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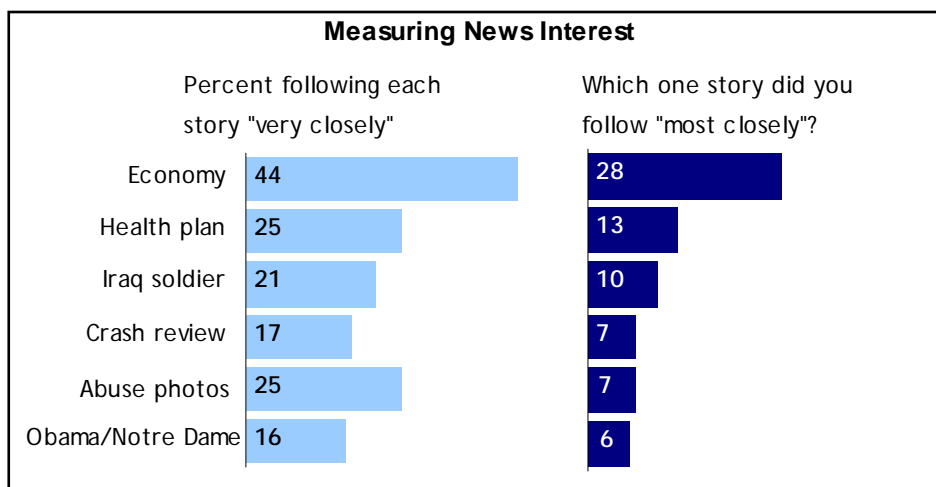
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## Widespread Awareness of Dealership Closings **PUBLIC STAYS FOCUSED ON THE ECONOMY**

Americans followed reports about the U.S. economy more closely than other major stories last week as President Obama pushed for new restrictions on the credit card industry and automakers announced plans to cut ties with some 1,900 dealerships nationwide.

More than four-in-ten (44%) say they followed economic news very closely, according to the latest weekly News Interest Index survey, conducted May 15-18 by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. For close to three-in-ten (28%), this was the story they followed more closely than any other.

Meanwhile, two-thirds of the public (67%) say they heard a lot about the plans announced by General Motors and Chrysler to each close hundreds of dealerships in their bids to become more efficient and profitable. The closings will hit communities across the country, many already hurting because of the lengthy recession.



## Car Dealership Closings Widely Heard About

The large majority that had heard a lot about the dealership closings exceeds or rivals the shares that had heard a lot about several of the top news events of the economic crisis – including the first loans to the troubled AIG insurance company by the Federal Reserve Bank (64%) last September and the bankruptcy filing by Lehman Brothers (59%), also last September. In March, when GM reported losses of \$30 billion for 2008, 44% said they had heard a lot about the story.

Perhaps because of its local impact, the news about the dealership closings is widely known across demographic groups, including gender, age and education. There is little difference among partisans as well, with 72% of Republicans saying they had heard a lot about the closings and 66% of Democrats saying the same.

	A <u>Lot</u> %	A <u>little</u> %	Nothing <u>at all</u> %	DK %
<i>How much have you heard about...</i>				
GM and Chrysler to close dealerships	67	27	6	*=100
Pelosi's knowledge of waterboarding	38	34	28	*=100
Astronauts repair Hubble telescope	35	45	20	*=100
Iran releases U.S. journalist	34	39	26	*=100
Cheney's criticisms Of Obama	32	37	30	*=100

Many more say they had heard about the dealerships' troubles last week than had heard a lot about the controversy over when House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was told about waterboarding and other harsh interrogation techniques used by the U.S. government since the Sept. 11 attacks (38% heard a lot).

About a third each had heard a lot about Iran releasing a U.S. journalist who had been convicted of spying (34%) and the mission by U.S. astronauts to repair the Hubble Space Telescope (34%). And a similar sized share (32%) says they heard a lot about former Vice President Dick Cheney's criticisms of Barack Obama's terrorism policies.

Republicans were significantly more likely to say they heard a lot about Pelosi's problems than Cheney's comments (47% vs. 32%), while the balance was switched among Democrats. Close to four-in-ten (39%) heard a lot about Cheney's words, while 31% had heard a lot about the Pelosi developments.

According to the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, stories about terrorism and how to deal with it proved to be the top storyline last week, accounting for 22% of the newshole. In that total, PEJ included reporting on both the Pelosi and Cheney stories, as well as Obama's decision to oppose the release of photographs of prisoner abuse in Iraq and Afghanistan, a high profile change in course for the president.

## The Week's Top Stories

One quarter of the public (25%) says they followed Obama's decision about the photographs very closely, while that was the story followed most closely by 7%. An equal share (25%) say they very closely tracked debate about an overhaul of the nation's health care system, as Obama met with industry leaders in Washington.

For 13%, this was the story they followed most closely last week, making it the second most closely followed. According to PEJ, the health care debate took up 6% of the newshole.

Slightly smaller shares closely followed stories about the U.S. soldier in Iraq who killed five fellow soldiers. About two-in-ten (21%) say they followed this story very closely, while 10% say this was the story they followed most closely.

Details of the investigation into the February plane crash near Buffalo, N.Y., were followed very closely by 17%. Fewer than one-in-ten (7%) say this was the story they followed more closely than the others.

Though President Obama's invitation to speak at Notre Dame's graduation – and the school's granting him an honorary degree – generated great controversy among opponents of abortion, just 16% of Americans say they followed the story very closely; 6% say this was the story they followed most closely.

## American Idol Interest Holds

As the eighth season of American Idol draws to a close, nearly one-in-five (18%) Americans say they are following the Fox singing competition very closely or fairly closely. That is comparable to the 19% that said the same in 2008 or the 22% in 2007.

Idol continues to attract more women than men with 22% of women following the show very or fairly closely, compared with 13% of men. And younger women – between ages 18 and 49 – are most likely to say they follow the show very or fairly closely (26%).

There are only slight differences among age groups. Those 65 and up are least likely to follow the show fairly or very closely (13%), compared with 20% of those 40 to 64 and 18% of those 18 to 39.

The Idol Audience			
	Following Idol very/fairly closely		
	May 2007	May 2008	May 2009
	%	%	%
Total	22	19	18
Men	17	16	13
Women	26	21	22
<i>Age</i>			
18-39	25	21	18
40-64	20	19	20
65+	17	14	13
<i>Sex/Age</i>			
Men 18-49	17	18	13
Men 50+	18	14	16
Women 18-49	30	21	26
Women 50+	20	21	17
Parents*	30	23	19
Non-parents	18	16	17

\* Refers to parents with children younger than 18 living in their household.

Meanwhile, there is no real difference in interest among adults who are parents (19% very/fairly closely) and those who are not (17%). That is a change from two years ago, when 30% of parents said they were following very or fairly closely, compared with 18% of non-parents.

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 from May 11-17, 2009 and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected May 15-18 from a nationally representative sample of 1,004 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. The News Interest Index survey collects 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 seven 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**  
**MAY 15-18, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY**  
**TOPLINE<sup>1</sup>**  
**N=1004**

Q.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>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
a. Debate over Barack Obama’s health care plans <b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b> March 6-9, 2009: Barack Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling the U.S. health care system	25	30	20	24	*
	41	32	13	14	*
b. A U.S. soldier in Iraq who killed five fellow soldiers	21	31	22	25	1
c. The investigation into a February plane crash in Buffalo, New York <b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b> February 13-16, 2009: A plane crashing into a house near Buffalo, New York, killing 50 people	17	26	25	33	*
	32	39	16	13	*
d. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy	44	35	12	8	*
May 8-11, 2009	42	34	12	12	*
May 1-4, 2009	47	36	11	5	1
April 17-20, 2009	52	30	10	7	1
April 9-13, 2009	48	29	13	10	0
March 27-30, 2009	48	32	10	10	*
March 20-23, 2009	52	34	8	6	*
March 13-16, 2009	48	33	9	10	*
February 27-March 2, 2009	56	30	8	6	*
February 13-16, 2009	55	29	10	6	*
January 30-February 2, 2009	52	31	12	5	*
January 23-26, 2009	57	30	8	5	0
January 16-19, 2009	43	35	13	9	*
January 2-4, 2009	42	36	15	7	*
December 12-15, 2008	51	33	9	7	*
December 5-8, 2008	42	38	13	7	*
November 21-24, 2008	59	24	9	8	*
November 14-17, 2008	56	29	9	6	*
November 7-10, 2008	54	31	8	7	*
October 31-November 3, 2008	63	27	6	4	*
October 24-27, 2008	52	35	7	5	1
October 17-20, 2008	62	29	6	3	*
October 10-13, 2008	65	25	7	3	*
October 3-6, 2008	69	23	5	3	*
September 26-29, 2008	70	22	5	3	*

<sup>1</sup> Prior to January, 2007 results are from monthly surveys. Beginning in January, 2007 the News Interest Index study has been conducted weekly.

**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>
September 19-22, 2008	56	27	12	5	*
September 5-8, 2008	44	33	16	7	*
August 29-31, 2008	41	34	13	11	1
August 15-18, 2008	39	36	15	10	*
August 8-11, 2008	39	35	16	10	*
August 1-4, 2008	47	34	11	8	0
July 25-28, 2008	46	32	10	12	*
July 18-21, 2008	45	33	13	9	*
July 11-14, 2008	44	33	12	10	1
June 27-30, 2008	49	31	12	7	1
June 13-16, 2008	42	33	14	11	*
May 9-12, 2008	45	31	13	11	*
May 2-5, 2008	43	31	15	10	1
April 18-21, 2008	41	35	13	10	1
April 4-7, 2008	39	37	12	12	*
March 28-31, 2008	42	36	14	8	*
March 20-24, 2008	45	33	13	9	*
February 29-March 3, 2008	38	35	15	11	1
February 15-18, 2008	37	36	11	16	8
February 1-4, 2008	40	37	14	8	1
January 18-21, 2008	42	31	16	11	*
January 11-14, 2008	36	32	15	16	1
November 2-5, 2007	27	37	16	19	1
October 19-22, 2007	25	34	20	21	*
August 10-13, 2007	28	36	18	18	*
Mid-November, 2006	31	40	17	11	1
December, 2005	35	35	18	11	1
Early November, 2005	35	39	17	9	*
Mid-May, 2005	30	39	19	11	1
January, 2005	35	41	17	7	*
Mid-October, 2004	30	43	16	10	1
Early September, 2004	39	34	15	11	1
Mid-January, 2004	37	41	15	7	*
December, 2003	35	38	14	11	2
November, 2003	40	34	15	10	1
October, 2003	32	39	16	12	1
September, 2003	39	30	18	12	1
March, 2003	40	35	16	8	1
February, 2003	42	33	15	10	*
January, 2003	40	35	13	11	1
December, 2002	38	34	17	10	1
February, 2002	35	40	15	9	1
January, 2002	30	44	16	9	1
December, 2001	37	40	13	8	2
Mid-November, 2001	41	36	15	7	1
June, 2001	24	41	18	16	1
May, 2001	34	36	15	15	0
April, 2001	36	34	16	13	1
February, 2001	30	39	18	12	1
January, 2001	32	38	17	11	2
June, 1995	26	41	22	11	*
March, 1995	27	45	19	9	*
February, 1995	23	41	22	13	1

**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>
December, 1994	28	43	20	9	*
October, 1994	27	40	20	12	1
June, 1994	25	42	23	10	*
May, 1994	33	40	16	10	1
January, 1994	34	39	16	10	1
Early January, 1994	36	44	13	7	*
December, 1993	35	41	15	8	1
October, 1993	33	38	20	9	*
September, 1993	37	40	14	8	1
Early September, 1993	39	39	14	9	*
August, 1993	41	36	14	9	*
May, 1993	37	38	18	6	1
February, 1993	49	36	10	5	*
January, 1993	42	39	12	7	*
September, 1992	43	37	13	6	1
May, 1992	39	39	15	6	1
March, 1992	47	38	11	4	*
February, 1992	47	37	10	6	*
January, 1992	44	40	11	5	*
October, 1991	36	38	16	9	1
e. Controversy over Barack Obama speaking at Notre Dame's commencement ceremony	16	24	22	37	1
f. Barack Obama's decision to block the release of photos showing abuse of detainees in Iraq and Afghanistan	25	30	21	24	1

**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.]**

28	Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
13	Debate over Barack Obama's health care plans
10	A U.S. soldier in Iraq who killed five fellow soldiers
7	The investigation into a February plane crash in Buffalo, New York
7	Barack Obama's decision to block the release of photos showing abuse of detainees in Iraq and Afghanistan
6	Controversy over Barack Obama speaking at Notre Dame's commencement ceremony
12	Some other story
16	Don't know/Refused

Now thinking about some other things...

**Q.3** How closely have you been following what's happening on American Idol? **[READ]**

		<u>May 9-12, 2008</u>	<u>May 11-14, 2007</u>
9	Very closely	12	13
9	Fairly closely	7	9
11	Not too closely	12	11
71	Not at all closely	69	66
*	Don't know/Refused <b>[VOL. DO NOT READ]</b>	*	1



Q.4 Still thinking about American Idol, how often, if ever, would you say the show comes up in your conversations with family, friends or co-workers? **[READ]**

		May 11-14, <u>2007</u>
9	Frequently	9
18	Occasionally	20
27	Hardly ever	31
47	Never	39
*	Don't know/Refused <b>[VOL. DO NOT READ]</b>	1

Q.5 How much if anything, have you heard about each of the following? Have you heard a lot, a little or nothing at all? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

		<u>A lot</u>	<u>A little</u>	<u>Nothing at all</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>
a.	Iran releasing a U.S. journalism from prison who was convicted of spying	34	39	26	*
	<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b>				
	April 23-27, 2009: Three American journalists prosecuted in North Korea and Iran	13	46	41	*
b.	A mission by astronauts to repair the Hubble Space Telescope	35	45	20	*
c.	Dick Cheney's criticisms of Barack Obama's terrorism policies	32	37	30	*
	<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b>				
	February 27-March 2, 2009: The criticism of Barack Obama's housing plan by a CNBC correspondent	21	33	46	*
d.	The controversy about when Nancy Pelosi knew about waterboarding and other harsh interrogation techniques	38	34	28	*
e.	GM and Chrysler announcing plans to close many dealerships around the country	67	27	6	*
	<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b>				
	February 22-March 2, 2009: General Motors posting \$30 billion in losses for 2008	44	40	16	*
	October 10-13, 2008: General Motors stock falling to its lowest level in 58 years	48	38	14	*
	October 3-6, 2008: Major U.S. automakers announcing steep drops in auto sales	32	52	16	*
	July 3-7, 2008: Ford and General Motors announcing steep drops in auto sales	34	44	22	*