

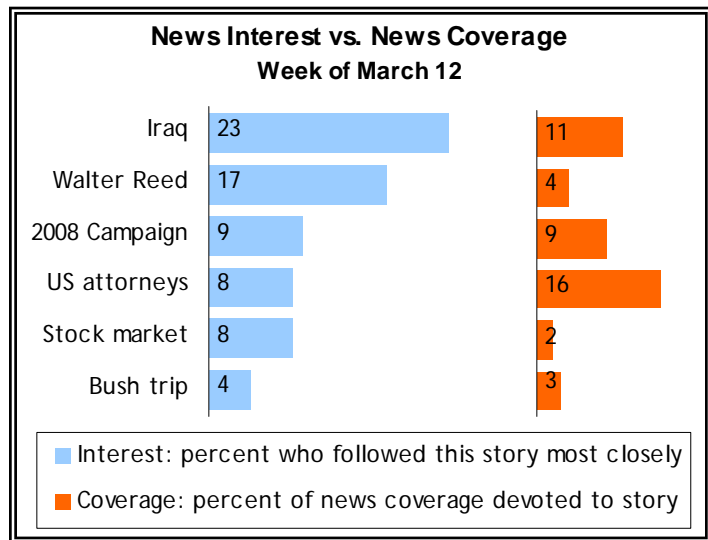


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
 Andrew Kohut, Director
 Kim Parker, Senior Researcher

Attorney Firings Stir Limited Public Interest
Despite Extensive News Coverage

The controversy over the firing of eight U.S. attorneys is not attracting strong public interest in spite of intense media coverage of the story. In fact, the story evokes a typical response from the public when compared with news interest in past Washington scandals. Amid calls for Attorney General Alberto Gonzales’ resignation, the news media’s coverage of the story outstripped public interest. Most Americans remained focused on the Iraq war and the problems facing returning soldiers.



Overall, 19% of the public paid very close attention to news about the fired U.S. attorneys and 8% said this was the single news story they followed more closely than any other. The news media devoted 16% of its coverage overall to the firings – an eight-fold increase over the week of March 5 –making it the most covered story of the week. Public interest increased as well though at a lower rate. Democrats followed the U.S. attorneys story more closely than Republicans (23% vs. 15%, respectively, followed it very closely). This story did generate more public interest than the recent verdict in the Scooter Libby trial – one of last week’s most covered news stories. Only 13% followed that story very closely.

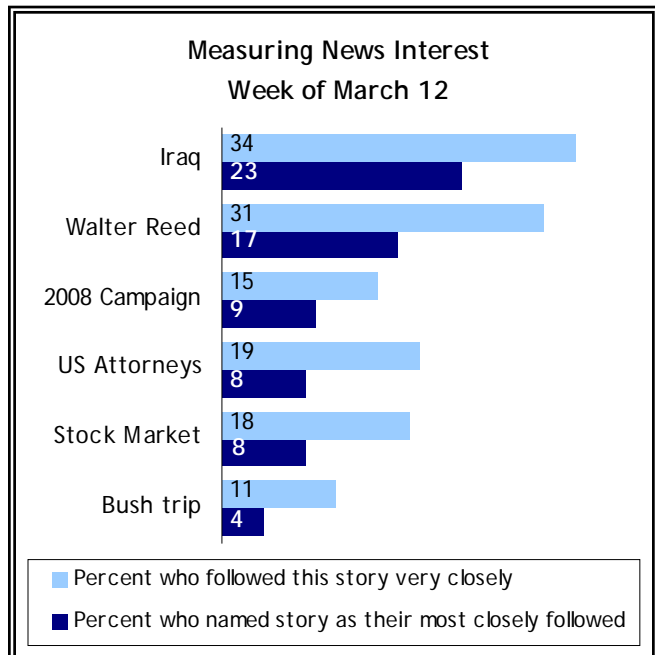
Looking at past Washington scandals involving senior government officials, the firing of eight U.S. attorneys generated an average amount of interest from the public. It is on par with Whitewater, the HUD scandal of the late 1980s, Trent Lott's resignation as Senate Majority Leader, the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandal, Tom Delay's indictment for campaign finance violations and the savings and loan scandal of the early 1990s.

Public Remains Focused on Iraq

While the news media focused on how Gonzales and the White House were connected to the U.S. attorney firings, the public remained intensely focused on the Iraq War. Fully 34% said they followed news about the situation in Iraq very closely and 23% listed Iraq as the story they followed most closely last week. Nearly as many (31%) followed news about conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and more general stories about problems with medical care for wounded soldiers returning from Iraq. Some 17% said this was the story they followed most closely. Coverage of this story fell off somewhat from the previous week—4% of coverage in all media sectors was devoted to this story last week vs. 6% the week of March 5.

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 agenda. 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.

	Followed Very Closely %
Congressional check bouncing {Apr 92}	36
Scooter Libby indictment {Nov 05}	24
Ethics charges against Gingrich {Jan 97}	23
Whitewater {May 94}	22
HUD scandal {Aug 89}	21
Trent Lott's resignation {Jan 03}	20
Firing of federal prosecutors {Mar 07}	19
Abramoff bribery admission {Jan 06}	18
Tom Delay indictment {Oct 05}	18
Savings and Loan scandal {Jun 90}	18
White House leak of CIA agent {Oct 03}	16
Jim Wright ethics investigation {May 89}	15
Ed Meese conflict of interest {May 88}	15
Charges against Rostenkowski {Aug 93}	13
Libby guilty verdict {Mar 07}	13



Campaign Buzz

In other top stories this week, the steady stream of news about the 2008 presidential campaign continued. Nine percent of news coverage in all sectors was devoted to this topic. For the past two months, media coverage of the campaign has focused largely on the two leading Democratic candidates, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. That fact has not been lost on the public, as these two campaigns are at the forefront of the public's mind. When asked to name the candidate they've heard the most about in the news lately, 37% named Clinton and another 24% named Barack Obama. Mentions of all other candidates were in single digits: 3% or fewer named John McCain, Rudy Giuliani, Mitt Romney and John Edwards.

Women were somewhat more likely than men to name Clinton (40% vs. 34%, respectively). Even so, she was the top pick of both men and women. Clinton and

Obama overshadowed the other candidates even among Republicans. Nearly one-third of Republicans named Clinton when asked which candidate they had heard the most about in the news lately, another 27% named Obama. Ten percent of Republicans named a GOP candidate: 8% named Giuliani, 6% named McCain and less than 1% named Romney. Among Democrats, 48% named Clinton and 26% named Obama. Only 1% named Edwards.

<i>Heard the most about in the news lately...</i>	<u>Total</u> %	<u>Rep</u> %	<u>Dem</u> %	<u>Ind</u> %
Hillary Clinton	37	31	48	34
Barack Obama	24	27	26	21
John McCain	3	6	2	3
Rudy Giuliani	3	8	1	2
George W. Bush	2	1	3	1
Mitt Romney	1	*	0	3
John Edwards	1	1	1	0
Other	4	4	4	4
No answer	<u>25</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>32</u>
	100	100	100	100

Overall, public interest in the campaign fell off somewhat from previous weeks while coverage remained about the same. Fifteen percent of the public followed news about the candidates very closely last week, down from 24% and 19% the previous two weeks. Roughly one-in-ten Americans named the campaign as the story they followed most closely. Democrats paid closer attention to campaign news than did Republicans – 22% vs. 12%, respectively, followed this story very closely.

Recent news about the stock market attracted a modest audience – 18% of the public followed this story very closely while 8% said it was the story they followed most closely. Two weeks earlier, when stocks took a dramatic tumble, the public was following the market somewhat more closely. Stock market happenings drew in a distinct audience – Republicans and men were among the most likely to pay close attention to this story. In addition, the income gap on this story is substantial. Fully 57% of those with annual household incomes of \$75,000 or higher followed news about the stock market very or fairly closely. This compares with 40% of

those making between \$50,000 and \$75,000, and fewer than 30% of those making less than \$50,000 a year.

News about Bush

Roughly one-in-ten Americans (11%) paid very close attention to President Bush’s recent trip to Latin America. This is on a par with previous Bush trips in terms of public interest. Three percent of media coverage for the week was devoted to Bush’s trip.

With regard to news coverage of the president more generally, 33% of the public believes the media is being unfair to the Bush administration, 53% say the media is being fair, and another 14% has no opinion. Over the course of his presidency, the perception that Bush is being treated unfairly by the media has grown gradually. At the beginning of 2001, only 19% said the media was being unfair to the president. By the summer of 2003, 24% held this view, and by the fall of 2005, the number had increased to 31%. Perceptions of media coverage of Bill Clinton’s administration followed a similar trajectory. Early on in his first term, a strong majority of the public (72%) said news organizations were being fair to the Clinton administration while only 17% saw them as unfair. By the spring of 1994, 36% thought the press was being unfair to Clinton, and by September, 1998 that number had risen to 40%.

Not surprisingly, the partisan gap on this question is substantial. Only 26% of Republicans believe Bush is being treated fairly by the news media, fully 65% say he’s being treated unfairly. Among Democrats, 75% think news organizations are being fair to Bush while 13% say they are being unfair. Independents are squarely in the middle: 52% see the media as fair to Bush, 33% say they are unfair.

The opinions of Republicans have changed dramatically over the course of Bush’s presidency. In July 2003, Republicans believed on balance that the media was being fair to Bush – 50% vs. 38% who said unfair. Independents have also become more critical of press coverage of Bush over the past four years. The opinions of Democrats have remained much more stable.

GOP Critical of Press Coverage of Bush		
	<u>2003</u>	<u>2007</u>
<i>News organizations are being...to Bush</i>	%	%
Total		
Fair	62	53
Unfair	24	33
DK/Ref	14	14
	100	100
Republicans		
Fair	50	26
Unfair	38	65
Democrats		
Fair	71	75
Unfair	16	13
Independents		
Fair	67	52
Unfair	20	33

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:

Andrew Kohut, Director
Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors
Carolyn Funk, Richard Wike and Kim Parker, Senior Researchers
Nilanthi Samaranyake, Survey and Data Manager
April Clark, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Robert Suls, Shawn Neidorf and Dan Cox, Research Associates
James Albrightain, Executive Assistant

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
MARCH 16-19, 2007 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,048

Q.1 There are already many candidates for the 2008 presidential election. Can you tell me the name of the candidate you've heard the MOST about in the news lately? [OPEN-END. RECORD FIRST MENTION ONLY]

37	Hillary Clinton
24	Barack Obama
3	John McCain
3	Rudy Giuliani
2	George W. Bush
1	Mitt Romney
1	John Edwards
4	Other
<u>25</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

Q.2 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, 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?"]

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>
a. News about the current situation in Iraq	34	34	17	15	*=100
March 9-12, 2007	34	37	16	13	*=100
March 2-5, 2007	37	37	16	9	1=100
Feb 23-26, 2007	36	36	15	13	*=100
Feb 16-19, 2007	30	36	19	14	1=100
Feb 9-12, 2007	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

Q.2 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
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
September, 2003	50	33	10	6	1=100
Mid-August, 2003	45	39	10	5	1=100
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 ²	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 ³	48	29	15	6	2=100
b. President Bush's recent trip to Latin America	11	23	27	38	1=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
July 2001: G-8 Genoa, Italy	6	21	31	40	2=100
June 2001: Europe	10	25	27	37	1=100
c. Reports about Walter Reed Army Medical Center and medical care for wounded soldiers returning from Iraq					
March 9-12, 2007⁴	31	30	20	19	*=100
Feb 23-26, 2007	31	31	19	19	*=100
Feb 23-26, 2007	19	24	24	32	1=100

¹ From March 20-24, 2003 to April 11-16, 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."
³ In Early September, 2002, the story was listed as "Debate over the possibility that the U.S. will invade Iraq."
⁴ From February 23-26, 2007 to March 9-12, 2007, the story was listed as "Conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center where many soldiers are treated after returning from Iraq."

Q.2 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. News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election	15	28	29	27	1=100
March 9-12, 2007	24	30	23	23	*=100
March 2-5, 2007	19	31	26	23	1=100
Feb 23-26, 2007	22	33	24	21	*=100
Feb 16-19, 2007	18	32	22	27	1=100
Feb 9-12, 2007	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, 2007⁵	24	27	22	26	1=100
2004 Presidential Election⁶					
November, 2004 (RVs)	52	36	8	4	*=100
Mid-October, 2004	46	30	12	11	1=100
August, 2004	32	38	16	14	*=100
July, 2004	29	37	18	15	1=100
April, 2004	31	33	19	16	1=100
Mid-March, 2004	35	34	18	13	*=100
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
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

⁵ January 19-22, 2007, asked about "Recent announcements by prominent Democrats about plans to run for president in 2008."

⁶ In previous election years, the question wording of stories varies because of 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.2 CONTINUED...

	Very <u>Closely</u>	Fairly <u>Closely</u>	Not too <u>Closely</u>	Not at all <u>Closely</u>	DK/ <u>Refused</u>
Early September, 1996	24	36	23	17	*=100
July, 1996	22	40	23	14	1=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
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
e. Questions about how the White House and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales were involved in the firing of eight federal prosecutors					
March 9-12, 2007⁷	19	24	22	35	*=100
	9	17	22	52	*=100
f. Recent major up and downs in the U.S. Stock Market					
March 2-5, 2007⁸	18	21	25	35	1=100
	21	28	25	26	*=100
Early September, 2002	27	30	20	22	1=100
Late July, 2002	33	33	15	18	1=100
March, 2001	27	27	18	27	1=100
Mid-October, 2000	20	26	23	31	1=100
April, 2000	18	28	23	31	*=100
Early April, 2000	19	29	20	32	*=100
March, 2000	23	29	21	26	1=100
March, 1999	18	29	22	31	*=100
January, 1999	24	28	19	28	1=100
Early September, 1998	32	31	20	17	*=100
Mid-August, 1998	17	23	21	39	*=100
January, 1998	21	25	23	31	*=100
Early November, 1997 ⁹	16	29	22	33	*=100
Mid-November, 1997	25	36	18	20	1=100
September, 1997	14	22	23	40	1=100
April, 1997	17	21	22	40	*=100
February, 1996	12	20	25	42	1=100

⁷ March 9-12, 2007 asked about "The firing of eight federal prosecutors by the Justice Department."

⁸ March 2-5 asked about "The recent drop in the U.S. stock market."

⁹ In Early November, 1997, the story was listed as "Thinking about last Monday when the stock market dropped..."

Q.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.**)

- 23 News about the current situation in Iraq
- 17 Reports about Walter Reed Army Medical Center and medical care for wounded soldiers returning from Iraq
- 9 News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election
- 8 Questions about how the White House and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales were involved in the firing of eight federal prosecutors
- 8 Recent major up and downs in the U.S. Stock Market
- 4 President Bush's recent trip to Latin America
- 11 Some other story (**SPECIFY**)
- 20 Don't know/Refused
- 100

Q.4 On another subject, in your opinion, are the news organizations you are familiar with being fair or unfair to the Bush administration?

	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Unfair</u>	(VOL) <u>DK/Ref</u>
March 16-19, 2007	53	33	14=100
April, 2006	56	31	13=100
Early November, 2005	50	31	19=100
Early July, 2003	62	24	14=100
February, 2001	65	19	16=100
Clinton			
Early September, 1998	52	40	8=100
February, 1998	49	44	7=100
September, 1994	67	26	7=100
May, 1994	52	36	12=100
August, 1993	66	21	13=100
June, 1993	51	43	6=100
February, 1993	72	17	11=100
Bush, Sr.			
January, 1992	77	15	8=100
November, 1990	72	15	13=100
January, 1990	76	14	10=100
August, 1989	82	12	6=100
Reagan			
January, 1988	66	21	13=100
January, 1987	67	25	8=100
July, 1985	78	12	10=100

Q.5 Now I'd like to ask you about where you get your news. Do you regularly get news about national and international issues from [INSERT ITEM], or not? How about...[READ AND RANDOMIZE]

	<u>Yes, regularly</u>	<u>No, not regularly</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
a. Newspapers	53	47	0=100
February 23-26, 2007	51	49	*=100
b. Network television news, such as ABC, CBS or NBC	65	34	1=100
February 23-26, 2007	68	32	*=100
c. Cable news channels such as CNN or the Fox News Channel	59	40	1=100
February 23-26, 2007	60	40	*=100
d. Radio	40	59	1=100
February 23-26, 2007	40	61	*=100
e. The Internet	36	63	1=100
February 23-26, 2007	38	62	*=100

Q.6 Which would you say is your MAIN source for news about national and international issues? [DO NOT READ LIST. ACCEPT ONLY ONE RESPONSE]

	<u>Newspapers</u>	<u>Network TV News</u>	<u>Cable TV News</u>	<u>Radio</u>	<u>Internet</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>None DK/Ref</u>
March 16-19, 2007	11	29	29	10	14	2	5=100
February 23-26, 2007	11	35	25	10	14	3	2=100