

**NEWS** Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Tuesday, February 14, 2012 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Andrew Kohut, Director Michael Remez, Senior Writer

# Election News Tops Public Interest, Coverage Despite Santorum Rise, Romney Still Most Visible

Rick Santorum's recent electoral wins may have propelled him to the top of the Republican field, but by a better than two-to-one margin, Mitt Romney remains the candidate Americans say they are hearing about most in the news. Half (50%) say they

have heard the most about Romney recently, compared with 19% who say they have heard the most about Santorum. (For more on the GOP race, see <u>"Santorum</u> <u>Catches Romney in GOP</u> <u>Race"</u> Feb. 13, 2012.)

With the race for the GOP nomination in flux, news about the 2012 elections again topped the public's news interest last week, according to the latest weekly News Interest Index survey, conducted Feb. 9-12 among 1,000 adults by the Pew

# News Interest vs. News Coverage News Interest News Coverage 2012 elections 25 22 Economy 18 10 Birth control coverage 12 8 Iran, Israel tensions 9 2 Violence in Syria 5 10 CA gay marriage ban 4 3

News interest shows the percentage of people who say they followed this story most closely, Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, Feb. 9-12, 2012. News coverage shows the percentage of news coverage devoted to each story, Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, Feb. 6-12, 2012.

Research Center for the People & the Press. A quarter (25%) say this was the news they followed most closely, while 18% say economic news was their top story.

The campaign also received the most coverage, accounting for 22% of the newshole, according to a separate analysis by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ). Though many more Americans say they have been hearing the most about Romney, he and Santorum were both major players in campaign coverage: Romney was a significant figure in 57% of campaign stories and Santorum in 46%.

The other Republican candidates trail on both fronts. Newt Gingrich was a significant figure in 28% of election stories; 13% say he was the

## Comparing Visibility and Coverage of GOP Candidates

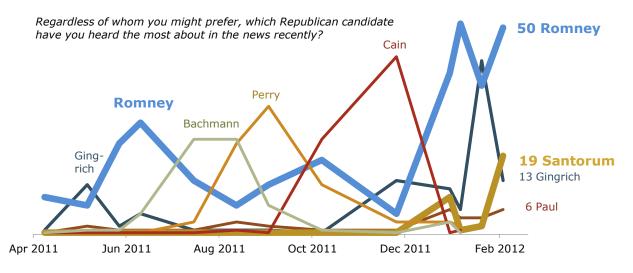
	Heard the most about in the news recently	Featured in campaign news coverage				
	%	%				
Romney	50	57				
Santorum	19	46				
Gingrich	13	28				
Paul	6	4				

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 9-12, 2012: Candidate most heard about in the news. Other candidates not shown. Coverage figures from Project for Excellence in Journalism, Feb. 6-12, 2012. Figure is percentage of campaign stories in which a candidate is present in at least 25% of the story. Because more than one candidate may be featured in a story, the figures can add to more than 100%.

candidate they had heard most about in the news. Ron Paul was a significant player in 4% of coverage, while 6% say he was the candidate they heard most about.

Candidate visibility among Republicans and GOP-leaning independents is comparable to the general public: 52% say they heard the most about Romney, 24% say Santorum, 10% Gingrich and 6% Paul.

### **Despite Santorum's Recent Victories, Public Hears More About Romney**



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 9-12, 2012. For Jan. 26-29, 2012 and the current survey, respondents were asked which candidate they'd heard the most about, with Romney, Santorum, Gingrich and Paul named. Respondents could volunteer other names, but very few did. From Apr. 2011 through mid-Jan. 2012, the question was open ended, and respondents had to volunteer which candidate they had heard the most about.

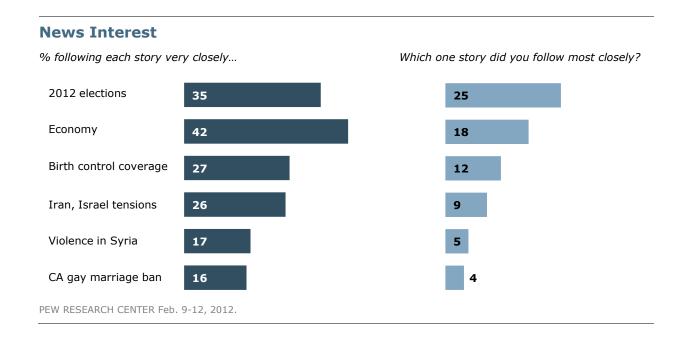
Reflecting the volatile GOP primary campaign, candidate visibility has fluctuated dramatically over the past year as a series of alternatives to Romney have become the focus of media and public attention for a period of time before falling back again. Just two weeks ago, 42% said they were hearing the most about Gingrich. Nearly as many (36%) said Romney was the most visible GOP candidate then; just 2% named Santorum.

### The Week's News

Very close interest in campaign coverage grew somewhat last week, hitting a high for the year so far, with 35% saying they followed news about the candidates very closely. One week earlier, 30% said they followed campaign news very closely.

Economic news also continued to attract strong interest; 42% say they followed news about the condition of the U.S. economy very closely, while 18% say this was the news they followed most closely. News about the economy made up 10% of coverage.

About a quarter (26%) say they very closely followed news about tension between Israel and Iran over Iran's nuclear program. This was the week's top story for 9%, but accounted for only 2% of coverage.



Similar numbers followed coverage of the debate over a new federal rule that would require religious employers, such as Catholic hospitals and universities, to include birth control in their health insurance plans; 27% say they followed this news very closely and 12% say this was the news they followed most closely. The debate, including a change announced Friday by President Obama intended to address the concerns of religious groups, accounted for 8% of coverage.

Among partisans, 38% of Republicans say they followed this news very closely, compared with 27% of Democrats and 22% of independents. One week earlier, Democrats were slightly more attentive than Republicans to news about the fight over funding for breast cancer prevention programs at Planned Parenthood by the Susan G. Komen for the Cure foundation.

Women were more likely than men to say they very closely followed news about the Komen funding for Planned Parenthood (24% vs. 16%). There is no comparable divide in interest in the debate over birth control coverage (26% of women and 27% of men followed this news very closely).

A court ruling that found California's ban on gay marriage unconstitutional received less attention from the public; 16% say they followed this news very closely, while 4% say this was their top story of the week. The federal appeals court ruling made up 3% of coverage.

Nearly two-in-ten (17%) say they followed news about the political violence in Syria very closely; 5% say this was the news they followed most closely. With conditions worsening there, news about violence in Syria accounted for 10% 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 Feb. 6-12, and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected Feb. 9-12 from a nationally representative sample of 1,000 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 <a href="https://www.journalism.org">www.journalism.org</a>.) 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 Feb. 9-12, 2012, among a national sample of 1,00 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (600 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 400 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 179 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 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:

Group	Sample Size	Plus or minus
Total sample	1,000	4.0 percentage points
Men	470	5.5 percentage points
Women	530	5.0 percentage points
Republicans	264	7.5 percentage points
Democrats	296	7.0 percentage points
Independents	359	6.5 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 FEBRUARY 9-12, 2012 NEWS INTEREST INDEX FINAL TOPLINE N=1,000

### **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?"]

		Very <u>closely</u>	Fairly <u>closely</u>	Not too closely	Not at all <u>closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
a.	Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy					
	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
	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 42	30	14 16	10 11	0
	March 31-April 3, 2011		31			*
	March 24-27, 2011 March 17-20, 2011	36 38	32 32	17 17	15 13	*
	March 17-20, 2011 March 10-13, 2011	38 40	32 30	16	13	*
	March 3-6, 2011	40 37	31	17	13	1
	February 24-27, 2011	49	29	17	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	*
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-	W12 GGW121/G25	Very <u>closely</u>	Fairly <u>closely</u>	Not too closely	Not at all closely	(VOL.) DK/Ref
	January 20-23, 2011 January 13-16, 2011	37 37	33 29	14 15	15 18	1 1
	January 6-9, 2011 SEE TRENDS FOR PREVIOUS YEARS: http:	39 //www.people	37 e-press.org/fil	11 es/2011/11/	12 NII-Economy-Ti	1 rends.pdf
b.	Political violence in Syria					
	February 9-12, 2012 January 12-15, 2012 TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:	17 12	23 17	23 26	36 45	* 1
	August 4-7, 2011: <i>Political violence following uprisings in Syria</i> May 5-8, 2011 June 2-5, 2011: <i>Anti-government protests</i>	10 14	19 27	26 30	44 28	1 1
	and violence in some Middle Eastern countries	18	25	25	32	*
	April 28-May 1, 2011 February 3-6, 2011: Anti-government protests in Egypt and other Middle Eastern	18	29	25	27	1
	countries January 27-30, 2011	32 17	35 26	16 21	18 35	*
c.	A federal appeals court ruling that California's ban on gay marriage is unconstitutional February 9-12, 2012 <b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b> February 24-27, 2011: <i>Recent</i>	16	23	24	37	1
	developments in the debate over gay marriage May 29-June 1, 2009: The California	19	26	20	34	1
	Supreme Court upholding a ban on gay marriage May 8-11, 2009: Steps to legalize gay	22	35	19	23	1
	marriage in Maine and New Hampshire April 9-13, 2009: The legalization of gay	16	16	22	45	1
	marriage in Iowa and Vermont Nov. 7-10, 2008: California voting to ban	13	21	23	42	1
	gay marriage June 20-23, 2008: The issue of same-sex	18	26	24	32	*
	marriage in California May 16-19, 2008: The California Supreme Court's decision giving same-sex couples	22	26	25	27	*
	the right to marry May 2004: The issue of gay and lesbian	19	27	25	28	1
	marriage March 2004: The issue of gay and lesbian	20	27	25	27	1
	marriage Early-February 2004: The debate about	29	33	20	17	1
	letting gays and lesbians marry Mid-August 2003: The debate about letting	26	32	22	19	1
	gays and lesbians marry	19	30	22	28	1
d.	Debate over a new rule requiring religious employers, such as Catholic hospitals and universities, to cover birth control in their health insurance plans February 9-12, 2012	27	22	20	30	1
	1 Columny 5 12, 2012	۷,	~~	20	50	1

W.1 CONTINUED					
	Very	Fairly	Not too	Not at all	(VOL.)
	<u>closely</u>	<u>closely</u>	<u>closely</u>	<u>closely</u>	DK/Ref
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
November 17-20, 2011: The U.S. Supreme					
Court agreeing to hear legal challenges to					
last year's health care reform law	18	24	24	33	1
February 3-6, 2011: A federal judge ruling					
that part of the new health care law is					
unconstitutional	25	28	19	28	1
January 20-23, 2011: News about					
Republican efforts to repeal last year's					
health care law	29	29	20	21	1
December 16-19, 2010: A federal judge					
ruling that parts of the new health care law	20	2.4	4 -	2.0	
are unconstitutional	28	24	17	30	1
September 23-26, 2010: News about					
portions of this year's health care reform	27	24	4.7	4.4	
law beginning to take effect	37	31	17	14	1
April 16-19, 2010: News about the new	40	20	4.0	4.4	*
health care reform law	40	30	16	14	
April 9-12, 2010	46	27	15	12	*
April 1-5, 2010	42	27	14	16	*
March 26-29, 2010: Debate over health	40	20	10	10	*
care reform	49	29	12	10	*
March 13-15, 2010	51	24	11	14	*
March 12-15, 2010	40	31	16	13	*
March 5-8, 2010	42	27	17	15 22	*
February 26-March 1, 2010	29 33	29 28	19 19	22 19	*
February 19-22, 2010 January 29-February 1, 2010	39	27	16	17	*
January 22-25, 2010	41	32	15	11	*
January 15-18, 2010	37	27	19	18	*
January 8-11, 2010	39	26	20	15	*
December 18-21, 2009	42	27	16	14	*
December 11-14, 2009	42	30	15	14	*
December 4-7, 2009	42	28	15	14	1
November 20-23, 2009	42	29	14	15	*
November 13-16, 2009	38	26	17	17	1
November 6-9, 2009	35	28	15	22	1
October 30-November 2, 2009	32	26	19	23	*
October 23-26, 2009	40	27	16	17	1
October 16-19, 2009	36	28	15	21	*
October 9-12, 2009	37	29	14	19	1
October 2-5, 2009	39	29	16	16	*
September 25-28, 2009	45	31	12	12	0
September 18-21, 2009	44	26	19	11	*
September 11-14, 2009	44	27	14	15	*
September 3-6, 2009	40	26	16	17	0
August 28-31, 2009	40	28	17	14	1
August 21-24, 2009	49	24	12	15	1
August 14-17, 2009	39	31	15	15	1
August 7-10, 2009: Debate in Washington					
over health care reform	40	27	17	15	1
July 31-August 3, 2009	47	26	14	13	1
July 24-27, 2009	44	28	15	13	*
July 17-20, 2009	33	31	13	21	2
July 10-13, 2009	24	29	20	27	*
June 26-29, 2009	29	26	20	25	1
June 19-22, 2009	28	28	20	23	*
June 12-15, 2009	29	26	18	26	*

PE	W.1 CONTINUED					
	M 45 40 2000 D / / D /	Very <u>closely</u>	Fairly <u>closely</u>	Not too <u>closely</u>	Not at all <u>closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
	May 15-18, 2009: <i>Debate over Barack Obama's health care plans</i> March 6-9, 2009: <i>Obama proposing a \$630</i>	25	30	20	24	*
	billion fund for overhauling health care	41	32	13	14	*
e.	Tension between Iran and Israel over Iran's					
	nuclear program February 9-12, 2012 TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:	26	25	21	29	*
	January 12-15, 2012: Mounting tensions between the U.S. and Iran January 5-8, 2012: Tensions between the	24	30	18	27	*
	U.S. and Iran over shipping in the Persian gulf December 1-4, 2011: Tensions between	23	26	19	32	*
	Britain and Iran following an attack on the British embassy by Iranian protestors June 10-13, 2010: New U.N. sanctions	12	19	24	44	1
	against Iran because of its nuclear program	19	28	25	27	1
	March 26-29, 2010: Reports about tensions between Israel and the United States October 2-5, 2009: Talks between the	20	27	21	31	1
	United States and Iran over Iran's nuclear program May 21-24, 2009: Iran testing a missile	30	32	18	20	*
	that could reach Israel July 11-14, 2008: The Iranian government	20	29	25	26	*
	firing test missiles capable of striking Israel	25	29	22	23	1
	January 11-14, 2008: <i>News about an</i> encounter between U.S. and Iranian ships December 7-10, 2007: <i>A new intelligence</i>	25	26	21	27	1
	report stating that Iran stopped its nuclear weapons program in 2003	25	31	20	23	1
	October 26-29, 2007: Mounting tensions between the United States and Iran September 28 – October 1, 2007: Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's recent	26	34	21	18	1
	trip to New York City where he spoke at Columbia University and the United Nations June 1-4, 2007: Recent talks between the	23	31	20	25	1
	United States and Iran February 23-26, 2007: Mounting tensions	19	27	27	26	1
	between the United States and Iran September, 2006: Iran's nuclear research	29	37	18	15	1
	program	23	34	19	23	1
	August, 2006	24	34	20	20	3
	June, 2006	21	32	22	22	3
	April, 2006 March, 2006	26 24	30 31	23 22	20 22	1 1
f.	News about candidates for the 2012 presidential elections					
	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

	Very	Fairly	Not too	Not at all	(VOL.)
	closely	closely	closely	closely	DK/Ref
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
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 REPUTALIS VEARS: http	·//www.noonl	o proce ora/f	iloc/2011/11	NII Floction Tr	ands ndf

 $\underline{\textbf{SEE TRENDS FOR PREVIOUS YEARS}}: \ \text{http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Election-Trends.pdf}$ 

### 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.]** 

Feb 9-12	
<u>2012</u>	
25	News about candidates for the 2012 presidential elections
18	Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
	Debate over a new rule requiring religious employers, such as Catholic hospitals and
12	universities, to cover birth control in their health insurance plans
9	Tension between Iran and Israel over Iran's nuclear program
5	Political violence in Syria
4	A federal appeals court ruling that California's ban on gay marriage is unconstitutional
8	Some other story (VOL.)
18	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

### **ASK ALL:**

PEW.3 Regardless of whom you might prefer, which Republican candidate have you heard the most about in the news recently? [READ NAMES; RANDOMIZE]

Feb 9-12		Jan 26-29
<u>2012</u>		<u>2012</u>
50	Mitt Romney	36
19	Rick Santorum	2
13	Newt Gingrich	42
6	Ron Paul	4
2	Other (VOL.)	1
11	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	15

### **PEW.3 FULL TREND:**

Thinking about Republican candidates for president in 2012... Regardless of whom you might prefer, which Republican candidate have you heard the most about in the news recently? [OPEN END. RECORD FIRST MENTION ONLY.] [PLEASE BE CERTAIN TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN "JOHN MCCAIN" AND "HERMAN CAIN".]

	Jan	Jan	Dec	Oct	Sep	Aug	Jul	Jun	Jun	May	Apr
	12-15	5-8	1-4	13-16	8-11	18-21	21-24	16-19	2-5	12-15	14-17
	2012	2012	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011
Newt Gingrich	6	11	13	*	1	1	1	5	2	12	1
Mitt Romney	51	39	5	18	12	7	13	27	22	7	9
Ron Paul	4	6	1	1	2	3	1	1	1	2	*
Rick Santorum	1	9	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Rick Perry	2	3	3	12	31	22	3	*	*	*	*
Herman Cain	1	*	43	23	*	1	*	*	*	*	*
Michele Bachmann	*	3	*	1	7	23	23	5	1	1	*
Jon Huntsman	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Gary Johnson	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Other											
None/DK/Ref.	32	26	32	39	37	35	44	45	41	50	53

**PEW.4 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**