

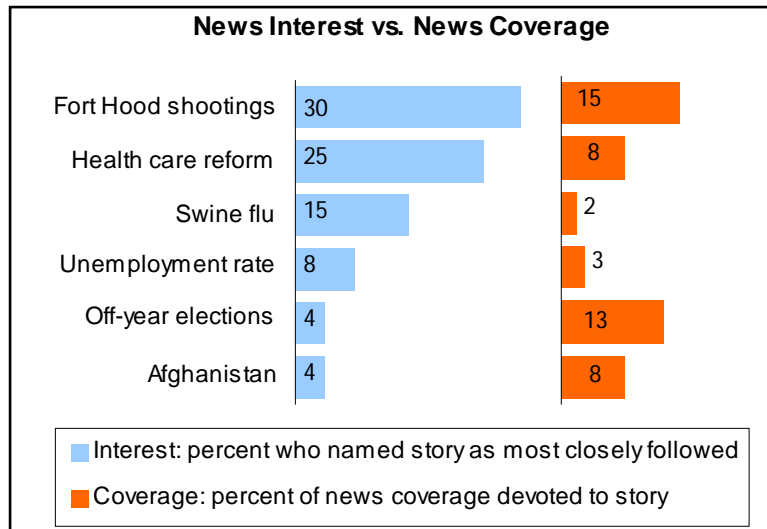


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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Unchanged Expectations About Health Care Reform Passage
FORT HOOD SHOOTINGS TOP INTEREST, COVERAGE

The November 5 shootings at the Fort Hood Army post in Texas – which resulted in the death of 13 Americans – was the public’s top news story last week. News coverage of the tragedy was also high, with the national media devoting more attention to the story than to any other.



Three-in-ten Americans followed news about the shootings

at Fort Hood more closely than any other news story last week. In addition, the latest weekly News Interest Index survey, conducted November 6-9 among 1,001 adults by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, finds that 44% say they paid very close attention to the shootings.

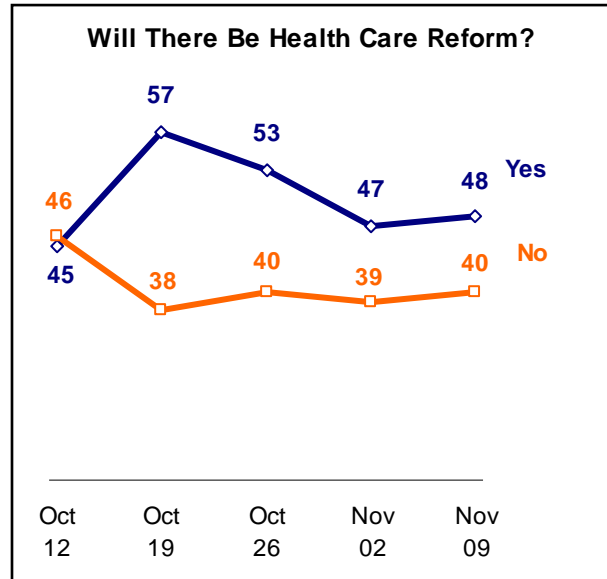
That level of very close interest is on par with the level of attention paid to the shootings at the Virginia Tech campus in 2007: at the time, 45% followed news about the Virginia Tech massacre very closely. By comparison, more than two-thirds (68%) followed news about the Columbine High School shootings very closely in late April 1999.

According to the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ), news coverage of the Fort Hood rampage accounted for 15% of the overall weekly newshole. In the three days immediately following the shootings, coverage accounted for more than a third (34%) of the newshole monitored by PEJ. Other leading stories – tracked over the full course of

the week – such as health care reform and the off-year elections filled a somewhat smaller percentage of the newshole (8% and 13%, respectively).

Prospects for Health Care Reform

By a 48%-40% margin, more Americans continue to say they think a health care reform bill will pass over the next year than say they do not think that will happen. Opinion on this question is virtually identical to that measured a week earlier. House passage of health care legislation late Saturday, Nov. 7, had little effect on public attitudes: opinions measured in the two days after passage were not significantly different than those measured in the two days leading up to the vote.



The partisan divide over the prospects for health care reform also remains. A broad majority of Democrats (62%) say they expect a bill to pass over the next year; about a quarter (27%) do not think reform will happen. Republicans and independents are much more mixed in their views: 42% of Republicans expect a bill to pass, half (50%) do not. Among independents, 43% think health care reform will happen over the next year, while a comparable percentage (46%) do not think a bill will pass.

Media Overstating Swine Flu Dangers?

Fewer than half (47%) say that, in general, news reports are presenting the danger of the swine flu about right. Nearly as many (43%) say that news reports are overstating the danger of the flu; few say the dangers of swine flu have been understated (7%). These attitudes are unchanged from mid-October, despite sustained media coverage and public interest in recent weeks.

	Oct 9-12 2009	Nov 6-9 2009	Change
<i>News reports on swine flu ...</i>	%	%	
Present about right	46	47	+1
Overstate danger	43	43	0
Understate danger	7	7	0
Don't know	4	3	-1
	100	100	

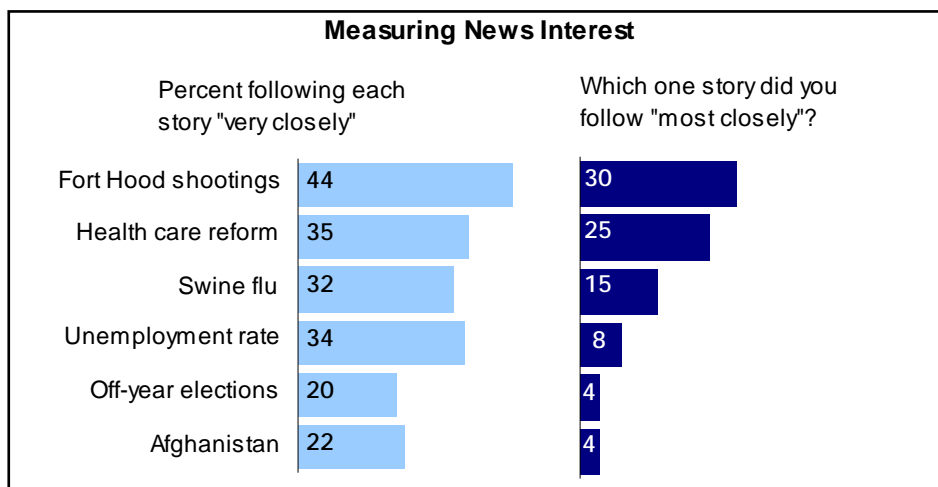
Q3. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Republicans take a much more critical view of swine flu coverage than do Democrats or independents. Fully 56% of Republicans say news reports are overstating the danger of swine flu, while about a third (36%) say they are getting it about right. Opinion among Democrats is the reverse. More than half (56%) say reports are presenting it about right, while 32% say reports

are overstating the danger. Independents are divided: 46% say news reports overstate the dangers of swine flu and 45% say they present the dangers about right. Fewer than 10% of each political group say news reports are understating swine flu's dangers.

The Week's Top Stories

Following the shootings at Fort Hood, the debate over health care reform was the public's second biggest story of the week with a quarter saying they followed health care news more closely than any other story. About a third (35%) paid very close attention to news about health care reform. According to PEJ, the media devoted 8% of national coverage to health care news.



News about swine flu was the top story for 15% of the public; 32% say they followed reports about the flu and its vaccine very closely. Interest was significantly higher among women (39% very closely) than men (24% very closely). Coverage of swine flu news filled just 2% of the national newshole.

Reports about the rising unemployment rate were followed very closely by 34% of the public with 8% naming unemployment news as their top story of the week. Those with lower levels of income and education were somewhat more likely to follow unemployment news closely than those with higher incomes and education levels. News coverage was modest, filling 3% of the newshole.

Overall, the public paid somewhat less attention to the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan and state and local elections. For both stories, about two-in-ten say they followed them very closely, while just 4% named Afghanistan or the off-year elections as their top story. Interest was modest, despite the fact that the national media devoted significant coverage to both stories: election news filled 13% of the newshole, while news about Afghanistan comprised 8% of all national 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 from November 2-8, 2009 and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected November 6-9, 2009 from a nationally representative sample of 1,001 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. 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 landline 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 4 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
November 6-9, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1001

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; 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>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
a. A shooter killing 13 people at Fort Hood Army post in Texas					
November 6-9, 2009	44	34	14	8	*
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
August 7-10, 2009: <i>A shooting at a fitness club in Pennsylvania, killing four</i>	13	28	25	34	1
June 12-15, 2009: <i>A deadly shooting at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.</i>	26	34	17	23	*
April 3-6, 2009: <i>A shooter killing several people at an immigration services center in Binghamton, New York</i>	26	32	19	23	*
March 13-16, 2009: <i>A shooting spree in Alabama that resulted in the death of 11 people</i>	18	33	24	25	*
February 15-18, 2008: <i>The shootings at Northern Illinois University that resulted in the death of 7 people</i>	26	40	19	15	0
February 8-11, 2008: <i>A shooting at a city council meeting in Missouri where six people were killed</i>	13	28	25	33	1
December 14-17, 2007: <i>Shootings at two religious centers in Colorado</i>	17	31	24	27	1
December 7-10, 2007: <i>A shooting at a shopping mall in Omaha, Nebraska where eight people were killed</i>	30	36	18	15	1
October 12-15, 2007: <i>The shooting at a high school in Cleveland, Ohio</i>	22	32	25	20	1
April 20-23, 2007: <i>The shootings at Virginia Tech University that resulted in the death of 33 people</i>	45	37	13	5	*
October, 2006: <i>Recent shootings at schools in Pennsylvania and other states</i>	46	33	12	8	1
March, 2000: <i>The shooting of a 6-year-old girl at a Michigan school</i>	40	38	15	7	*
September, 1999: <i>The shootings in a Jewish community center in Los Angeles</i>	29	34	22	14	1
Late April, 1999: <i>The shooting of students and teachers by two students at a Colorado high school</i>	68	24	6	2	*
June, 1998: <i>The shooting at a high school in Springfield, Oregon</i>	46	36	14	4	*
March, 1998: <i>The shooting at a middle school in Jonesboro, Arkansas</i>	49	33	12	5	1

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>
b. Debate over health care reform					
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
TREND FOR COMPARISON:¹					
August 7-10, 2009: <i>Debate in Washington over health care reform</i>	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	*
May 15-18, 2009	25	30	20	24	*
March 6-9, 2009: <i>Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling health care</i>	41	32	13	14	*
September, 1994: <i>The Clinton administration's health care reform proposals</i>	32	41	18	9	*
June, 1994	34	40	19	7	*
May, 1994	37	37	16	9	1
January, 1994	38	38	15	9	*
Early January, 1994	40	40	14	6	*
December, 1993	45	35	12	7	1
October, 1993	44	32	17	6	1
September, 1993	49	34	11	6	*
August, 1993: <i>Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton</i>	27	32	25	15	1
June, 1993	28	38	19	15	*
May, 1993	30	30	25	14	1
c. The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan					
November 6-9, 2009	22	35	24	18	*
October 30-November 2, 2009	24	32	21	22	*
October 23-26, 2009	32	29	21	18	*
October 16-19, 2009	25	31	20	24	*

¹ June 12-15, 2009 through August 7-10, 2009 asked about: "Debate in Washington over health care reform." May 15-18, 2009 asked about: "Debate over Barack Obama's health care plans." March 6-9, 2009 asked about: "Barack Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling the U.S. health care system." September, 1993 through September, 1994 asked about: "The Clinton Administration's health care reform proposals." May, 1993 through August, 1993 asked about: "Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton."

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 9-12, 2009	31	31	21	17	0
September 25-28, 2009 ²	27	40	17	16	*
September 18-21, 2009	26	33	25	16	*
September 11-14, 2009	25	35	22	18	1
September 3-6, 2009	23	33	23	21	0
August 7-10, 2009	24	32	23	21	1
March 20-23, 2009	24	32	22	22	*
February 20-23, 2009	27	29	24	19	1
January 30-February 2, 2009	26	34	24	16	*
January 2-4, 2009	22	33	23	21	1
October 24-27, 2008	28	32	22	17	1
October 10-13, 2008	19	34	29	18	*
September 12-15, 2008	21	34	25	19	1
August 29-31, 2008	18	27	32	23	*
July 18-21, 2008	27	33	24	16	*
July 11-14, 2008	19	28	29	23	1
July 3-7, 2008	19	28	32	21	*
June 20-23, 2008	20	30	30	20	*
Late July, 2002	41	38	13	7	1
June, 2002	38	32	20	9	1
April, 2002	39	39	13	8	1
Early April, 2002	45	37	12	5	1
February, 2002	47	39	8	5	1
January, 2002	51	35	9	4	1
December, 2001	44	38	12	5	1
Mid-November, 2001	49	36	11	3	1
Early November, 2001	45	36	12	6	1
Mid-October, 2001	51	35	10	3	1

d. Reports about swine flu and the vaccine

November 6-9, 2009	32	35	24	10	*
October 30-November 2, 2009	33	33	22	12	*
October 23-26, 2009	43	30	17	9	*
October 16-19, 2009	32	35	18	14	0
October 9-12, 2009	38	35	16	11	*
September 18-21, 2009 ³	34	31	25	9	*
September 11-14, 2009	30	36	21	12	*
September 3-6, 2009	26	32	25	17	0
August 28-31, 2009	26	33	22	18	*
May 21-24, 2009	30	39	21	11	*
May 8-11, 2009	34	36	19	11	*
May 1-4, 2009	43	37	15	4	1
April 25-27, 2009	25	30	19	26	*

² September 25-28 asked about "The debate over whether to send more troops to Afghanistan." February 20-23, 2009 asked about "The Obama administration's decision to send 17,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan." From June 20-23, 2008 to October 10-13, 2008 the story was listed as "The military effort in Afghanistan against Taliban fighters." All other dates asked about "The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan."

³ From August 28-31 through September 18-21 question was worded "Reports about swine flu and the availability of a vaccine." May 21-24, 2009 and May 8-11, 2009 asked about: "Reports about swine flu in the U.S. and elsewhere." For May 1-4, 2009 the story was listed as: "The outbreak of swine flu in different parts of the world." For April 25-27, 2009 the story was listed as: "Reports of swine flu in Mexico and the U.S."

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>
e. Reports about state and local elections					
November 6-9, 2009	20	28	23	28	*
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
November 7-10, 2008: <i>News about elections in Congress</i>	23	36	24	17	*
November 9-12, 2006: <i>News about the outcome of the elections</i>	46	33	11	10	*
November, 1998	42	31	14	12	1
December, 1994	41	36	13	10	*
f. Reports about the rising unemployment rate					
November 6-9, 2009	34	29	22	14	*
May 8-11, 2009	33	33	17	17	*
April 3-6, 2009	36	37	16	11	*
March 6-9, 2009	42	33	13	11	1
February 6-9, 2009	44	36	11	9	*
January 9-12, 2009	45	34	14	7	*
December 5-8, 2008	40	33	17	10	*
November 7-10, 2008	39	32	17	12	*
June 6-9, 2008	25	31	23	21	*

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. ACCEPT ONLY ONE RESPONSE.**]

- 30 A shooter killing 13 people at Fort Hood Army post in Texas
- 25 Debate over health care reform
- 15 Reports about swine flu and the vaccine
- 8 Reports about the rising unemployment rate
- 4 Reports about state and local elections
- 4 The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan
- 6 Some other story (**VOL. SPECIFY**)
- 8 Don't know/Refused (**VOL.**)

Now thinking about the swine flu that's been in the news lately...

Q.3 In general, do you think news reports are overstating the danger of the swine flu, understating the danger of the swine flu, or presenting it about right?

Nov 6-9 <u>2009</u>		Oct 9-12 <u>2009</u>
43	Overstating the danger	43
7	Understating the danger	7
47	Presenting it about right	46
3	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	4

Q.4 Thinking now about the issue of health care, from what you've seen and heard, do you think a health care reform bill will pass over the next year or not?

Nov 6-9 <u>2009</u>		Oct 30-Nov 2 <u>2009</u>	Oct 23-26 <u>2009</u>	Oct 16-19 <u>2009</u>	Oct 9-12 <u>2009</u>
48	Yes, will	47	53	57	45
40	No, will not	39	40	38	46
11	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	14	7	5	9