



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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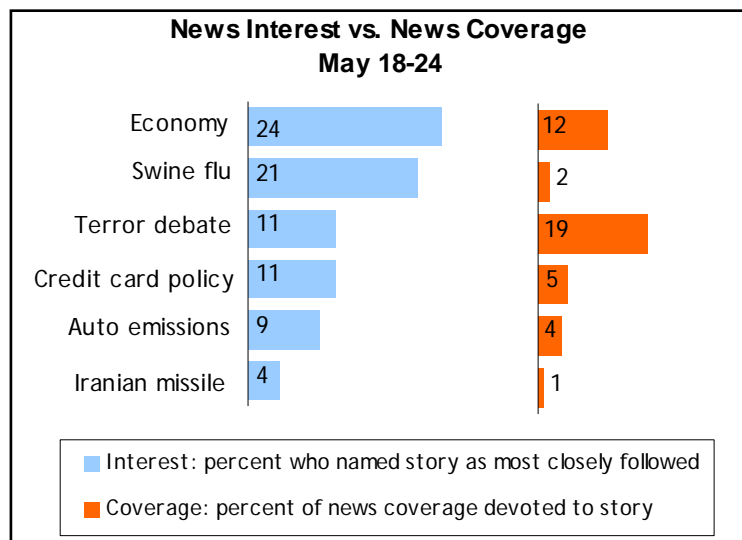
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Interest in Swine Flu Remains Strong

PUBLIC TRACKS ECONOMY, MEDIA FOCUSES ON TERROR DEBATE

Americans continued to closely track news about the struggling economy and the spread of the swine flu last week, though the media devoted the largest share of coverage to the sharp debate in Washington over how best to protect the nation from terrorism.

About a quarter of the public (24%) says they followed reports about the condition of the economy more closely than other top stories last week, while 21% followed news about the swine flu most closely. According to the latest weekly News Interest Index survey, conducted May 21-24 by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, about one-in-ten (11%) say they followed the debate about how to defend the nation from terror most closely.



A separate content analysis by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism shows that the media devoted 19% of the newshole to terrorism stories last week, making it the most covered story of the week. Much of that was tied to the dueling speeches on May 21 by President Obama and former Vice President Cheney that highlighted different approaches to thwarting terror and dealing with suspected terrorists in U.S. custody.

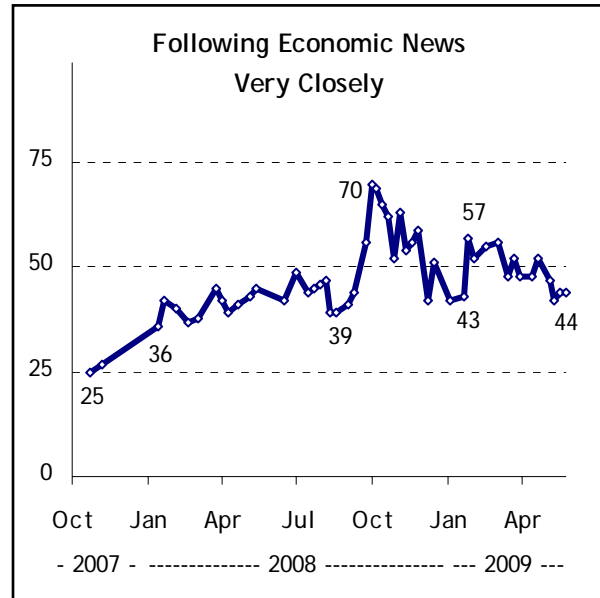
More than four-in-ten Americans (44%) say they followed reports about the U.S. economy very closely last week, which is little changed from recent weeks. News organizations, meanwhile, devoted 12% of the newshole to the economic crisis, as measured by PEJ. That

figure does not include 5% of coverage devoted to new credit card regulations enacted into law last week in Washington. Interest in that story was measured separately in this survey.

Sustained Interest in Economic News

Public attention to economic news peaked as the financial crisis deepened last fall. In the last week of September, 70% said they were following economic news very closely – the highest ever in a Pew Research survey. Since then, interest has fluctuated depending on events; this year, interest peaked at 57% in late January.

There also are no signs that the public is hearing too much about government efforts to help the economy. Just 19% say they are hearing too much about what the government is doing to help the economy; 49% say they are hearing the right amount, while 31% say they are hearing too little about this.



Meanwhile, three-in-ten say they are very closely following reports about the swine flu in the U.S. and elsewhere. That is down from the first week of May, when 43% said they were following the story very closely and experts were voicing greater public concern about how quickly the virus would spread and its potential lethality. As April turned to May, swine flu dominated media coverage as well, but last week, the virus that continues to cause trouble in places such as New York City accounted for only 2% of the newshole.

Despite the great media attention to the debate over tactics in the fight against terror, about one quarter (23%) of the public say they followed the debate very closely last week. Another 25% say they did not follow it at all closely.

In other top stories, 26% say they very closely followed reports about Congress enacting new credit card regulations intended to help consumers. For 11%, this was the story they followed most closely. That is the same share that says they followed the terrorism debate at that level. Stories about the credit card overhaul, signed by President Obama on May 22, made up 5% of the newshole examined by PEJ.

A quarter says they followed news about Obama’s proposal requiring better fuel efficiency for American automobiles very closely. Just under one-in-ten (9%) say this was the news they followed most closely. The story accounted for 4% of coverage.

One-in-five say they very closely followed stories about Iran’s testing of a missile that could reach Israel. That was the story followed most closely for 4%. The news made up 1% of the newshole.

Too Much Coverage of Swine Flu?

While many Americans say they continue to follow news about the spread of swine flu very closely, a significant share (45%) says they have been hearing too much about the illness. Still, a comparable percentage (44%) says they are hearing the right amount. Only 11% say they are hearing too little.

<i>How much are you hearing about...</i>	Too much	Too little	Right amount
	%	%	%
Steroid use in baseball	53	15	28
The swine flu	45	11	44
Problems with U.S. auto industry	39	18	42
America’s policies about torture	34	26	38
Gov’t plans for the economy	19	31	49
Political instability in Pakistan	17	43	37

Figures read across.

About a third (34%) say they have been hearing too much about the debate over America’s policies about torture. Still, close to four-in-ten (38%) say they have been hearing the right amount about this debate and about a quarter (26%) say they have been hearing too little about this.

About four-in-ten (43%) say they have been hearing too little about political instability in Pakistan, a critical factor in the fight against terror. More than a third (37%) says coverage has been about the right amount on this subject, while just 17% say there has been too much coverage.

Meanwhile, more than half (53%) say they have been hearing too much about steroids in baseball in the aftermath of the suspension of Dodger’s slugger Manny Ramirez for using a substance prohibited by major league baseball. Close to three-in-ten (28%) say they have heard about the right amount, while 15% say they have heard too little.

About four-in-ten (39%) say they have been hearing too much about the problems facing the U.S. automobile industry, though the survey was taken before General Motors moved closer to a bankruptcy filing this week. A comparable share (42%) say the coverage has been about right, while 18% say there has been too little.

Majority Says Economic Policies on Right Track

More than half of the public (53%) says the government is on the right track in the way it is handling the economic problems facing the nation, while almost four-in-ten (39%) say it is on the wrong track. That is little changed from last March, when 50% said the government was on the right track and 39% said it was on the wrong track. Still, the share saying the government is on the right track is up significantly since just before Obama took office. In mid-January, close to half (48%) said the government was on the wrong track, while 31% said it was on the right track.

Not surprisingly, the current numbers show a deep partisan divide. More than eight-in-ten (84%) Democrats say the government is on the right track in the way it is handling the economy, while only 10% say it is on the wrong track. Seven-in-ten Republicans (70%) say the government is on the wrong track, while 24% say it is on the right track. Independents are divided with 49% saying the government is on the right track and 41% saying it is on the wrong track.

Boy Who Fled Cancer Treatment Widely Known

More than seven-in-ten Americans (71%) heard a lot or a little (33% and 38% respectively) about the mother and son who fled Minnesota in defiance of a court order requiring the family to give the cancer-stricken 13-year-old chemotherapy. The pair returned to the state this week.

More people had heard about that story than the arrests of four men in New York on charges they plotted to bomb two synagogues and attack military aircraft. Two thirds of the public heard either a lot (29%) or a little (37%) about this news. One third says they had heard nothing at all.

Fewer had heard news about a fossil that researchers believe sheds light on the links between humans and early primates. Close to half (48%) say they heard nothing about this story, while 18% say they heard a lot and 34% say they heard a little.

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 18-24, 2009 and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected May 21-24 from a nationally representative sample of 1,000 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.

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 21-24, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
TOPLINE
N=1000

Q.1 In the past few weeks, have you come to have a MORE favorable opinion of Barack Obama, a LESS favorable opinion of Barack Obama, or hasn't your opinion of him changed lately?

	<u>More favorable</u>	<u>Less favorable</u>	<u>Opinion has not changed</u>	<u>Don't know/Refused</u>
Barack Obama				
May 21-24, 2009	18	21	60	1
April 9-13, 2009	20	18	60	2
March 20-23, 2009	22	19	56	3
February 27-March 2, 2009	23	20	56	1
February 6-9, 2009	23	16	60	1

2008 CAMPAIGN

TREND FOR COMPARISON:¹

October 31-November 3, 2008	25	25	49	1
October 24-27, 2008	24	21	52	3
October 17-20, 2008	33	23	43	1
October 10-13, 2008	29	21	48	2
October 3-6, 2008	28	23	47	2
September 26-29, 2008	31	23	45	1
September 19-22, 2008	25	20	53	2
September 12-15, 2008	20	20	58	2
September 5-8, 2008	20	20	59	1
August 29-31, 2008	29	19	50	2
August 22-25, 2008	22	21	54	3
August 15-18, 2008	16	21	60	3
August 8-11, 2008	15	18	64	3
August 1-4, 2008	16	22	60	2
July 25-28, 2008	17	21	59	3
July 18-21, 2008	16	22	60	2
July 11-14, 2008	15	17	64	4
July 3-7, 2008	17	17	62	4
June 27-30, 2008	21	19	56	4
June 20-23, 2008	16	16	66	2
June 13-16, 2008	17	15	64	4
June 6-9, 2008	19	17	61	3
May 30-June 2, 2008	17	21	58	4
May 22-25, 2008	18	20	60	2
May 16-19, 2008	19	19	59	3
May 9-12, 2008	20	23	55	2
May 2-5, 2008	11	25	59	5
April 25-28, 2008	16	24	58	2
April 18-21, 2008	18	24	54	4
March 28-31, 2008	18	27	52	3
March 20-24, 2008	22	30	46	2

¹ For March 20-24, 2008, through October 31-November 3, 2008, the introduction read, "In the past few days." For September 12-15 through October 31-November 3, 2008, the question asked respondents to "Please think about each of the following candidates," Barack Obama, John McCain, Joe Biden and Sarah Palin in the 2008 presidential and vice presidential elections. For June 13-16, 2008, through September 5-8, 2008, the question was worded, "Please think about each of the following *presidential* candidates..." and asked about Barack Obama and John McCain. For March 20-24, 2008, through June 6-9, 2008, the list of presidential candidates included Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John McCain.

Q.2 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?”]

	Very closely	Fairly closely	Not too closely	Not at all closely	DK/Refused
a. New federal regulations on the credit card industry	26	31	22	21	*
b. Barack Obama’s proposal requiring better fuel efficiency for automobiles	25	35	23	18	*
c. The debate over how America can best defend against terrorism	23	29	23	25	1
TREND FOR COMPARISON:²					
January 23-26, 2009: <i>Obama’s order to close the Guantanamo Bay military prison</i>	33	36	18	13	*
June 13-16, 2008: <i>Supreme Court ruling that foreign terror suspects at Guantanamo have the right to challenge their confinement</i>	21	23	24	32	*
d. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy	44	35	13	9	*
May 15-18, 2009	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	*
September 19-22, 2008	56	27	12	5	*
September 5-8, 2008	44	33	16	7	*

² The wording of the item for January 23-26, 2009, was: “President Obama’s order to close the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.” The wording of the item for June 13-16, 2008, was: “The U.S. Supreme Court ruling that foreign terror suspects held at Guantanamo Bay have the right to challenge their confinement.”

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>
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
December, 1994	28	43	20	9	*
October, 1994	27	40	20	12	1

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>
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. Iran testing a missile that could reach Israel	20	29	25	26	*
July 11-14, 2008: The Iranian government firing test missiles capable of striking Israel	25	29	22	23	1
TREND FOR COMPARISON:³					
January 11-14, 2008: <i>Encounter between U.S. and Iranian ships</i>	25	26	21	27	1
December 7-10, 2007: <i>Intelligence report on Iran's nuclear weapons program</i>	25	31	20	23	1
October 26-29, 2007: <i>Mounting tensions</i>	26	34	21	18	1
September 28 – October 1, 2007: <i>Ahmadinejad visit to U.S.</i>	23	31	20	25	1
June 1-4, 2007: <i>US-Iranian talks</i>	19	27	27	26	1
February 23-26, 2007: <i>Mounting tensions</i>	29	37	18	15	1
February 16-19, 2007: <i>Iran supplying weapons to Iraqi insurgents</i>	28	32	20	19	1
February 2-5, 2007: <i>Mounting tensions</i>	33	38	18	10	1
f. Reports about swine flu in the U.S. and elsewhere	30	39	21	11	*
May 8-11, 2009	34	36	19	11	*
May 1-4, 2009: <i>Swine flu</i> ⁴	43	37	15	4	1
April 25-27, 2009	25	30	19	26	*

³ January 11-14, 2008 asked about: "News about a naval encounter between U.S. and Iranian ships." December 7-10, 2007 asked about: "A new intelligence report stating that Iran stopped its nuclear weapons program in 2003." October 26-29, 2007, February 23-26, 2007 and February 2-5, 2007 asked about: "Mounting tensions between the United States and Iran." September 28-October 1, 2007 asked about: "Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's recent trip to New York City where he spoke at Columbia University and the United Nations." June 1-4, 2007 asked about: "Recent talks between the United States and Iran." February 16-19, 2007 asked about: "Reports that Iran may be supplying weapons to insurgents in Iraq."

⁴ For May 1-4, 2009 the story was listed as: "The outbreak of swine flu in different parts of the world." For April 25-27, 2009 the story was listed as: "Reports of swine flu in Mexico and the U.S."

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>
TREND FOR COMPARISON:⁵					
October 19-22, 2007: <i>Drug-resistant staph infection in the U.S.</i>	26	31	19	24	0
June 1-4, 2007: <i>Atlanta man traveling with dangerous form of Tuberculosis</i>	24	34	21	19	2
March, 2006: <i>Outbreaks of bird flu</i>	21	36	24	19	*
November, 2005: <i>Bird flu</i>	22	37	25	15	1
Late October, 2005: <i>Bird flu</i>	22	33	24	20	1
January 2004: <i>Mad cow disease in Washington State</i>	29	42	19	9	1
June 2003: <i>The lung disease called "SARS" that has spread from Asia</i>	28	44	19	8	1
May 2003: <i>SARS</i>	39	39	15	6	1
September, 2002: <i>Cases of West Nile virus</i>	34	36	21	8	1
Early September, 2001: <i>Mad cow disease in Europe</i>	18	34	27	20	1
March, 2001: <i>Foot-and-mouth disease</i>	22	33	22	22	1
January, 1998: <i>Bird flu</i>	19	36	25	20	*

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.**]

- 24 Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
- 21 Reports about swine flu in the U.S. and elsewhere
- 11 The debate over how America can best defend against terrorism
- 11 New federal regulations on the credit card industry
- 9 Barack Obama's proposal requiring better fuel efficiency for automobiles
- 4 Iran testing a missile that could reach Israel
- 11 Some other story (**SPECIFY**)
- 9 Don't know/Refused

On another topic...

Q.4 All in all, do you think the government is on the right track or the wrong track in the way it is handling economic problems facing the nation?

	<u>Mar 27-30,</u> <u>2009</u>	<u>Feb 20-23,</u> <u>2009</u>	<u>Jan 16-19,</u> <u>2009</u>
53 Right track	50	47	31
39 Wrong track	39	34	48
8 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	11	19	21

⁵ October 19-22, 2007 asked about: "The growing danger of a drug-resistant staph infection in the U.S." June 1-4, 2007 asked about: "An Atlanta man with a dangerous form of tuberculosis who traveled to Europe against the advice of government health officials." March, 2006 asked about: "Outbreaks of bird flu in different parts of the world." Late October and November, 2005 asked about: "The outbreak of bird flu in Asia and Europe." January, 2004 asked about: "Reports about a case of mad cow disease in Washington state." May and June, 2003 asked about: "The lung disease called "SARS" that has spread from Asia." September, 2002 asked about: "Cases of West Nile Virus spread by mosquitoes." Early September, 2001 asked about: "The spread of mad cow disease in Europe." March, 2001 asked about: "The outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease among livestock in Europe." January, 1998 asked about: "The outbreak of an Asian flu spread by birds or chickens."

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. A fossil that researchers believe links humans with early primates	18	34	48	1
b. A mother who fled with her cancer-stricken son to avoid court-ordered treatment	33	38	28	*
c. The arrest of four men accused of plotting to bomb New York synagogues and attack military aircraft	29	37	33	*

Q.6 Thinking about some topics that have been in the news recently... Please tell me whether you are hearing too much, too little or the right amount about each of the following **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

	<u>Too much</u>	<u>Too little</u>	<u>Right amount</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
a. America's policies about torture	34	26	38	2
b. Steroid use in baseball	53	15	28	4
c. The swine flu	45	11	44	1
d. Political instability in Pakistan	17	43	37	3
November 16-19, 2007 ⁶	12	30	51	7
e. Problems with the U.S. auto industry	39	18	42	1
f. Government plans for dealing with the economy	19	31	49	1

⁶ For November 16-19, 2007, the introduction to this item read: "Do you think news organizations are giving too much coverage, too little coverage, or the right amount of coverage to...".