

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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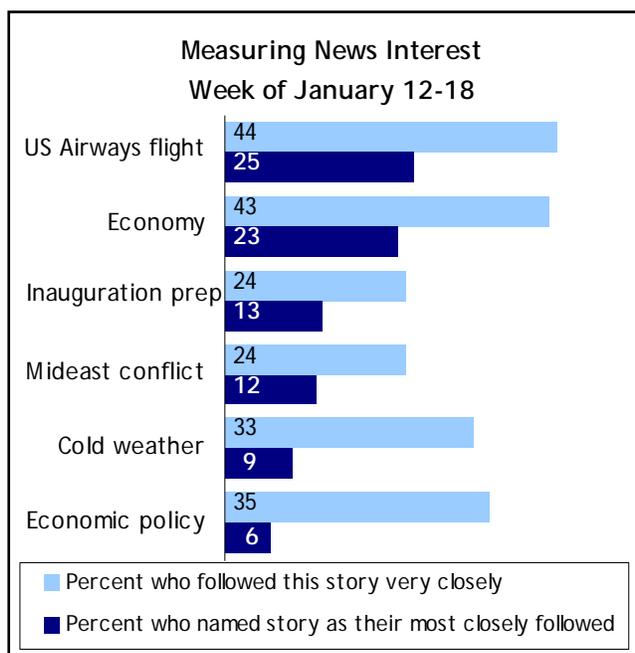
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PLANE CRASH DRAWS AS MUCH INTEREST AS ECONOMY

Americans last week followed the dramatic emergency landing of US Airways flight 1549 in New York's Hudson River as closely as they followed news about the nation's number one problem: the troubled economy. One-in-four say the crash – which resulted in no fatalities and turned pilot Chesley Sullenberger into a national hero – was the story they followed most closely last week, while 23% say they followed economic developments most closely.

The crash and quick rescue of all passengers and crew from the river's freezing water captured the very close attention of 44% of the public, according to the latest Pew Research Center weekly News Interest Index survey conducted Jan. 16-19. That compares with 43% who say they followed economic news very closely last week.

Among domestic airline and train accidents of recent years, only one attracted significantly greater public interest: the deadly crash of TWA flight 800 off the coast of New York after a fuel tank exploded. Fully 69% of the public followed this story very closely in July 1996. Roughly the same percentage followed the recent US Airways story as followed the crash of American

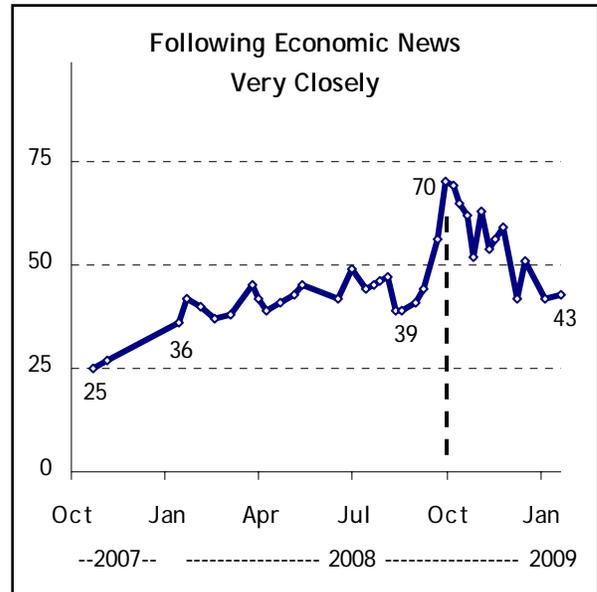


Interest in US Airways Crash
Matches Other Recent Accidents

Recent transportation accidents	% following Very closely
TWA flight crashes off NY coast {7-96}	69
American Airlines crash near JFK {11-01}	48
US Airways lands in Hudson River {1-09}	44
Amtrak train wreck in Alabama {9-93}	40
Alaska Airlines crash near L.A. {2-00}	35
Columbian airliner crashes near JFK {2-90}	33
EgyptAir crashes off New England coast {12-99}	30
Amtrak derailment in Illinois {3-99}	29
Train crashes in MD, CO and NJ {2-96}	24
American Airlines crash in Arkansas {6-99}	19

Airlines flight 587 near New York’s John F. Kennedy International Airport in November 2001 (48% followed news about this accident very closely). That crash resulted in more than 250 deaths.

The public also remains interested in news about the U.S. economy, though the percent of Americans following the financial crisis very closely has slipped considerably since its high in late September amid talk of an imminent global economic meltdown. About four-in-ten (43%) say they were following news about the economy very closely last week, which is little changed since early January (42%). In late September, 70% said they were tracking economic news very closely.



The current survey was conducted just prior to President Obama’s inauguration and just after the stunning Hudson River aircraft crash. But bad economic news was by no means the only major story breaking in early fall, either. The presidential election captured record high levels of interest during this period [See [“Election Weekend News Interest Hits 20-Year High”](#) released Nov. 6, 2008 and [“Interest in Economic News Surges”](#) released Oct. 1, 2008].

While the percent of Americans following economic news very closely has gotten smaller since September, the public remains highly concerned about the nation’s economic health and rising unemployment. Strengthening the economy and improving the job situation top the public’s list of priorities for 2009 [See [“Economy, Jobs Trump All Other Policy Priorities In 2009”](#) released Jan. 22, 2008].

The public also perceives a slight change in the tenor of the economic news. Two-thirds of Americans (67%) say they have heard mostly bad news about the economy in recent days. That is down from early December when eight-in-ten said they were hearing mostly bad news about economic conditions. The percentage saying that they are hearing a mix of good and bad news increased from 19% in December to three-in-ten now.

	Dec 2008	Jan 2009
<i>News about the Economy these days...</i>	%	%
Mostly good	1	2
Mostly bad	80	67
Mix of good and bad	19	30
Don't know	*	1
	100	100

In both surveys, there was little partisan difference in these perceptions, with large majorities of Republicans, Democrats and independents saying they were hearing mostly bad news about the economy. The increase since December in the percent saying the economic news is a mix of good and bad can be seen among people of different parties, genders, ages, education levels and geographic regions. In December, those following the news less closely were more likely to see a mix of good and bad news than those following the news more closely. Now, there is little difference between the two groups.

Top Stories of the Week Attract Distinct Audiences

The public paid very close attention to several major news stories last week, dividing its time near equally between the emergency splashdown of US Airways flight 1549 and stories about the financial crisis. The debate in Washington over what to do about the ailing economy and news about cold winter weather across the nation also attracted considerable public interest. A third or more of Americans followed each of these stories very closely. Rounding out the major stories of the week, the survey finds that equal shares of the public followed news about presidential inauguration planning and the conflict in Gaza very closely (24% each).

The public's *most* closely followed story of the week proved a virtual tie between news about the US Airways crash landing and news about the economic crisis, with each the choice of about one quarter of Americans. For more than one-in-ten, preparations for Obama's inauguration (13%) or the conflict in Gaza (12%) was the top story of the week.

The story people were following most closely last week varied significantly by demographic characteristics and party identification. For example, more women (31%) than men (19%) list the US Airways crash as the story they followed most closely. For men, the economy and then the US Airways crash were the top stories of the week. A much larger percentage of young people (those 18-29 years of age) than older Americans cite the inaugural preparations as the story they followed more closely than any other: a quarter of young people vs. about one-in-ten (11%) older Americans list this as their top story. Not surprisingly, more Democrats than Republicans or independents say that the inauguration planning was their top story of the week. Republicans and independents were more likely to say that the economy or the US Airways crash was the story they followed more closely than any other.

% Following story most closely...	Plane		Inaugural	
	Crash	Economy	prep	Gaza
	%	%	%	%
TOTAL	25	23	13	12
Men	19	26	13	14
Women	31	20	13	9
18-29	27	18	25	7
30-49	21	25	9	15
50-64	25	25	13	15
65+	31	23	11	7
Republican	31	29	6	12
Democrat	25	18	25	12
Independent	23	24	7	12

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, survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected January 16-19, 2009 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 Sunday through Friday) PEJ compiles this data to identify the top stories for the week. The News Interest Index survey collects data from Friday through Monday to gauge public interest in the most covered stories of the week.

Results for the weekly surveys are based on telephone interviews among a nationwide sample of approximately 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older, conducted under the direction of ORC (Opinion Research Corporation). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

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, and that results based on subgroups will have larger margins of error.

For more information about the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, go to www.journalism.org.

About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
JANUARY 16-19, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
TOPLINE
N=1,004

Q.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; ROTATE ITEMS IN BLOCKS A-C FIRST, FOLLOWED BY D-F] [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>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
a. Conflict between the Israeli military and Hamas forces in Gaza	24	31	22	22	1=100
January 9-12, 2009	34	35	18	13	0=100
January 2-4, 2009	28	32	22	18	*=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:¹					
March 7-10, 2008	20	33	26	21	*=100
August, 2006	40	34	14	10	2=100
September, 2003	31	36	20	13	*=100
Early June, 2003	26	40	20	13	1=100
December, 2002	29	36	22	12	1=100
Early October, 2002	32	39	20	8	1=100
June, 2002	38	33	18	10	1=100
April, 2002	38	37	14	10	1=100
Early April, 2002	44	33	13	9	1=100
December, 2001	31	40	19	9	1=100
Early September, 2001	21	33	25	20	1=100
April, 2001	22	34	24	19	1=100
Mid-October, 2000	30	38	18	13	1=100
Early October, 2000	21	30	27	21	1=100
January, 1997	12	23	29	35	1=100
October, 1996	17	34	26	23	*=100
May, 1988	18	37	34	9	2=100
b. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy	43	35	13	9	*=100
January 2-4, 2009	42	36	15	7	*=100
December 12-15, 2008	51	33	9	7	*=100
December 5-8, 2008	42	38	13	7	*=100
November 21-24, 2008	59	24	9	8	*=100
November 14-17, 2008	56	29	9	6	*=100
November 7-10, 2008	54	31	8	7	*=100
October 31-November 3, 2008	63	27	6	4	*=100
October 24-27, 2008	52	35	7	5	1=100
October 17-20, 2008	62	29	6	3	*=100
October 10-13, 2008	65	25	7	3	*=100
October 3-6, 2008	69	23	5	3	*=100
September 26-29, 2008	70	22	5	3	*=100
September 19-22, 2008	56	27	12	5	*=100

¹ In Early September 2001 through September, 2003 and for Mid-October 2000 and March 7-10, 2008 the item was listed as “Continued violence in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis.” In August 2006 the item was listed as “The military conflict between Israel and Hezbollah forces in Lebanon.” In April 2001 the item was listed as “Continued violence in the Middle East.” In Early October 2000 the item was listed as “Renewed violence in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis.” In January 1997 the item was listed as “Renewed tensions between Israelis and Palestinians over Hebron.” In October 1996 the item was listed as “Renewed violence between Israelis & Palestinians on the West Bank and in Jerusalem.” In May 1988 the item was listed as “The conflict in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis in the occupied territories.”

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
September 5-8, 2008	44	33	16	7	*=100
August 29-31, 2008	41	34	13	11	1=100
August 15-18, 2008	39	36	15	10	*=100
August 8-11, 2008	39	35	16	10	*=100
August 1-4, 2008	47	34	11	8	0=100
July 25-28, 2008	46	32	10	12	*=100
July 18-21, 2008	45	33	13	9	*=100
July 11-14, 2008	44	33	12	10	1=100
June 27-30, 2008	49	31	12	7	1=100
June 13-16, 2008	42	33	14	11	*=100
May 9-12, 2008	45	31	13	11	*=100
May 2-5, 2008	43	31	15	10	1=100
April 18-21, 2008	41	35	13	10	1=100
April 4-7, 2008	39	37	12	12	*=100
March 28-31, 2008	42	36	14	8	*=100
March 20-24, 2008	45	33	13	9	*=100
February 29-March 3, 2008	38	35	15	11	1=100
February 15-18, 2008	37	36	11	16	8=100
February 1-4, 2008	40	37	14	8	1=100
January 18-21, 2008	42	31	16	11	*=100
January 11-14, 2008	36	32	15	16	1=100
November 2-5, 2007	27	37	16	19	1=100
October 19-22, 2007	25	34	20	21	*=100
August 10-13, 2007	28	36	18	18	*=100
Mid-November, 2006	31	40	17	11	1=100
December, 2005	35	35	18	11	1=100
Early November, 2005	35	39	17	9	*=100
Mid-May, 2005	30	39	19	11	1=100
January, 2005	35	41	17	7	*=100
Mid-October, 2004	30	43	16	10	1=100
Early September, 2004	39	34	15	11	1=100
Mid-January, 2004	37	41	15	7	*=100
December, 2003	35	38	14	11	2=100
November, 2003	40	34	15	10	1=100
October, 2003	32	39	16	12	1=100
September, 2003	39	30	18	12	1=100
March, 2003	40	35	16	8	1=100
February, 2003	42	33	15	10	*=100
January, 2003	40	35	13	11	1=100
December, 2002	38	34	17	10	1=100
February, 2002	35	40	15	9	1=100
January, 2002	30	44	16	9	1=100
December, 2001	37	40	13	8	2=100
Mid-November, 2001	41	36	15	7	1=100
June, 2001	24	41	18	16	1=100
May, 2001	34	36	15	15	0=100
April, 2001	36	34	16	13	1=100
February, 2001	30	39	18	12	1=100
January, 2001	32	38	17	11	2=100
June, 1995	26	41	22	11	*=100
March, 1995	27	45	19	9	*=100
February, 1995	23	41	22	13	1=100
December, 1994	28	43	20	9	*=100

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
October, 1994	27	40	20	12	1=100
June, 1994	25	42	23	10	*=100
May, 1994	33	40	16	10	1=100
January, 1994	34	39	16	10	1=100
Early January, 1994	36	44	13	7	*=100
December, 1993	35	41	15	8	1=100
October, 1993	33	38	20	9	*=100
September, 1993	37	40	14	8	1=100
Early September, 1993	39	39	14	9	*=100
August, 1993	41	36	14	9	*=100
May, 1993	37	38	18	6	1=100
February, 1993	49	36	10	5	*=100
January, 1993	42	39	12	7	*=100
September, 1992	43	37	13	6	1=100
May, 1992	39	39	15	6	1=100
March, 1992	47	38	11	4	*=100
February, 1992	47	37	10	6	*=100
January, 1992	44	40	11	5	*=100
October, 1991	36	38	16	9	1=100
c. News about a US Airways flight crashing into the Hudson River	44	34	14	8	*=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
November, 2001: <i>Crash of an American Airlines plane near JFK Airport in New York</i>	48	34	13	4	1=100
February, 2000: <i>Crash of an Alaskan Airlines jet near Los Angeles</i>	35	40	17	8	*=100
December 1999: <i>Crash of EgyptAir plane off the coast of New England and its investigation</i>	30	44	15	10	1=100
June, 1999: <i>Crash of an American Airlines flight in Arkansas</i>	19	38	25	17	1=100
March, 1999: <i>The derailment of an Amtrak train in Illinois</i>	29	39	19	12	1=100
July 1996: <i>Crash of a Paris-bound TWA plane off the coast of New York</i>	69	23	6	2	*=100
February 1996: <i>Recent train crashes in Maryland, Colorado and New Jersey</i>	24	40	24	11	1=100
September, 1993: <i>Amtrak train wreck in Alabama</i>	40	37	15	7	1=100
February, 1990: <i>Crash of Columbian airliner near JFK airport in New York</i>	33	39	18	10	0=100

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
d. The debate in Washington over what the government should do about the nation's economic problems	35	33	17	15	*=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:²					
October 3-6, 2008: Washington debates plan to stabilize markets	62	26	7	5	*=100
September 26-29, 2008	60	22	10	8	*=100
September 19-22, 2008: Wall Street turmoil	49	28	14	9	*=100
September 12-15, 2008: Government takeover of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac	28	35	19	17	1=100
February 8-11, 2008: Bush and Congress agreeing on an economic stimulus plan	22	33	23	21	1=100
January 25-28, 2008	24	36	19	21	*=100
March 20-24, 2008: Bear Stearns buyout	21	26	21	32	*=100
August, 1989: Savings and loan bailout	26	30	20	23	1=100
e. Cold winter weather in much of the country	33	31	21	15	*=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:³					
December 14-17, 2007	30	31	21	18	*=100
February 16-19, 2007	30	33	18	18	1=100
February 9-12, 2007	36	36	15	13	*=100
January 19-22, 2007	31	32	22	14	1=100
January 5-8, 2007	24	30	25	21	*=100
January, 2001	42	31	15	11	1=100
January, 1999	37	34	17	12	*=100
Early December, 1998	39	35	13	12	1=100
January, 1994	51	30	12	7	*=100
f. Preparations for Barack Obama's inauguration	24	26	26	24	*=100
Jan 9-12, 2009	16	23	27	33	1=100

² September 26-29, 2008 and October 3-6, 2008 asked about: "The debate in Washington over a plan to use government funds to stabilize financial markets." September 19-22, 2008 asked about: "Turmoil among major financial institutions on Wall Street." September 12-15, 2008 asked about: "The federal government taking control of the mortgage companies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac." March 20-24, 2008 asked about: "The buyout of Wall Street investment bank Bear Stearns." January 25-28, 2008 and February 8-11, 2008 asked about: "President Bush and Congress agreeing on an economic stimulus plan." August, 1989 asked about: "Passage in Congress of a bill to bailout ailing savings and loan institutions."

³ For December 14-17, 2007 the story was listed as "Snow and ice storms in the Midwest and Northeast." For February 16-19, 2007 the story was listed as "Cold winter weather and snowstorms in the Northeast and Midwest." For February 9-12, 2007 the story was listed as "Cold winter weather." For January 19-22, 2007 the story was listed as "Snow and ice storms in some parts of the country." For January 5-8, 2007 the story was listed as "Winter snowstorms in the western U.S." In January 2001 the story was listed as "Cold winter weather and storms in the Northeast and Midwest." In January 1999 the story was listed as "Cold winter weather and storms in the Midwest." In December, 1998 the story was listed as "Unseasonable weather patterns." In January 1994 the story was listed as "News about cold weather conditions in the Northeast and Midwest."

Q.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. RECORD ONE ANSWER. IF RESPONDENT MENTIONS "ECONOMY" UNSPECIFIED, PROBE WITH: "Do you mean the condition of the economy, or the debate in Washington about what to do?"]

25	News about a US Airways flight crashing into the Hudson River
23	Reports about the conditions of the U.S. economy
13	Preparations for Barack Obama's inauguration
12	Conflict between the Israeli military and Hamas forces in Gaza
9	Cold winter weather in much of the country
	The debate in Washington over what the government should do about the nation's
6	economic problems
5	Some other story (VOL.)
<u>7</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	

On another topic...

Q.3 Are you hearing mostly good news about the economy these days, mostly bad news about the economy or a mix of both good and bad news?

		Dec 5-8,
		<u>2008</u>
2	Hearing mostly good news about the economy	1
67	Hearing mostly bad news about the economy [OR]	80
30	A mix of good and bad	19
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL. DO NOT READ)	*
100		100

Q.4 All in all, do you think the government is on the right track or the wrong track in the way it is handling economic problems facing the nation?

31	Right track
48	Wrong track
<u>21</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	