



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

NEWS Release
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Partisan, Gender Differences in Interest in Obama’s Comments Obama Support for Gay Marriage Public’s Top Story

President Obama’s expression of support for same-sex marriage proved to be the public’s top news story last week.

About a quarter of Americans (26%) say they followed news about Obama’s statements on the divisive topic more closely than any other news, according to the latest weekly News Interest Index survey, conducted May 10-13 among 1,003 adults by the Pew Research Center for the

People & the Press. Still, in the same survey, about half (52%) say Obama’s expression of support for same-sex marriage did not affect their opinion of the president. A quarter (25%) say Obama’s comments made them think less favorably of him, while 19% say the comments made them think more favorably of the president. (See: [“Half Say View of Obama Not Affected by Gay Marriage Decision.”](#))

Obama’s comments – and their possible impact on the presidential race – also were among the week’s most covered stories, according to a separate analysis by the Pew

News Interest vs. News Coverage

	News Interest	News Coverage
Obama on gay marriage	26	14
Economy	20	8
2012 election	11	15
Plane bomb-plot foiled	7	7
Chinese activist	3	1
European economies	3	5

News interest shows the percentage of people who say they followed this story most closely, Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, May 10-13, 2012. News coverage shows the percentage of news coverage devoted to each story, Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, May 7-13, 2012.

Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ). News specifically about Obama and his expression of support for gay marriage accounted for 14% of coverage. More general news about the 2012 election accounted for 15%, separating out news that focused primarily on Obama's gay marriage comments. Altogether, campaign news accounted for 24% of coverage, according to PEJ.

Looking at the week's other top stories, 20% of the public says they followed news about the economy most closely while 11% say they followed news about the 2012 campaign this closely. News about the economy accounted for 8% of coverage.

Differences in Interest in Obama's Comments on Gay Marriage

More than a third of the public (37%) says they followed news about Obama's expression of support for gay marriage very closely. About half of Democrats say this (49%), compared with 39% of Republicans and 29% of independents.

About four-in-ten women (42%) say they followed this news very closely, compared with 33% of men. Nearly half of those with at least a college degree (46%) say they followed news about Obama's comment very closely, compared with 32% of those with some college and 36% of those with a high school diploma or less education.

As is typically the case, older people are more likely to say they followed this news very closely; 45% of those 50 and older say this, compared with 31% of those 18-49.

Obama's comments are clearly the top story of the week for Democrats (36%). News about the economy ranks second (19% most closely). About a quarter of Republicans, 24% say they followed news about Obama's gay marriage statements most closely, while about as many (22%) say they followed news about the economy this closely. Independents are also divided: 20% say they followed news about Obama's statements most closely and 23% say their top story was news about the economy.

Women are more likely than men to say this was their top story (31% vs. 20%).

Partisan, Gender Differences on Gay Marriage News

<i>% following very closely</i>	<i>%</i>
Total	37
Republican	39
Democrat	49
Independent	29
Men	33
Women	42
18-49	31
50+	45
College grad +	46
Some college	32
HS or less	36

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 10-13, 2012.

The Week's News

Americans continue to keep a close watch on news about the economy at home. Four-in-ten (40%) say they followed news about the condition of the U.S. economy very closely, while 20% say this was the news they followed most closely.

Relatively few are closely following news about the economic problems unfolding in several European countries. Just 17% say they followed this news very closely; 3% say this was their top story. News about European economic woes accounted for 5% of coverage, according to PEJ.

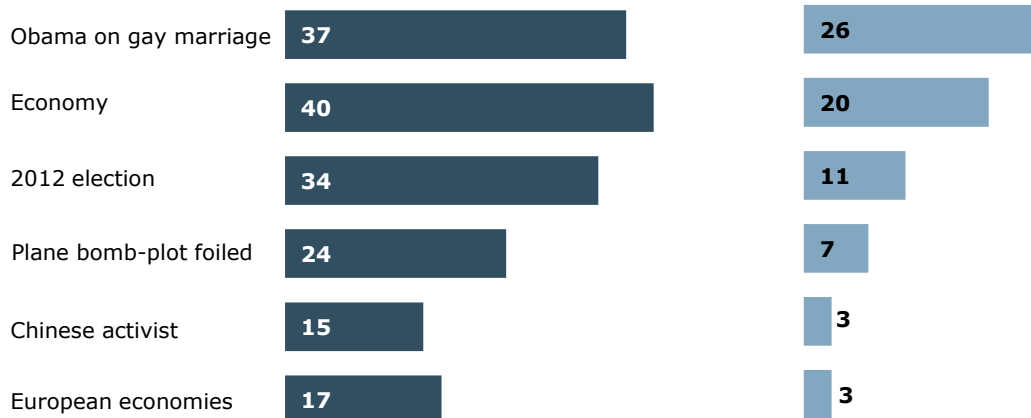
About a third (34%) say they very closely followed news about the candidates for president in 2012, while 11% say this was the news they followed most closely. With the contest now a head-to-head race between Obama and Mitt Romney, Republicans and Democrats are about equally likely to say they are following this news very closely (39% of Republicans, 40% of Democrats). Fewer independents say this (27%).

About a quarter of the public (24%) say they followed news about the undercover agent in Yemen who foiled a plot to blow up a U.S.-bound airplane; 7% say this was the news they followed most closely. News about the failed plot accounted for 7% of coverage.

News Interest

% following each story very closely...

Which one story did you follow most closely?



PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 10-13, 2012.

And news about negotiations between U.S. and Chinese officials over the fate of a Chinese human rights activist continued to attract modest attention; 15% say they followed this news very closely, the same level of interest as one week earlier. Meanwhile, 3% say this was the news they followed most closely. Last week, news about Chen Guangcheng's situation accounted for 1% of coverage. The week before that, the story had ranked near the top of PEJ's list, accounting for 12% 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 May 7-13, 2012, and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected May 10-13, 2012, from a nationally representative sample of 1,003 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.

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted May 10-13, 2012, among a national sample of 1,003 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (603 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 400 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 195 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted 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	1,003	3.6 percentage points
Men	455	5.4 percentage points
Women	548	4.9 percentage points
Republicans	255	7.2 percentage points
Democrats	309	6.5 percentage points
Independents	329	6.3 percentage points
College grad+	329	6.3 percentage points
Some College	307	6.5 percentage points
High school or less	339	6.2 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
MAY 10-13, 2012 NEWS INTEREST INDEX
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,003

NO QUESTION PEW.1

ASK ALL:

PEW.2 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					
May 10-13, 2012	40	26	16	17	*
May 3-6, 2012	38	29	13	20	*
April 26-29, 2012	34	32	17	16	1
April 19-22, 2012	35	35	13	14	2
April 12-15, 2012	39	28	16	17	1
April 5-8, 2012	37	31	16	16	1
March 29-April 1, 2012	34	33	15	18	1
March 22-25, 2012	36	29	16	18	1
March 15-18, 2012	40	35	11	14	1
March 8-11, 2012	37	32	14	17	*
March 1-4, 2012	41	27	15	17	1
February 23-26, 2012	37	33	14	15	1
February 16-20, 2012	33	32	16	17	1
February 9-12, 2012	42	30	14	13	1
February 2-5, 2012	38	32	16	13	1
January 26-29, 2012	35	31	16	19	*
January 19-22, 2012	35	30	16	19	1
January 12-15, 2012	33	32	14	20	1
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	*

PEW.2 CONTINUED...

	Very <u>closely</u>	Fairly <u>closely</u>	Not too <u>closely</u>	Not at all <u>closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
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:](http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Economy-Trends.pdf) <http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Economy-Trends.pdf>

- b. Negotiations between the United States and China to let a Chinese human-rights activist move to the U.S.

May 10-13, 2012	15	22	24	39	1
May 3-6, 2012: <i>Controversy over how U.S. and Chinese officials dealt with a Chinese human-rights activist who sought protection at the American Embassy in Beijing</i>	15	23	24	36	1

- c. President Obama expressing his support for gay marriage

May 10-13, 2012	37	23	18	21	1
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TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:

February 23-26, 2012: <i>Recent debates over social issues such as gay marriage and contraception</i>	21	24	22	32	1
February 9-12, 2012: <i>A federal appeals court ruling that California's ban on gay marriage is unconstitutional</i>	16	23	24	37	1
February 24-27, 2011: <i>Recent developments in the debate over gay marriage</i>	19	26	20	34	1
May 29-June 1, 2009: <i>The California Supreme Court upholding a ban on gay marriage</i>	22	35	19	23	1
May 8-11, 2009: <i>Steps to legalize gay marriage in Maine and New Hampshire</i>	16	16	22	45	1
April 9-13, 2009: <i>The legalization of gay marriage in Iowa and Vermont</i>	13	21	23	42	1
Nov. 7-10, 2008: <i>California voting to ban gay marriage</i>	18	26	24	32	*
June 20-23, 2008: <i>The issue of same-sex marriage in California</i>	22	26	25	27	*
May 16-19, 2008: <i>The California Supreme Court's decision giving same-sex couples the right to marry</i>	19	27	25	28	1
May 2004: <i>The issue of gay and lesbian marriage</i>	20	27	25	27	1

PEW.2 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
March 2004: <i>The issue of gay and lesbian marriage</i>	29	33	20	17	1
Early-February 2004: <i>The debate about letting gays and lesbians marry</i>	26	32	22	19	1
Mid-August 2003: <i>The debate about letting gays and lesbians marry</i>	19	30	22	28	1
d. Reports about economic problems in several European countries					
May 10-13, 2012	17	24	24	34	*
May 3-6, 2012	16	23	24	36	*
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
February 16-20, 2012: <i>Efforts to deal with the debt crisis in Europe</i>	11	21	23	45	*
January 12-15, 2012	12	23	23	42	1
December 8-11, 2011	14	22	27	37	1
December 1-4, 2011	14	24	25	36	1
November 10-13, 2011: <i>Efforts to deal with the debt crisis in Greece and Italy</i>	15	23	23	38	1
November 3-6, 2011: <i>Efforts to deal with the debt crisis in Greece and other European countries</i>	18	26	21	34	1
October 27-30, 2011	12	27	24	36	*
September 29-October 2, 2011: <i>The debt crisis in Greece and other European countries</i>	15	21	24	39	1
September 15-18, 2011	16	23	24	37	1
August 18-21, 2011: <i>The debate among European leaders on how to address the region's debt crisis</i>	12	21	22	44	1
August 11-14, 2011: <i>Riots in London and other parts of Britain</i>	17	28	21	32	1
June 30-July 3, 2011: <i>The financial crisis and violent protests in Greece</i>	14	22	23	39	1
June 16-19, 2011	10	20	25	45	1
May 13-16, 2010: <i>A trillion-dollar bailout package for European governments facing debt problems</i>	21	26	24	28	2
May 7-10, 2010: <i>The financial crisis in Greece and violent protests there</i>	19	23	26	31	*
April 30-May 3, 2010: <i>The financial crisis in Greece</i>	6	15	28	51	1
October, 1998: <i>Financial instability around the world</i>	32	40	19	9	*
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	*
January, 1998: <i>The deepening financial crisis in many Asian countries</i>	15	25	27	33	*
March, 1995: <i>The financial and political instability in Mexico</i>	12	28	30	29	1
e. An undercover agent in Yemen who foiled a plot to blow up a U.S.-bound airplane					
May 10-13, 2012	24	23	19	33	1

PEW.2 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
September 7-10, 2007: <i>German officials stopping a terrorist plot to bomb several locations, including a U.S. military base in Germany</i>	20	27	23	28	2
August, 2006: <i>British officials stopping a terrorist plot to blow up planes flying to the U.S.</i>	54	26	9	9	2
f. News about candidates for the 2012 presidential election					
May 10-13, 2012	34	23	18	24	*
May 3-6, 2012	29	27	19	24	*
April 26-29, 2012	29	29	18	23	1
April 19-22, 2012	29	29	20	20	1
April 12-15, 2012	32	28	16	23	1
April 5-8, 2012	31	27	18	23	*
March 29-April 1, 2012	23	29	21	27	*
March 22-25, 2012	28	28	18	25	1
March 15-18, 2012	28	31	17	24	*
March 8-11, 2012	28	27	21	23	*
March 1-4, 2012	31	24	20	24	1
February 23-26, 2012	28	29	18	24	1
February 16-20, 2012	25	29	19	25	2
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
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

PEW.2 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
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](http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Election-Trends.pdf): <http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Election-Trends.pdf>

ASK ALL:

PEW.3 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.]**

May 10-13

2012

26	President Obama expressing his support for gay marriage
20	Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
11	News about candidates for the 2012 presidential election
7	An undercover agent in Yemen who foiled a plot to blow up a U.S.-bound airplane
3	Negotiations between the United States and China to let a Chinese human-rights activist move to the U.S.
3	Reports about economic problems in several European countries
9	Some other story (VOL.)
21	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

NO QUESTION PEW.4**PEW.5 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**