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Attentive Public Critical of DOJ Use of AP Records

Partisan Interest, Reactions to IRS and AP Controversies

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Attentive Public Critical of DOJ Use of AP Records Partisan Interest, Reactions to IRS and AP Controversies

So far, public interest in a trio of controversies connected to the Obama administration has been limited. Roughly a quarter (26%) of Americans say they are very closely following reports that the IRS targeted conservative groups. About the same number (25%) are tracking the Benghazi investigation very closely, and even fewer (16%) are very closely following news about the Justice Department subpoenaing phone records of AP journalists.

Interest in IRS Controversy Mirrors Benghazi

<i>% following each story</i>	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Diff
<i>very closely</i>	%	%	%	%	
IRS targeting conservative groups	26	37	21	25	R+16
Benghazi investigation	25	34	18	26	R+16
DOJ subpoenas AP phone records	16	20	12	16	R+8
Reports about US economy	30	31	26	32	R+5

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 16-19, 2013.

The new survey by the Pew Research Center, conducted May 16-19 among 1,002 adults, finds that 37% of Republicans are paying very close attention to the IRS story, compared with 21% of Democrats and 25% of independents. And the Benghazi investigation continues to draw much greater interest from Republicans (34% very closely) than Democrats (18%).

A historical review of previous controversies involving White House or cabinet officials finds that these levels of public interest – and the partisan divide in attentiveness – are not necessarily new. Previous scandals – such as the Lewis “Scooter” Libby case during George W. Bush’s administration or the “Pardon-gate” scandal at the end of Bill Clinton’s second term – received similar levels of public attention, and were generally more interesting to those in the opposition party.

The IRS Targeting Controversy

Overall, 42% say the Obama administration was involved in the decision to target conservative groups. Fewer (31%) say that the decision to target conservative groups was made by IRS employees without administration involvement, while 27% offer no opinion.

Not surprisingly, opinions about this are highly partisan. Nearly seven-in-ten Republicans (69%) say the administration was involved in the IRS's decision to target

conservative groups, compared with just 12% who say the decision was made by IRS employees. By contrast, just 21% of Democrats say the administration was involved, while 54% say IRS employees made the decision to target conservative groups. By a 44% to 28% margin, more independents say the administration was involved in the IRS decision than say it was not.

Those who followed the IRS story at least fairly closely (50% of the public) express similar views about the administration's involvement: 49% say the administration was involved while 35% say it was not. But partisan differences are wider among this attentive segment of the population; fully 78% of Republicans who have followed the story believe the administration was involved in the decision to target conservative groups, while 63% of attentive Democrats say the decision came from IRS employees.

Plurality Says Obama Administration Was Involved In IRS Targeting Decision

Do you think the targeting of conservative groups by the IRS was a decision made by employees at the IRS or do you think the Obama administration was also involved?

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
	%	%	%	%
IRS employees made decision	31	12	54	28
Obama administration also involved	42	69	21	44
Don't know	<u>27</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>29</u>
	100	100	100	100

*Opinions among those who followed IRS story **very** or **fairly** closely*

IRS employees made decision	35	13	63	33
Obama administration also involved	49	78	21	48
Don't know	<u>16</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>19</u>
	100	100	100	100
N	551	162	169	189

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 16-19, 2013. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

AP Phone Records Controversy

The public is of two minds when it comes to the Justice Department's decision to subpoena the phone records of AP journalists as part of an investigation into the disclosure of classified information. Slightly more disapprove (44%) than approve (36%) of the DOJ's actions.

Criticism of the DOJ is substantially higher among those who are paying attention to the story. By a 55% to 35% margin people who have followed reports about the AP phone records at least fairly closely disapprove of the DOJ's actions. Attentive Republicans are particularly critical: they disapprove by a 66% to 28% margin.

Attentive Republicans, Independents Highly Critical of Justice Obtaining AP Phone Records

Justice Department's decision to subpoena AP phone records as part of investigation into disclosure of classified information?

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
	%	%	%	%
Approve	36	36	43	32
Disapprove	44	48	40	47
Don't know	<u>20</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>21</u>
	100	100	100	100

Opinions among those who followed Justice Department story very or fairly closely

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
Approve	35	28	52	29
Disapprove	55	66	43	55
Don't know	<u>10</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>16</u>
	100	100	100	100
N	391	112	112	140

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 16-19, 2013. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Past Administration Controversies

The Pew Research Center has been tracking public interest in news stories for more than two decades, and while each political scandal is unique – and the list is hardly comprehensive – the level of public and partisan interest in the current affairs is largely consistent with prior events.

At their peaks, about a quarter of Americans very closely followed controversies involving Alberto Gonzales (22%), Scooter Libby (27%) and Karl Rove (23%) during George W. Bush’s administration. All three drew more attention from Democrats than Republicans.

The “Pardon-gate” controversy at the end of Bill Clinton’s presidency was followed very closely by 28%, with far more interest from Republicans (42%) than Democrats (24%).

The exception to this partisan gap was the public’s first reaction to the Monica Lewinsky story. An early February 1998 survey found

Administration Controversies Typically Draw More Interest from Members of “Out” Party

<i>Following news very closely ...</i>	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Diff
	%	%	%	%	
Obama Administration					
Investigations into last fall’s attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya May 2013	25	34	18	26	R+16
The Justice Department subpoenaing phone records of AP journalists as part of an investigation into the disclosure of classified information involving national security May 2013	16	20	12	16	R+8
Reports that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) targeted conservative groups, such as the Tea Party, for extra scrutiny May 2013	26	37	21	25	R+16
An FBI investigation that led David Petraeus to resign as director of the CIA after it uncovered an extra-marital affair Nov 2012	22	28	21	19	R+7
The House voting to hold Attorney General Eric Holder in contempt for not sharing documents related to a gun-trafficking investigation July 2012	22	27	23	19	R+4
George W. Bush Administration					
Questions about whether the White House and Alberto Gonzales were involved in the firing of eight federal prosecutors April 2007	22	20	29	19	D+9
George Bush’s decision to commute the prison sentence of former vice presidential aide Lewis “Scooter” Libby July 2007	27	22	34	23	D+12
Reports that White House adviser Karl Rove may have leaked classified information about a CIA agent July 2005	23	18	26	27	D+8
Bill Clinton Administration					
The controversy over the pardons Bill Clinton granted as he left office Feb 2001	28	42	24	21	R+18
Allegations that President Clinton had an affair with former white house intern Monica Lewinsky Feb 1998	35	34	38	33	D+4
George H.W. Bush Administration					
The scandal involving the Department of Housing and Urban Development July 1989	15	11	16	18	D+5

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 16-19, 2013.

35% following very closely, with high levels of interest across party lines. However, the partisan gap in interest in allegations against Clinton increased during impeachment proceedings later that year.

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted May 16-19, 2013, among a national sample of 1,002 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (500 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 502 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 249 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source and Universal Survey 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. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

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 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2012 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 among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted 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	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,002	3.7 percentage points
Republicans	247	7.5 percentage points
Democrats	317	6.6 percentage points
Independents	363	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.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
May 16-19, 2013, OMNIBUS
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,002

ASK ALL:

PEW.1 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 16-19, 2013	30	31	20	19	*
May 9-12, 2013	28	30	21	20	1
March 28-31, 2013	30	30	17	22	1
March 7-10, 2013	35	30	16	19	*
January 31-February 3, 2013	33	33	16	16	1
January 17-20, 2013	36	32	15	16	*
January 3-6, 2013	34	32	18	16	1
December 6-9, 2012	38	30	16	14	1
November 8-11, 2012	41	31	15	12	1
November 1-4, 2012	38	30	16	14	1
October 25-28, 2012	44	30	14	11	1
October 18-21, 2012	39	36	12	12	1
October 12-14, 2012	42	28	14	15	1
October 4-7, 2012	40	29	13	17	*
September 27-30, 2012	34	37	13	15	1
September 20-23, 2012	36	32	17	15	*
September 13-16, 2012	38	32	17	12	1
September 7-9, 2012	36	31	17	15	2
August 31-September 3, 2012	33	31	20	16	1
August 23-26, 2012	38	30	15	16	1
August 16-19, 2012	33	32	16	19	*
August 9-12, 2012	30	31	20	18	1
August 2-5, 2012	33	29	20	17	1
July 26-29, 2012	32	30	20	19	*
July 19-22, 2012	39	29	16	16	*
July 12-15, 2012	32	33	18	17	1
July 5-8, 2012	34	28	18	19	1
June 28-July 1, 2012	38	28	15	18	1
June 21-24, 2012	33	32	17	17	*
June 14-17, 2012	39	28	15	17	*
June 7-10, 2012	35	32	15	18	*
May 31-June 3, 2012	37	34	13	14	1
May 24-27, 2012	33	31	19	16	1
May 17-20, 2012	35	30	16	19	*
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

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
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	*
SEE TREND FOR PREVIOUS YEARS: http://www.people-press.org/files/2013/01/NII-Economy-trend.pdf					
b. Investigations into last fall's attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya					
May 16-19, 2013	25	21	24	29	1
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
May 9-12, 2013: <i>Congressional hearings about the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya</i>	23	21	24	32	1
January 24-27, 2013: <i>Hillary Clinton testifying about the attack on the U.S. embassy in Benghazi, Libya</i>	21	25	21	31	1
November 15-18, 2012: <i>Investigations into the September attack on the U.S. embassy in Benghazi, Libya</i>	28	26	21	24	2
October 18-21, 2012: <i>Investigations into last month's attack on the U.S. embassy in Libya</i>	31	30	19	20	1
October 12-14, 2012	28	28	19	23	1
October 4-7, 2012: <i>Investigations into the attack on the U.S. embassy in Libya earlier this month</i>	27	24	20	28	1
September 13-16, 2012: <i>Attacks on American embassies and consulates in the Middle East and the killing of the U.S. ambassador in Libya</i>	43	24	15	17	1
c. The Justice Department subpoenaing phone records of journalists working for the Associated Press, as part of an investigation into the disclosure of classified information involving a national security case					
May 16-19, 2013	16	19	26	37	1
d. Reports that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) targeted conservative groups, such as the Tea Party, for extra scrutiny					
May 16-19, 2013	26	24	22	28	1

RANDOMIZE PEW.2 AND PEW.3**ASK ALL:**

PEW.2 Do you approve or disapprove of the Justice Department's decision to subpoena the phone records of Associated Press journalists as part of an investigation into the disclosure of classified information?¹

May 16-19

2013

36	Approve
44	Disapprove
20	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

RANDOMIZE PEW.2 AND PEW.3**ASK ALL:**

PEW.3 Do you think the targeting of conservative groups by the Internal Revenue Service was a decision made by employees at the IRS or do you think the Obama administration was also involved?

May 16-19

2013

31	IRS employees
42	Obama administration also involved
27	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

¹ The original version of the topline mistakenly listed the question wording as "... the Justice Department obtaining the phone records ..." This mistake was corrected May 22, 2013.