



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

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Republicans More Likely to View Cain Coverage as “Too Tough” Campaign News Draws More Coverage than Interest

Public interest in the presidential campaign showed no increase this week, despite the news media’s increasing coverage of sexual harassment allegations against Herman Cain.

About one-in-five Americans (22%) say they followed news about the 2012 candidates very closely, little changed from a week earlier (21%), according to the latest weekly News Interest Index survey, conducted Nov. 3-6 among 1,005 adults by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

News Interest vs. News Coverage

	News Interest	News Coverage
2012 elections	16	29
Economy	14	13
E. Coast snow storm	12	3
Anti-Wall St. protests	10	5
Federal deficit/debt	9	1
European debt crisis	8	9

News interest shows the percentage of people who say they followed this story most closely, Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, Nov 3-6, 2011. News coverage shows the percentage of news coverage devoted to each story, Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, Oct. 31-Nov 6, 2011.

Still, the Cain allegations registered widely with the public: 75% say they heard a lot (51%) or a little (24%) about the accusations that Cain sexually harassed several women in the late 1990s when he served as president of the National Restaurant Association.

In terms of the week's top stories, as many followed news about the economy most closely (14%) as followed campaign news most closely (16%). Another 12% cite news about the freak snowstorm that hit the East Coast as their top story.

Meanwhile, coverage of the campaign accounted for 29% of all news coverage, up from only 18% a week earlier, according to a content analysis by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ). About two-thirds of campaign coverage dealt with the controversy surrounding Cain and its potential impact on the race (20% of all coverage).

The survey was completed before a new allegation against Cain was reported on Monday and Cain held a news conference Tuesday. (*For more on the Cain controversy, see ["39% Think Cain Allegations True; 24% False" Nov. 7, 2011](#)*)

Views of Candidate Coverage

The public, on balance, thinks that press coverage of Herman Cain has been fair, but far more say that the news media has been too tough on Cain than say that about coverage of two other leading GOP contenders, Mitt Romney and Rick Perry.

Four-in-ten (40%) say that coverage of Cain has been fair while 19% say it has been too tough. By comparison about half say coverage of Romney (53%) and Perry (50%) has been fair, while only 9% say the coverage of each of these candidates has been too tough. Comparable percentages say coverage of Cain (12%), Romney (12%) and Perry (15%) has been too easy.

Attitudes about Cain's coverage are little different among those who had heard at least a little about the allegations: 43% say coverage has been fair, 24% say it has been too tough and 14% say it has been too easy.

Among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, far more say news coverage of Cain has been too tough (30%) than say that about coverage of Romney (13%) or Perry (13%). Just 38% of Republicans and GOP leaners say coverage of Cain has been fair; about half say coverage of Romney (53%) and Perry (52%) has been fair.

Among Republicans and GOP leaners who had heard at least a little about the Cain allegations, about as many say the press has been too tough on the candidate (37%) as say coverage has been fair (39%). Just 10% say it has been too easy.

Nearly half (48%) of Democrats and Democratic leaners say coverage of Cain has been fair; about as many say the coverage has been too easy (15%) as too tough (12%). The numbers are only slightly different among those who had heard at least a little about the allegations.

Majorities of Democrats say the coverage of Romney (60%) and Perry (53%) has been fair.

The public has different impressions of news coverage of Barack Obama than of the GOP candidates. About as many say the press has been too easy on Obama as too tough (26% vs. 22%), while 41% say coverage of Obama has been fair. These numbers are little changed from July.

As might be expected, views of press coverage of Obama divide along partisan lines: 37% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents say coverage has been too tough compared with only 8% of Republicans and GOP leaners. Nearly half of Republicans and Republican leaners (47%) say coverage of Obama has been too easy, while just 9% of Democrats and Democratic leaners say the same.

Republicans More Likely to See Cain Coverage as "Too Tough"

<i>Press coverage of ____ has been...</i>	Total	Rep/ Lean Rep	Dem/ Lean Dem
Herman Cain	%	%	%
Too tough	19	30	12
Too easy	12	9	15
Fair	40	38	48
Don't know	<u>28</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>25</u>
	100	100	100
Mitt Romney			
Too tough	9	13	7
Too easy	12	15	10
Fair	53	53	60
Don't know	<u>26</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>23</u>
	100	100	100
Rick Perry			
Too tough	9	13	7
Too easy	15	16	17
Fair	50	52	53
Don't know	<u>26</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>23</u>
	100	100	100
Barack Obama			
Too tough	22	8	37
Too easy	26	47	9
Fair	41	37	46
Don't know	<u>11</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>
	100	100	100
N	1,005	387	461

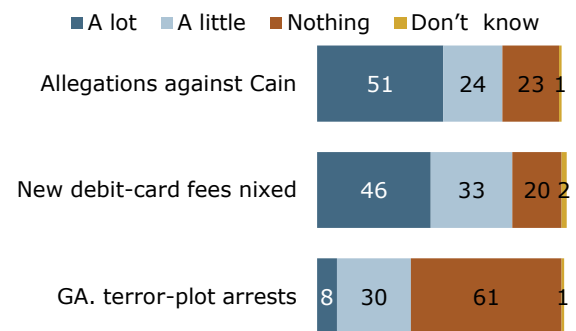
PEW RESEARCH CENTER Nov. 3-6, 2011.
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Most Have Heard about Cain, Bank Fees

In addition to the Cain allegations, most Americans say they heard at least a little last week about large banks abandoning plans to charge monthly fees for using debit cards to shop (46% a lot, 33% a little). Far fewer had heard about the arrest of four older men in Georgia on charges that they were planning a terror attack involving the poison ricin. Just 8% had heard a lot about this story, 30% had heard a little. About six-in-ten (61%) had heard nothing at all about this.

Despite the political nature of the Cain story, there is no partisan difference in familiarity with this story. Modest majorities of Republicans (52%), Democrats (57%) and independents (51%) had heard a lot about the accusations that Cain sexually harassed several women in the late 1990s.

What People Have Heard About



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The Cain accusations have been more visible than several other campaign stories this year. In September, for example, 36% of the public said it had heard a lot about Rick Perry's characterization of Social Security as a Ponzi scheme, while 29% had heard a little. And last month, about one-in-five (21%) said they had heard a lot about Sarah Palin's announcement that she would not run for president; 49% had heard a little.

The Week's News

Nearly four-in-ten (37%) say they followed news about the condition of the U.S. economy very closely last week, essentially unchanged in recent weeks; 14% say this was the news they followed most closely.

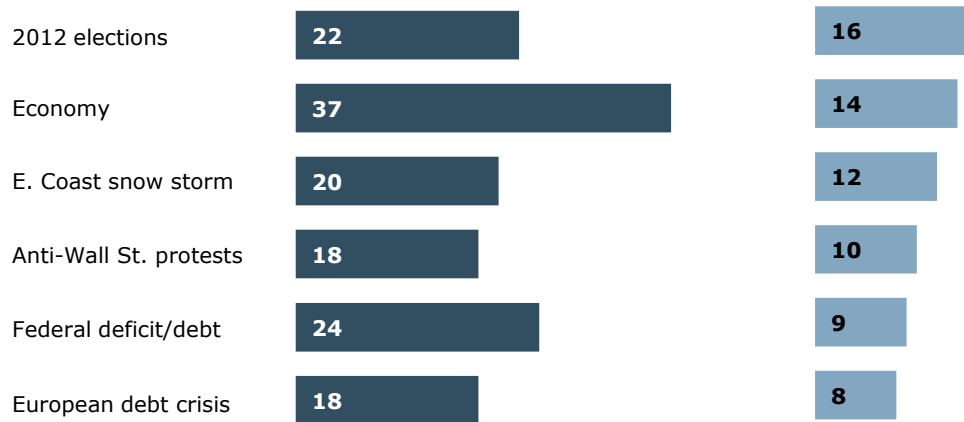
About two-in-ten (22%) say they very closely followed news about the candidates for president in 2012, also largely unchanged in recent weeks. While Republicans have shown greater interest in campaign news in recent weeks, that was not the case last week: 24% of Republicans, 24% of Democrats and 22% of independents say they followed news about the campaign very closely.

Two-in-ten (20%) followed news about the early snow storm that knocked out power for millions last week in the Northeast. Not surprisingly, interest was highest in that region: 46% followed this news very closely, more than double the number for any other region. The storm was the top story for 12% and accounted for 3% of the newshole, according to PEJ.

News Interest

% following each story very closely

Which one story did you follow most closely?



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Interest in the anti-Wall Street protests in several cities across the country also was little changed from the week before; 18% say they followed this news very closely. Nearly a quarter of Democrats (23%) say they followed protest news very closely, compared with 11% of Republicans; 18% of independents also say they followed this news very closely. Overall, the protests were the top story for 10%. News about the protests accounted for 5% of coverage.

About a quarter of the public (24%) says they followed news about the deliberations in Washington over deficit and debt reduction very closely; 9% say this was their top story. Partisans are about equally likely to say they tracked this news very closely. With much of the deliberations at this point unfolding behind closed doors, the story accounted for just 1% of coverage measured by PEJ.

Nearly two-in-ten (18%) say they followed news about efforts in Europe to deal with the debt crisis in Greece and other countries; this was the top story for 8%. News about the European debt crisis accounted for 9% 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 Oct. 31-Nov. 6, and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected Nov. 3-6 from a nationally representative sample of 1,005 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 Nov. 3-6, 2011, among a national sample of 1,005 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (601 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 404 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 185 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	1,005	4.0 percentage points
Republicans	258	7.5 percentage points
Democrats	313	7.0 percentage points
Independents	364	6.5 percentage points
Rep/Lean Rep	387	6.0 percentage points
Dem/Lean Dem	461	5.5 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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