fight (Apr 7-10)	31	29
Violence in Libya (Mar 3-6)	23	28

PEW RESEARCH CENTER News interest figures from Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. News coverage figures from the Project for Excellence in Journalism. Dates show field period of the survey in which interest was measured.

Instances When Coverage and Public Interests Differed in 2011

	% followed most closely	% of newshole
When press coverage exceeded public interest		
U.K. hacking scandal (July 21-24)	3	17
Dominique Strauss-Kahn's arrest (May 19-22)	2	15
When public interest exceeded press coverage		
Gas and oil prices (Apr 28-May1)	24	2
Helicopter crash in Afghanistan kills 30 US troops (Aug 11-14)	27	7

PEW RESEARCH CENTER News interest figures from Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. News coverage figures from the Project for Excellence in Journalism. Dates show field period of the survey in which interest was measured.

There also were stories over the year that received significant media coverage but drew little public interest. For example, in mid-May, the public paid modest attention to the arrest of Dominique Strauss-Kahn, then managing director of the International Monetary Fund, on sexual assault charges in New York. While this was one of the top stories of the week for the media (15% of coverage), just 2% said this was the news they followed most closely.

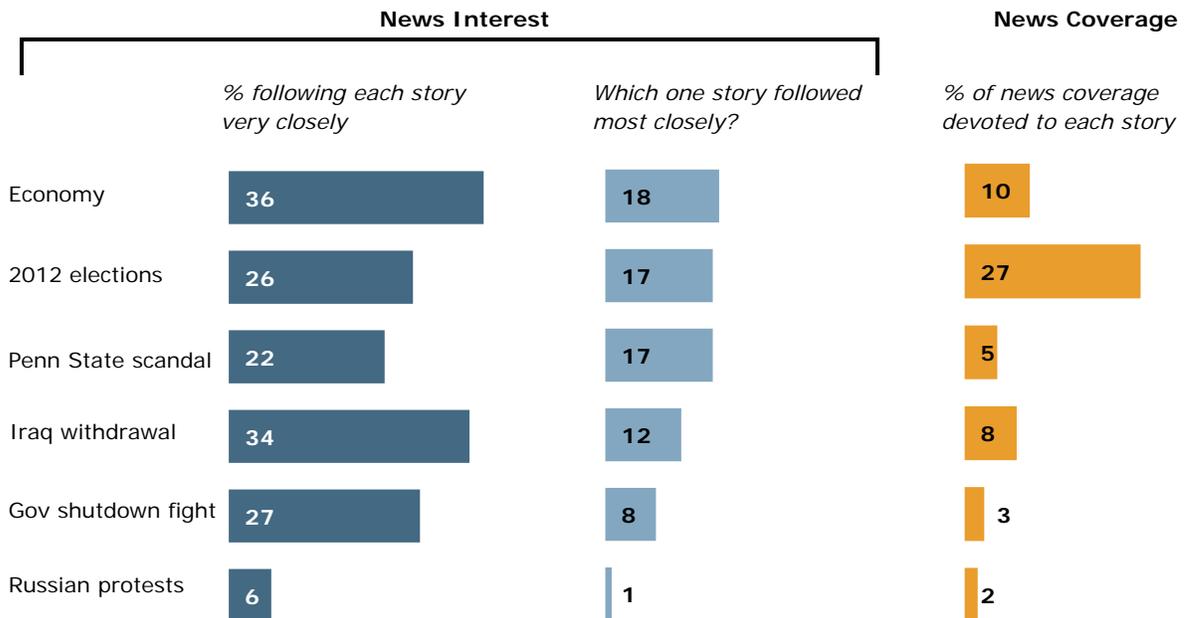
Similarly, in mid-July, media coverage of developments in the scandal involving phone hacking by newspapers in the United Kingdom greatly exceeded public interest. That week, the debate about the national deficit and debt in the U.S. topped both the public's news interest and media coverage. Fully 29% of coverage analyzed by PEJ dealt with the debt and deficit. Still, the scandal involving News Corp media properties in Great Britain accounted for 17% of coverage. Just 3% of the public said this was the news they followed most closely.

And there were several instances in which public interest greatly exceeded coverage. The public generally closely tracks news about rising fuel prices. That was the case in late April, when 24% said this was their top story. News about rising oil and gas prices, however, was limited, accounting for 2% of coverage that week. In mid-August, more than a quarter (27%) said their top story of the week was the helicopter crash in Afghanistan that killed 30 U.S. troops. The news accounted for 7% of coverage in a week when the economy and the campaign topped coverage.

The Week's News

In the survey conducted Dec. 15-18, three stories topped the public's news interest. Nearly two-in-ten (18%) say they followed news about the economic situation most closely, while 17% each say their top story was either the candidates for president in 2012 or the child sex abuse scandal at Penn State.

This Week's News Interest and News Coverage



News interest shows the percentage of people who say they followed each story very closely and which one story they followed most closely, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, December 15-18, 2011. News coverage show the percentage of news coverage devoted to each story, Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, December 11-18, 2010.

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 Dec. 12-18, and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected Dec. 15-18 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.) The News Interest Index survey collects data from Thursday through Sunday to gauge public interest in the most covered stories of the week.

The analysis in this report is based on weekly *News Interest Index* surveys conducted throughout 2011. Results for the weekly surveys are based on telephone interviews among a national sample of approximately 1,000 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States. Results for the latest survey, conducted Dec. 15-18, 2011, are based on a national sample of 1,004 (600 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 404 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 187 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.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2010 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample is also weighted to match current patterns of telephone status based on extrapolations from the 2010 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:

Group	Sample Size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,004	4.0 percentage points
Republicans	272	7.5 percentage points
Democrats	304	7.0 percentage points
Independents	321	7.0 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.

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER NEWS INTEREST INDEX
DECEMBER 15-18, 2011
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>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
a. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy					
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
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

[SEE TRENDS FOR PREVIOUS YEARS](#)

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
b. Political protests in Russia					
December 15-18, 2011	6	12	24	57	1
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
July 31-August 3, 2009: <i>The Iranian government's crackdown on opposition protestors</i>	18	23	26	31	2
July 2-5, 2009: <i>News about controversy surrounding the recent Iranian election</i>	22	31	23	23	*
June 26-29, 2009: <i>The Iranian government's crackdown on election protestors</i>	31	27	18	23	1
June 19-22, 2009: <i>Protests in Iran over disputed elections</i>	28	28	21	22	1
June 12-15, 2009: <i>The presidential election in Iran</i>	18	26	23	34	*
March 7-10, 2008: <i>The election of a new president in Russia</i>	7	18	23	51	1
December 7-10, 2007: <i>Recent parliamentary elections in Russia</i>	5	14	22	58	1
January 2000: <i>The resignation of Russian President Boris Yeltsin</i>	11	32	33	22	2
September 1999: <i>Political instability in Russia</i>	9	23	34	33	1
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	*
July 1996: <i>The Russian presidential elections</i>	7	25	31	37	*
January 1994: <i>The Russian elections</i>	11	32	31	26	*
October 1993: <i>Boris Yeltsin's conflict with the Russian parliament</i>	19	36	24	20	1
September 1993: <i>Boris Yeltsin's decision to dissolve the Russian parliament</i>	18	32	27	22	1
September 1993: <i>The political and economic changes going on in Russia</i>	12	36	29	22	*
April 1993: <i>The voter referendum in Russia</i>	10	20	36	32	2
January 1992: <i>Mikhail Gorbachev's resignation as the Soviet Union came to an official end</i>	31	42	20	7	*
December 1991: <i>The end of Mikhail Gorbachev's rule, as a new commonwealth was formed to replace the Soviet Union</i>	30	36	19	15	*
October 1991: <i>The breakup of the Soviet Union following the failed coup to depose Mikhail Gorbachev</i>	47	32	12	8	1
July 1991: <i>Russian President Boris Yeltsin's election victory and visit to the U.S.</i>	12	28	33	26	1
c. Congress working on a budget agreement to avoid a government shutdown					
December 15-18, 2011	27	23	21	29	1
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
November 10-13, 2011: <i>A "super committee" whose goal is to significantly reduce the federal budget deficit</i>	19	21	24	36	1
November 3-6, 2011: <i>Discussions in Washington about how to address the federal budget deficit and national debt</i>	24	31	21	24	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
October 27-30, 2011	25	28	21	25	1
October 13-16, 2011: <i>The debate in Washington over jobs and the deficit</i>	29	32	15	24	1
September 29-October 2, 2011: <i>Congress working on a budget extension to avoid a government shutdown</i>	31	26	20	22	*
September 22-25, 2011: <i>The debate in Washington over jobs and the deficit</i>	35	26	19	19	1
September 15-18, 2011: <i>The debate in Washington over President Obama's jobs legislation</i>	31	28	19	21	2
September 8-11, 2011: <i>Barack Obama's speech about jobs to a joint session of Congress</i>	28	18	17	36	1
July 28-31, 2011: <i>Discussions in Washington about how to address the federal budget deficit and national debt</i>	41	27	15	17	*
July 21-24, 2011	38	28	17	17	*
July 14-17, 2011	34	29	18	19	*
June 16-19, 2011: <i>Debate in Washington over whether to raise the federal debt limit</i>	24	26	22	28	*
June 2-5, 2011	23	24	22	31	*
May 26-29, 2011: <i>Discussions in Washington about how to address the federal budget deficit</i>	25	26	20	29	*
May 12-15, 2011	21	26	24	28	1
May 5-8, 2011: <i>Discussions in Washington about how to address the federal budget deficit and national debt</i>	29	28	22	20	1
April 21-25, 2011	30	31	18	21	*
April 14-17, 2011	36	27	18	19	1
April 7-10, 2011: <i>The threat of a government shutdown because of budget disagreements in Washington</i>	47	26	15	12	*
March 31-April 3, 2011: <i>Discussions in Washington about how to address the federal budget deficit</i>	30	27	21	22	*
March 17-20, 2011	24	25	24	26	1
March 3-6, 2011	26	29	19	26	1
February 17-20, 2011	27	30	17	25	1
December 2-5, 2010	35	25	21	17	2
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
November 11-14, 2010: <i>Proposals made by leaders of the federal budget deficit commission</i>	15	21	21	41	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
March 6-9, 2009: <i>Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling health care</i>	41	32	13	14	*

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
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	*
February 27-March 2, 2009: <i>The Obama administration's plan to help homeowners facing foreclosure which could cost as much as \$275 billion dollars</i>	31	36	19	13	1
February 20-23, 2009: <i>The \$780 billion economic stimulus legislation approved by Congress and signed into law by President Obama</i>	41	37	14	8	*
February 13-16, 2009: <i>Congress passing Barack Obama's economic stimulus plan</i>	50	32	13	5	*
February 6-9, 2009: <i>The debate in Congress over Barack Obama's economic stimulus plan</i>	41	33	15	11	*
January 30-February 2, 2009	36	29	22	13	*
January 16-19, 2009: <i>Debate in Washington over what the government should do about the nation's economic problems</i>	35	33	17	15	*
January 9-12, 2009: <i>Projections of a record high federal budget deficit this year</i>	35	30	19	16	*
December 19-22, 2008: <i>The Bush administration's plan to provide billions in emergency loans to U.S. automakers</i>	37	33	16	13	1
December 12-15, 2008: <i>The debate over a government bailout for the U.S. auto industry</i>	40	33	18	9	*
December 5-8, 2008: <i>The debate in Congress over a government bailout for the U.S. auto industry</i>	34	38	17	11	*
November 21-24, 2008	41	26	17	15	1
October 3-6, 2008: <i>The debate in Washington over a plan to use government funds to stabilize financial markets</i>	62	26	7	5	*
September 26-29, 2008	60	22	10	8	*
September 12-15, 2008: <i>The federal government taking control of the mortgage companies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac</i>	28	35	19	17	1
March 20-24, 2008: <i>The buyout of Wall Street investment bank Bear Stearns</i>	21	26	21	32	*
February 8-11, 2008: <i>President Bush and Congress agreeing on an economic Stimulus plan</i>	22	33	23	21	1
January 25-28, 2008	24	36	19	21	*
February, 2003: <i>George W. Bush's tax cut and economic stimulus plan</i>	26	33	23	16	2
February, 2003	26	33	23	16	2
January, 2003	28	34	21	15	2
February, 2002: <i>The debate in Congress over George W. Bush's budget and tax cut plan</i>	17	31	28	23	1
April, 2001	24	38	20	18	*
February, 2001: <i>George W. Bush's tax cut plan</i>	31	35	19	14	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
August, 1997: <i>The debate in Washington about the federal budget</i>	14	34	25	26	1
May, 1997	16	38	23	22	1
February, 1997	19	28	22	29	2
March, 1996	24	35	23	18	*
January, 1996	32	42	17	9	*
September, 1995	20	35	27	18	*
August, 1995: <i>The debate in Congress over the federal budget</i>	18	34	27	20	1
February, 1995: <i>The debate in Congress over the Balanced Budget Amendment</i>	12	31	28	28	1
August, 1993: <i>The debate in Congress over Bill Clinton's budget bill</i>	30	36	21	13	*
June, 1993	12	38	31	18	1
February, 1993: <i>Bill Clinton's economic plan</i>	49	36	10	5	*
September, 1992 (RV): <i>George Bush's plan to improve the economy by cutting government spending and cutting taxes</i>	28	44	18	9	1
November, 1990: <i>Congressional and administration efforts to reach a budget deficit agreement</i>	34	33	20	11	2
October, 1990: <i>Attempts by Congress and the administration to find ways to reduce the budget deficit</i>	34	37	17	12	*
August, 1989: <i>Passage of a bill to bailout ailing savings and loan institutions</i>	26	30	20	23	1
d. The complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq					
December 15-18, 2011	34	32	18	14	2
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
October 21-23, 2011: <i>President Obama announcing a complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq by the end of 2011</i>	30	30	19	20	1
December 16-19, 2010: <i>The current situation and events in Iraq</i>	19	30	27	24	*
September 2-6, 2010: <i>The withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Iraq</i>	36	37	15	11	*
August 26-29, 2010: <i>The current situation and events in Iraq</i>	25	36	24	15	1
August 19-22, 2010: <i>The withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Iraq</i>	31	33	19	17	1
August 5-8, 2010: <i>The current situation and events in Iraq</i>	23	35	22	18	1
May 13-16, 2010	31	34	21	13	2
March 12-15, 2010	22	36	28	14	*
March 5-8, 2010	26	34	20	20	*
January 29-February 1, 2010	23	33	27	17	*
January 15-18, 2010	20	35	28	17	*
October 16-19, 2009	23	30	24	23	*
September 11-14, 2009	21	33	30	16	*
August 21-24, 2009	25	35	22	18	1
August 14-17, 2009	19	38	23	18	*
July 2-5, 2009: <i>U.S. troops withdrawing from Iraqi cities</i>	25	34	20	21	0
April 24-27, 2009: <i>The current situation and events in Iraq</i>	21	35	25	19	*
March 20-23, 2009	25	37	21	17	*

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
February 27-March 2, 2009: <i>Barack Obama's plan to withdraw most U.S. troops from Iraq by August 2010</i>	40	37	13	9	1
December 12-15, 2008: <i>The current situation and events in Iraq</i>	24	35	25	16	*
November 21-24, 2008	32	31	24	13	0
November 14-17, 2008	24	33	27	16	*
October 31-November 3, 2008	30	35	22	12	1
October 24-27, 2008	29	35	25	11	*
October 10-13, 2008	23	34	30	13	*
October 3-6, 2008	29	33	28	10	*
September 5-8, 2008	24	37	26	13	*
August 29-31, 2008	22	32	29	16	1
August 22-25, 2008	26	31	27	15	1
August 1-4, 2008	27	40	23	10	*
July 25-28, 2008	28	33	22	17	*
July 18-21, 2008	33	35	20	12	*
July 11-14, 2008	24	35	24	16	1
July 3-7, 2008	25	35	25	15	*
June 20-23, 2008	25	36	24	15	*
May 9-12, 2008	29	35	21	14	1
May 2-5, 2008	26	35	25	13	1
April 25-28, 2008	29	35	23	12	1
April 18-21, 2008	29	39	20	11	1
April 11-14, 2008	25	39	20	15	1
April 4-7, 2008	25	37	23	15	*
March 28-31, 2008	29	40	19	11	1
March 20-24, 2008	30	38	19	13	*
March 14-17, 2008	29	38	23	10	*
March 7-10, 2008	28	39	18	15	*
February 29-March 3, 2008	28	40	19	13	*
February 8-11, 2008	24	35	25	16	*
February 1-4, 2008	28	39	22	11	*
January 25-28, 2008	23	35	26	16	*
January 18-21, 2008	31	33	20	15	1
January 11-14, 2008	25	38	21	16	*
January 4-7, 2008	27	38	20	15	*
December 14-17, 2007	26	32	24	18	*
December 7-10, 2007	28	37	21	14	*
November 23-26, 2007	25	37	21	16	1
November 16-19, 2007	31	37	19	12	1
November 9-12, 2007	29	38	19	13	1
November 2-5, 2007	31	35	18	15	1
October 26-29, 2007	28	37	21	13	1
October 19-22, 2007	28	37	20	15	*
October 12-15, 2007	26	36	18	19	1
October 5-8, 2007	29	33	22	16	*
September 28 – October 1, 2007	30	41	18	11	*
September 21-24, 2007	32	38	17	13	*
September 14-17, 2007	31	36	18	15	0
September 7-10, 2007	32	34	20	14	*
August 30 – September 2, 2007	31	34	18	16	1
August 24-27, 2007	34	36	18	12	*
August 17-20, 2007	33	34	18	15	*
August 10-13, 2007	36	37	14	13	*
August 3-6, 2007	29	40	19	12	*
July 27-30, 2007	28	36	19	16	1
July 20-23, 2007	28	34	21	16	1
July 13-16, 2007	25	41	17	16	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
July 6-9, 2007	36	34	18	12	*
June 29-July 2, 2007	32	35	19	13	1
June 22-25, 2007	30	36	18	15	1
June 15-18, 2007	30	37	20	13	*
June 8-11, 2007	32	38	15	14	1
June 1-4, 2007	30	36	20	13	1
May 24-27, 2007	33	36	18	12	1
May 18-21, 2007	36	34	15	14	1
May 11-14, 2007	30	34	18	17	1
May 4-7, 2007	38	37	15	10	*
April 27-30, 2007	27	35	21	16	1
April 20-23, 2007	28	35	22	15	*
April 12-16, 2007	34	33	20	13	*
April 5-9, 2007	33	39	16	11	1
March 30-April 2, 2007	34	37	16	13	*
March 23-March 26, 2007: <i>News about the current situation in Iraq</i>	31	38	18	12	1
March 16-19, 2007	34	34	17	15	*
March 9-12, 2007	34	37	16	13	*
March 2-5, 2007	37	37	16	9	1
February 23-26, 2007	36	36	15	13	*
February 16-19, 2007	30	36	19	14	1
February 9-12, 2007	37	34	18	11	*
February 2-5, 2007	38	38	17	7	*
January 26-29, 2007	36	38	15	11	*
January 19-22, 2007	37	34	18	10	1
January 12-15, 2007	38	36	17	8	1
January, 2007	46	40	8	5	1
January 5-8, 2007	40	32	16	12	0
December, 2006	42	39	12	7	*
November 30-December 3, 2006	40	36	13	11	*
Mid-November, 2006	44	38	12	6	*
September, 2006	33	43	14	8	2
August, 2006	41	39	12	7	1
June, 2006	37	43	13	6	1
May, 2006	42	35	15	7	1
April, 2006	43	36	13	7	1
March, 2006	43	38	12	6	1
February, 2006	39	42	12	6	1
January, 2006	40	40	12	7	1
December, 2005	45	38	11	5	1
Early November, 2005	41	40	13	6	*
Early October, 2005	43	36	15	6	*
Early September, 2005	32	40	20	7	1
July, 2005	43	37	13	6	1
Mid-May, 2005	42	42	11	5	*
Mid-March, 2005	40	39	14	5	2
February, 2005	38	45	13	4	*
January, 2005	48	37	11	4	*
December, 2004	34	44	15	6	1
Mid-October, 2004	42	38	11	8	1
Early September, 2004	47	37	9	6	1
August, 2004	39	42	12	6	1
July, 2004	43	40	11	6	*
June, 2004	39	42	12	6	1
April, 2004	54	33	8	5	*
Mid-March, 2004	47	36	12	4	1
Early February, 2004	47	38	10	4	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
Mid-January, 2004	48	39	9	4	*
December, 2003	44	38	11	6	1
November, 2003	52	33	9	5	1
September, 2003	50	33	10	6	1
Mid-August, 2003	45	39	10	5	1
Early July, 2003	37	41	13	8	1
June, 2003	46	35	13	6	*
May, 2003	63	29	6	2	*
April 11-16, 2003: <i>News about the war in Iraq</i>	47	40	10	2	1
April 2-7, 2003	54	34	9	2	1
March 20-24, 2003	57	33	7	2	1
March 13-16, 2003: <i>Debate over the possibility that the U.S. will take military action in Iraq</i>	62	27	6	4	1
February, 2003	62	25	8	4	1
January, 2003	55	29	10	4	2
December, 2002	51	32	10	6	1
Late October, 2002	53	33	8	5	1
Early October, 2002	60	28	6	5	1
Early September, 2002: <i>Debate over the possibility that the U.S. will invade Iraq</i>	48	29	15	6	2
e. A sex abuse scandal at Penn State University					
December 15-18, 2011	22	29	23	25	1
December 8-11, 2011	24	29	24	22	1
November 17-20, 2011: <i>A sex abuse scandal at Penn State University</i>	28	31	21	18	1
November 10-13, 2011: <i>A sex abuse scandal at Penn State University resulting in the firing of the school's president and football coach Joe Paterno</i>	34	29	19	18	1
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
August 18-21, 2011: <i>Recent scandals in college football</i>	10	12	17	61	*
September 16-19, 2010: <i>Pope Benedict's visit to Great Britain and his comments on the Catholic Church's handling of sex-abuse scandals</i>	10	16	26	47	1
April 23-26, 2010: <i>Reports about the Vatican's handling of sex-abuse scandals in the Catholic Church</i>	14	28	29	29	*
March 26-29, 2010	17	24	28	30	*
March 19-22, 2010	8	18	31	42	1
June, 2002: <i>Reports of sexual abuses by Catholic priests</i>	38	36	17	8	1
May, 2002: <i>The Pope and American cardinals meeting in Rome about sexual abuse by Catholic priests</i>	27	33	21	18	1
Early April, 2002: <i>Reports of sexual abuses by Catholic priests</i>	27	34	25	13	1
December, 1993	18	32	31	18	1
f. News about candidates for the 2012 presidential elections					
December 15-18, 2011	26	24	20	29	1
December 8-11, 2011	27	27	18	28	*
December 1-4, 2011	25	28	20	26	1
November 17-20, 2011	24	31	21	23	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
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](#)

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.]**

Dec 15-18

2011

18	Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
17	News about candidates for the 2012 presidential elections
17	A sex abuse scandal at Penn State University
12	The complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq
8	Congress working on a budget agreement to avoid a government shutdown
1	Political protests in Russia
8	Some other story (VOL.)
20	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)