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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
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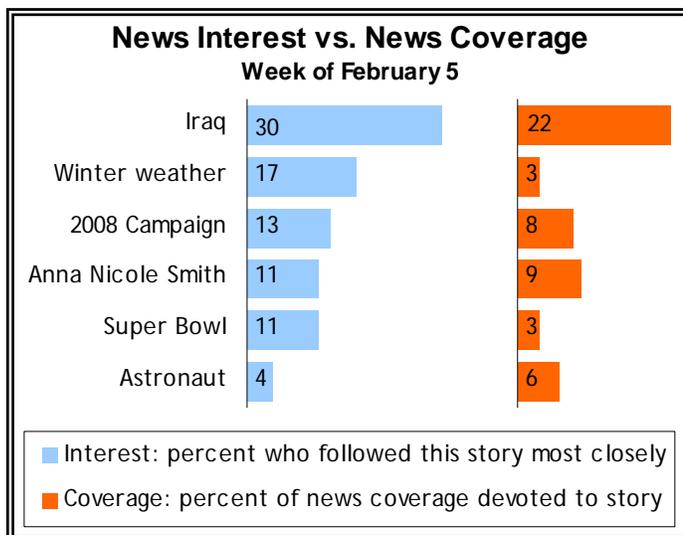
Pew Launches Weekly News Interest Index Too Much Anna Nicole, But the Saga Attracts an Audience

Most Americans feel the press has gone overboard in covering the death of Anna Nicole Smith. Fully 61% believe the Smith story has been overcovered, far more than the number saying that about any other recent story. Even so, a sizable minority (11%) followed Smith's death more closely than any of last week's other top stories. This is on par with the number who cited news about the 2008 presidential candidates (13%) or the Super Bowl (11%) as the stories they followed most closely. The war in Iraq was the top story for the week of Feb. 5, with 30% following it most closely.

These are the principal findings of the first weekly *News Interest Index*, a new initiative by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. The index will build on the Center's longstanding research into public attentiveness to major news stories, adding an important new dimension.

For the first time, the public's news interest can be compared with the news media's agenda through [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. PEJ's Index examines news content each week from Sunday through Friday, with the results released every Tuesday. The News Interest Index survey will measure the public's reaction over the weekend (Friday through Monday) with the results reported on Thursdays. The marriage of these two projects provides an unprecedented



opportunity to evaluate how the public's appetite for major news stories compares with the amount of coverage the press devotes to these stories.

Data collected since the start of the year suggest that the public and the press are often in agreement about the most important news stories of the day. The Iraq war has consistently been the top-ranked news story both in terms of public interest and press coverage. In the news interest index survey for the week of Feb. 5 (conducted Feb. 9-12), 30% of Americans said the situation in Iraq was the story they followed most closely, nearly double the next highest story – winter weather. During that same week, 22% of the news reported across a broad spectrum of media outlets was devoted to the Iraq war (12% to the policy debate and 10% to events on the ground), according to PEJ.

Anna Nicole Coverage

The death of Anna Nicole Smith, which set off a classic media feeding frenzy, may be an instance where press coverage exceeded public demand. Eleven percent of the public said Smith's death was the news story they followed most closely last week; 9% of the week's news coverage was devoted to this topic. But because the death occurred mid-week, the full extent of news coverage is not accurately captured by that 9% figure. In the two days immediately following Smith's death (Feb. 8-9), nearly a quarter of the news from all sectors (24%) was devoted to this story, and fully *half* of cable news was focused on Smith. The public reacted negatively to the abundance of coverage – 61% feel that the Smith story received too much coverage, compared with just 8% who think it should have received more.

Too Much Anna Nicole		
	<i>Which stories...</i>	
	Received too much coverage	Deserved more coverage
	%	%
Anna Nicole Smith	61	8
Astronaut	29	11
Super Bowl	13	4
2008 presidential	10	26
Iraq	9	43
Weather	5	13

Figures show the percent choosing each story as one that received too much or too little press coverage. Figures add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one story as being over- or under-covered.

On the other big tabloid story of the week – involving a female astronaut, a love triangle, and charges of attempted murder – public interest and news coverage seemed to be more closely aligned. Just 4% of the public said this was the story they followed most closely last week. Notably, 29% believe the saga of astronaut Lisa Nowak received too much coverage; 11% feel it was undercovered. The story was overshadowed by Smith's death, and by week's end 6% of the overall coverage had been devoted to the story.

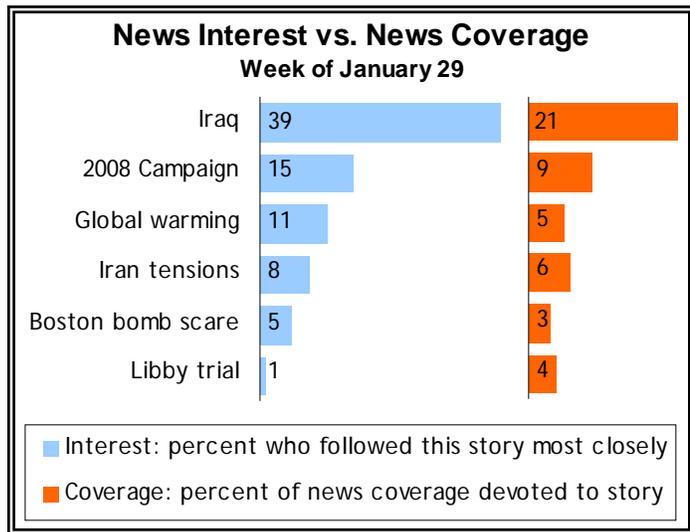
It seems that news coverage of the weather did not match the public's fascination with it. Record cold temperatures and dramatic snowstorms captured the interest of many Americans this

past week – 17% said the weather was their top story, while only 3% of the news coverage was devoted to this topic.

Beyond Tabloid Stories, Iraq and Campaign Dominate

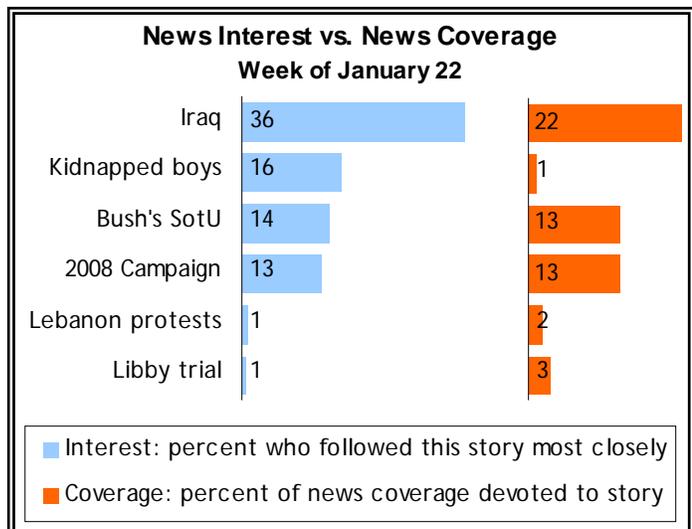
Aside from the recent tabloid stories and the weather, the public has been focused on several important national and international issues over the past several weeks. The media has devoted an enormous amount of time to the Iraq war, but Americans do not seem to be tiring of the coverage. In the most recent poll taken this past weekend, 43% selected Iraq as the news story that, if anything, should be receiving even *more* coverage from the media.

The 2008 presidential campaign, with high stakes and an interesting cast of characters, has caught the public’s interest. During the past three weeks, this has been a top-tier news story both in terms of interest and coverage. Public interest in the 2008 election is significantly higher at this early stage than was the case eight years ago.



The high-profile global warming conference in Paris and stories related to the causes of global climate change attracted a considerable amount of public interest. During the week of Jan. 29, 11% of the public said global warming was the story they were most interested in. (Ten years ago, during the Kyoto summit, the public was paying very little attention to this issue.) News coverage of global warming was substantial during the week of the Paris conference, with 5% of the overall newshole devoted to this topic.

The Scooter Libby trial – a complex, inside-the-Beltway story – has yet to spark widespread interest among the public. Stories about the trial accounted for 3-4% of the newshole during the last two weeks of January. The Libby trial has been the top news story for just 1% of the public, and fewer than 10% have been following it very closely. The public was much more



intrigued with the circumstances surrounding the outing of CIA operative Valerie Plame back in July 2005, when Karl Rove was still a central character.

Partisan Audiences and Evaluations

Many of these stories have a political dimension, and as a result partisanship is linked to both interest in the stories and evaluations of press coverage. Democrats have paid somewhat closer attention than Republicans to the 2008 presidential campaign. Democrats also express more interest than Republicans in the global warming story and the Scooter Libby trial.

Republicans are highly critical of the way the press has covered the Iraq war. About two-thirds of Republicans who have been following the Iraq story say the press's coverage has been "only fair" or "poor;" this compares with 44% of Democrats. Republicans are less critical of press coverage of the 2008 campaign – 52% give the press low ratings vs. 36% of Democrats.

Who's Following Anna Nicole?

While most feel the Anna Nicole Smith story has been overcovered, 11% of Americans say they have followed it more closely than anything else this past week. Women – especially younger women – are by far the most interested in this story. Among women ages 18-49, 18% list Smith's death as the most interesting news story last week, placing it roughly on par with news about Iraq (20%) and the campaign (16%). By contrast, men over age 50 were the least intrigued by this story – just 2% rate news about the former Playboy Playmate's death as the top story. Instead, older men are the most focused on Iraq; fully 44% rate it as the single story they followed most closely.

	Rep	Dem	Ind
<i>Following very closely:</i>	%	%	%
Iraq situation	36	42	37
2008 campaign	21	29	24
Global warming	19	31	28
Libby trial	5	13	7
<i>Press coverage of Iraq is...+</i>			
Excellent/good	32	56	43
Only fair/poor	68	44	56
Don't know	0	0	1
	100	100	100
<i>Press coverage of 2008 campaign is...+</i>			
Excellent/good	47	64	53
Only fair/poor	52	36	44
Don't know	1	0	3
	100	100	100

* Based on the week of Jan 29.
+ Based on those following the story very/fairly closely.

	Women	Men	Women	Men
	18-49	18-49	50+	50+
<i>Top News Story</i>	%	%	%	%
Iraq	20	31	30	44
Winter weather	25	14	17	12
2008 Campaign	16	12	9	13
Anna Nicole Smith	18	9	13	2
Super Bowl	7	16	10	10
Astronaut	5	5	5	2
Other/DK	9	13	16	17
	100	100	100	100

The gender gap in news interest is most extreme with respect to news about Anna Nicole Smith's death: of those who rated this as the story they followed most closely, 72% are women. Winter weather news also appealed more to women than men – 62% of the people who followed this most closely are women. Not surprisingly, those who followed the Super Bowl more closely

than any other news were predominantly male (61%), as is the core audience for Iraq news (57% male).

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 will compile this data to identify the top stories for the week. The News Interest Index survey will collect 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 six 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
FEBRUARY 9-12 2007 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1018

Q.1 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past month, 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] ITEMS [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 <u>closely</u>	Not at all <u>closely</u>	DK/ <u>Refused</u>
a. News about the current situation in Iraq	37	34	18	11	*=100
Feb 2-5, 2007	38	38	17	7	*=100
Jan 26-29, 2007	36	38	15	11	*=100
Jan 19-22, 2007	37	34	18	10	1=100
Jan 12-15, 2007	38	36	17	8	1=100
January, 2007	46	40	8	5	1=100
Jan 5-8, 2007	40	32	16	12	0=100
December, 2006	42	39	12	7	*=100
Nov 30 – Dec 3, 2006	40	36	13	11	*=100
Mid-November, 2006	44	38	12	6	*=100
September, 2006	33	43	14	8	2=100
August, 2006	41	39	12	7	1=100
June, 2006	37	43	13	6	1=100
May, 2006	42	35	15	7	1=100
April, 2006	43	36	13	7	1=100
March, 2006	43	38	12	6	1=100
February, 2006	39	42	12	6	1=100
January, 2006	40	40	12	7	1=100
December, 2005	45	38	11	5	1=100
Early November, 2005	41	40	13	6	*=100
Early October, 2005	43	36	15	6	*=100
Early September, 2005	32	40	20	7	1=100
July, 2005	43	37	13	6	1=100
June, 2005	41	39	12	7	1=100
Mid-May, 2005	42	42	11	5	*=100
Mid-March, 2005	40	39	14	5	2=100
February, 2005	38	45	13	4	*=100
January, 2005	48	37	11	4	*=100
December, 2004	34	44	15	6	1=100
Mid-October, 2004	42	38	11	8	1=100
Early September, 2004	47	37	9	6	1=100
August, 2004	39	42	12	6	1=100
July, 2004	43	40	11	6	*=100
June, 2004	39	42	12	6	1=100
April, 2004	54	33	8	5	*=100
Mid-March, 2004	47	36	12	4	1=100
Early February, 2004	47	38	10	4	1=100
Mid-January, 2004	48	39	9	4	*=100
December, 2003	44	38	11	6	1=100
November, 2003	52	33	9	5	1=100
October, 2003	38	40	14	7	1=100
September, 2003	50	33	10	6	1=100
Mid-August, 2003	45	39	10	5	1=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>
Early July, 2003	37	41	13	8	1=100
June, 2003	46	35	13	6	*=100
May, 2003	63	29	6	2	*=100
April 11-16, 2003 ¹	47	40	10	2	1=100
April 2-7, 2003	54	34	9	2	1=100
March 20-24, 2003	57	33	7	2	1=100
March 13-16, 2003	62	27	6	4	1=100
February, 2003	62	25	8	4	1=100
January, 2003	55	29	10	4	2=100
December, 2002	51	32	10	6	1=100
Late October, 2002	53	33	8	5	1=100
Early October, 2002	60	28	6	5	1=100
Early September, 2002 ²	48	29	15	6	2=100
b. News about candidates for the 2008					
presidential election	24	30	24	21	1=100
Feb 2-5, 2007	24	36	22	18	*=100
Jan 26-29, 2007	24	33	23	20	*=100
Jan 19-22, 2007³	24	27	22	26	1=100
2004 Presidential Election⁴					
November, 2004 (RVs)	52	36	8	4	*=100
Mid-October, 2004	46	30	12	11	1=100
Early September, 2004	40	34	14	11	1=100
August, 2004	32	38	16	14	*=100
July, 2004	29	37	18	15	1=100
June, 2004	28	34	19	18	1=100
April, 2004	31	33	19	16	1=100
Mid-March, 2004	35	34	18	13	*=10
Late February, 2004	24	40	23	12	1=100
Early February, 2004	29	37	20	13	1=100
Mid-January, 2004	16	30	27	26	1=100
Early January, 2004	14	32	30	23	1=100
December, 2003	16	26	27	30	1=100
November, 2003	11	26	34	28	1=100
October, 2003	12	27	28	32	1=100
September, 2003	17	25	30	27	1=100
Mid-August, 2003	12	27	27	33	1=100
May, 2003	8	19	31	41	1=100
January, 2003	14	28	29	28	1=100
2000 Presidential Election					
Early November, 2000 (RVs)	39	44	12	5	*=100
Mid-October, 2000 (RVs)	40	37	15	8	8=100
Early October, 2000 (RVs)	42	36	15	6	1=100
September, 2000	22	42	21	15	*=100

¹ From March 20 to April 16, 2003 the story was listed as “News about the war in Iraq.”

² From October 2002 to March 13-16, 2003 the story was listed as “Debate over the possibility that the U.S. will take military action in Iraq.” In Early September 2002 the story was listed as “Debate over the possibility that the U.S. will invade Iraq.”

³ January 19-22, 2007 asked about: “Recent announcements by prominent Democrats about plans to run for president in 2008.”

⁴ In previous election years, the question wording of stories varies due to factors such as timing within the election cycle (primaries or general election) and the nature of the race (incumbent candidate or open field of candidates).

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>
July, 2000	21	38	20	20	1=100
June, 2000	23	32	23	21	1=100
May, 2000	18	33	26	23	*=100
April, 2000	18	39	22	20	1=100
March, 2000	26	41	19	13	1=100
February, 2000	26	36	21	17	*=100
January, 2000	19	34	28	18	1=100
December, 1999	16	36	24	23	1=100
October, 1999	17	32	28	22	1=100
September, 1999	15	31	33	20	1=100
July, 1999	15	38	24	22	1=100
June, 1999	11	25	29	34	1=100
1996 Presidential Election					
November, 1996 (RVs)	34	45	15	6	*=100
October, 1996	31	39	18	12	*=100
Early September, 1996	24	36	23	17	*=100
July, 1996	22	40	23	14	1=100
April, 1996	23	35	25	17	*=100
March, 1996	26	41	20	13	*=100
January, 1996	10	34	31	24	1=100
September, 1995	12	36	30	22	*=100
August, 1995	13	34	28	25	*=100
June, 1995	11	31	31	26	1=100
1992 Presidential Election					
October, 1992 (RVs)	55	36	7	2	0=100
September, 1992 (RVs)	47	36	11	6	*=100
August, 1992 (RVs)	36	51	11	2	0=100
July, 1992	20	45	26	9	*=100
May, 1992	32	44	16	8	*=100
March, 1992	35	40	16	9	*=100
January, 1992	11	25	36	27	1=100
December, 1991	10	28	32	30	*=100
October, 1991	12	26	31	29	2=100
1988 Presidential Election					
October, 1988 (RVs)	43	44	11	2	*=100
August, 1988 (RVs)	39	45	13	3	*=100
May, 1988	22	46	23	6	3=100
November, 1987	15	28	35	21	1=100
September, 1987	14	34	37	14	1=100
c. The female astronaut who was arrested in Florida on charges of attempted murder					
	10	27	29	33	1=100
d. The death of Anna Nicole Smith					
	11	27	31	30	1=100
e. The Super Bowl					
February, 2000	26	21	16	36	1=100
February, 1990	31	22	15	32	0=100
	22	22	19	37	0=100
f. Cold winter weather					
Jan 19-22, 2007 ⁵	36	36	15	13	*=100
	31	32	22	14	1=100

⁵ From January 19-22, 2007 the story was listed as "Snow and ice storms in some parts of the country." From 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

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	Very <u>Closely</u>	Fairly <u>Closely</u>	Not too <u>closely</u>	Not at all <u>closely</u>	DK/ <u>Refused</u>
Jan 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

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 News about the current situation in Iraq
- 17 Cold winter weather
- 13 News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election
- 11 The death of Anna Nicole Smith
- 11 The Super Bowl
- 4 The female astronaut who was arrested in Florida on charges of attempted murder
- 5 Other
- 9 Don't know/Refused
- 100

ROTATE Q.3 AND Q.4

IF DON'T KNOW/REFUSED IN Q.2, SKIP Q.3/4 [N=919]:

Q.3 Of all the stories I just mentioned, which of them, if any, received TOO MUCH coverage? [**DO NOT READ; DISPLAY PRE-CODES; ACCEPT UP TO THREE RESPONSES BUT DO NOT PROBE FOR MORE THAN ONE**]

- 61 The death of Anna Nicole Smith
- 29 The female astronaut who was arrested in Florida on charges of attempted murder
- 13 The Super Bowl
- 10 News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election
- 9 News about the current situation in Iraq
- 5 Cold winter weather
- 17 No/None of these
- 5 Don't know/Refused

Q.4 Of all the stories I just mentioned, which of them, if any should have received MORE coverage? [**DO NOT READ; DISPLAY PRE-CODES; ACCEPT UP TO THREE RESPONSES BUT DO NOT PROBE FOR MORE THAN ONE**]

- 43 News about the current situation in Iraq
- 26 News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election
- 11 The female astronaut who was arrested in Florida on charges of attempted murder
- 13 Cold winter weather
- 8 The death of Anna Nicole Smith
- 4 The Super Bowl
- 27 No/None
- 6 Don't know/Refused

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."