

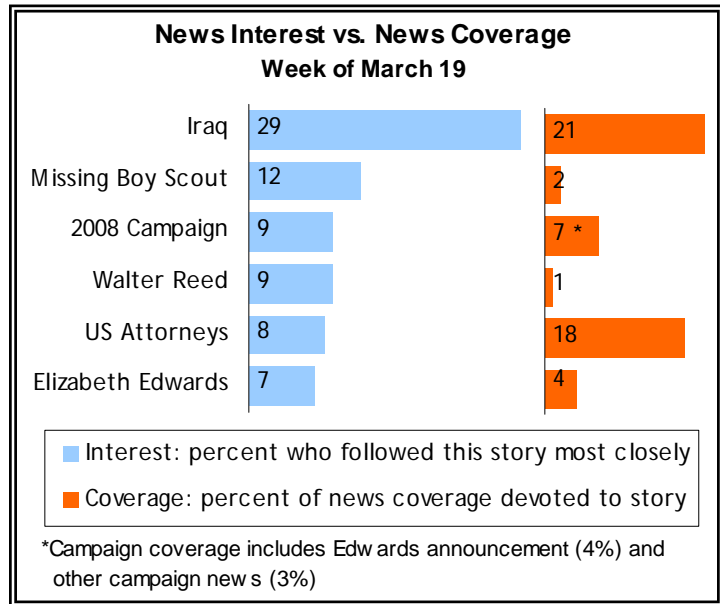


**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
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**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**  
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**Attorney Firings: Important but Not Interesting**

Public interest in the Iraq war remained high last week as the country marked the fourth anniversary of the conflict, and the House of Representatives passed a controversial war funding bill. At the same time the fallout from the firing of eight U.S. attorneys by the Justice Department failed to gain much traction with the public, in spite of intense media coverage of the story.



Beyond Iraq, the public divided its attention fairly evenly among the other top stories of the week – a missing Boy Scout found alive in North Carolina, news about the 2008 presidential campaign, medical care for wounded Iraq war veterans, and the U.S. attorney story. The third week into the U.S. attorney story, public interest increased only marginally, and the gap between coverage of the story and public attentiveness remained substantial. Only 20% of the public paid very close attention to news about the firings, and 8% said it was the story they followed most closely (unchanged from last week). Fully 18% of news coverage for the week was devoted to this story.

The public is divided over whether the story is interesting or boring (48% vs. 46%). Even so, a solid majority (68%) says the issue is important to the country. Overall, this story is viewed as somewhat more significant than the recent Scooter Libby trial – 59% said that was important for the country.

There is a significant partisan gap over the importance of the story. While 80% of Democrats believe the story is important for the country, only 60% of Republicans agree. Roughly two-thirds of independents view the issue as important. Democrats are also more likely to find the story interesting – 59% vs. 42% of Republicans. Independents are split on this matter – 46% interesting, 48% boring.

	Total %	Rep %	Dem %	Ind %
<i>Questions about how Gonzales and White House were involved in firing of U.S. attorneys:</i>				
Important for country	68	60	80	66
Not important	26	33	14	28
Don't know	6	7	6	6
	100	100	100	100
Interesting	48	42	59	46
Boring	46	51	36	48
Don't know	6	7	5	6
	100	100	100	100

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.

**Campaign News**

One in five Americans paid very close attention to news about the 2008 candidates and 17% closely followed news about Elizabeth Edwards' recurrence of cancer. Roughly one-in-ten Americans (9%) said they followed the campaign more closely than any other major news story, and another 7% said they followed the Edwards news most closely.

In what was otherwise a quiet week on the presidential campaign trail, 7% of the overall newshole was filled by campaign news. News about Edwards specifically made up 4% of the newshole. Women followed the Edwards announcement more closely than did men – 11% of women named this as their most closely followed story compared to 3% of men.

## 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](http://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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Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research  
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors  
Carolyn Funk, Richard Wike and Kim Parker, Senior Researchers  
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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**MARCH 23-26, 2007 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**N=1,034**

Q.1 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	<b>31</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>March 16-19, 2007</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>March 9-12, 2007</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>March 2-5, 2007</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>February 23-26, 2007</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>February 16-19, 2007</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>February 9-12, 2007</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>February 2-5, 2007</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>January 26-29, 2007</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>January 19-22, 2007</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>January 12-15, 2007</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1=100</b>
January, 2007	46	40	8	5	1=100
<b>January 5-8, 2007</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0=100</b>
December, 2006	42	39	12	7	*=100
<b>November 30-December 3, 2006</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>*=100</b>
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
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

**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>
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 <sup>1</sup>	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 <sup>2</sup>	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 <sup>3</sup>	48	29	15	6	2=100
b. The missing Boy Scout found alive in North Carolina	<b>16</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
<b>February 23-26, 2007: The rescue of three climbers on Oregon's Mt. Hood</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>January 26-29, 2007: News about two kidnapped boys who were found in Missouri</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>1=100</b>
c. Reports about Walter Reed Army Medical Center and medical care for wounded soldiers returning from Iraq	<b>27</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>March 16-19, 2007</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>March 9-12, 2007<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>February 23-26, 2007</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>1=100</b>
d. News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election	<b>20</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>March 16-19, 2007</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>March 9-12, 2007</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>March 2-5, 2007</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>February 23-26, 2007</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>February 16-19, 2007</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>February 9-12, 2007</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>February 2-5, 2007</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>January 26-29, 2007</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>January 19-22, 2007<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>24</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1=100</b>

<sup>1</sup> From March 20-24, 2003 to April 11-16, 2003, the story was listed as "News about the war in Iraq."  
<sup>2</sup> 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."  
<sup>3</sup> In Early September, 2002, the story was listed as "Debate over the possibility that the U.S. will invade Iraq."  
<sup>4</sup> 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."  
<sup>5</sup> January 19-22, 2007 asked about "Recent announcements by prominent Democrats about plans to run for president in 2008."

**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>2004 Presidential Election</b>					
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
<b>2000 Presidential Election</b>					
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
<b>1996 Presidential Election</b>					
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
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
<b>1992 Presidential Election</b>					
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

**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>
January, 1992	11	25	36	27	1=100
December, 1991	10	28	32	30	*=100
<b>1988 Presidential Election</b>					
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. The announcement that Elizabeth Edwards, the wife of John Edwards, has had a recurrence of breast cancer					
	<b>17</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1=100</b>
f. Questions about how the White House and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales were involved in the firing of eight federal prosecutors					
	<b>20</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>March 16-19, 2007</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>March 9-12, 2007<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>*=100</b>

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.**)

29	News about the current situation in Iraq
12	The missing Boy Scout found alive in North Carolina
9	News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election
9	Reports about Walter Reed Army Medical Center and medical care for wounded soldiers returning from Iraq
8	Questions about how the White House and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales were involved in the firing of eight federal prosecutors
7	The announcement that Elizabeth Edwards, the wife of John Edwards, has had a recurrence of breast cancer
10	Some other story ( <b>SPECIFY</b> )
<u>16</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

Now a few questions about the firing of eight federal prosecutors and how Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and White House officials were involved...

**ROTATE QUESTIONS 3 THROUGH 5**

Q.3 Do you find this story hard to follow or easy to follow?

		<i>Libby Trial</i> <u>March 9-12, 2007<sup>7</sup></u>
39	Hard to follow	34
50	Easy to follow	49
<u>11</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>17</u>
100		100

<sup>6</sup> March 9-12, 2007 asked about "The firing of eight federal prosecutors by the Justice Department."

<sup>7</sup> For March 9-12, 2007, Q.3 through Q.5 referred to "The recent trial involving former vice presidential aide Lewis Libby."

Q.4 Do you think this story is important for the country or not important for the country?

		<i>Libby Trial</i> <u>March 9-12, 2007</u>
68	Important for the country	59
26	Not important for the country	30
<u>6</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>11</u>
100		100

Q.5 Is this story interesting to you or is it boring?

48	Interesting	37
46	Boring	51
<u>6</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>12</u>
100		100

Q.6 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	<b>53</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>March 16-19, 2007</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>0=100</b>
<b>February 23-26, 2007</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>*=100</b>
b. Network television news, such as ABC, CBS or NBC	<b>66</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>March 16-19, 2007</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>February 23-26, 2007</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>*=100</b>
c. Cable news channels such as CNN or the Fox News Channel	<b>58</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>March 16-19, 2007</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>February 23-26, 2007</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>*=100</b>
d. Radio	<b>43</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>March 16-19, 2007</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>February 23-26, 2007</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>*=100</b>
e. The Internet	<b>38</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>March 16-19, 2007</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>February 23-26, 2007</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>*=100</b>

Q.7 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>
<b>March 23-26, 2007</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2=100</b>
<b>March 16-19, 2007</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5=100</b>
<b>February 23-26, 2007</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2=100</b>