



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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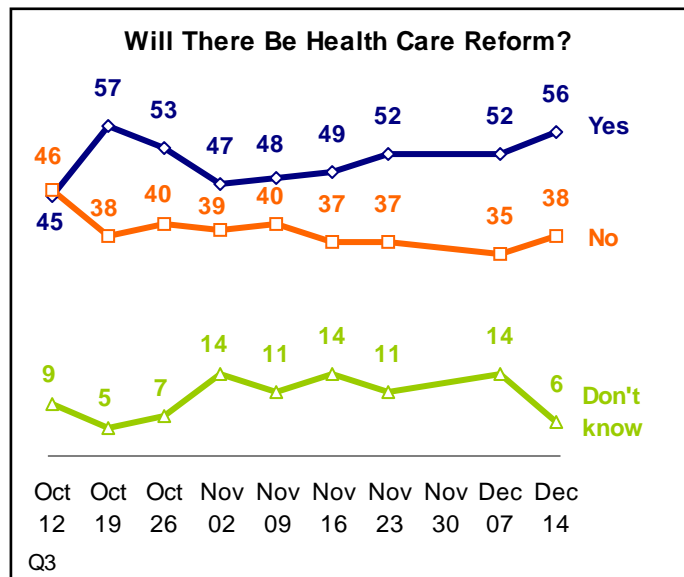
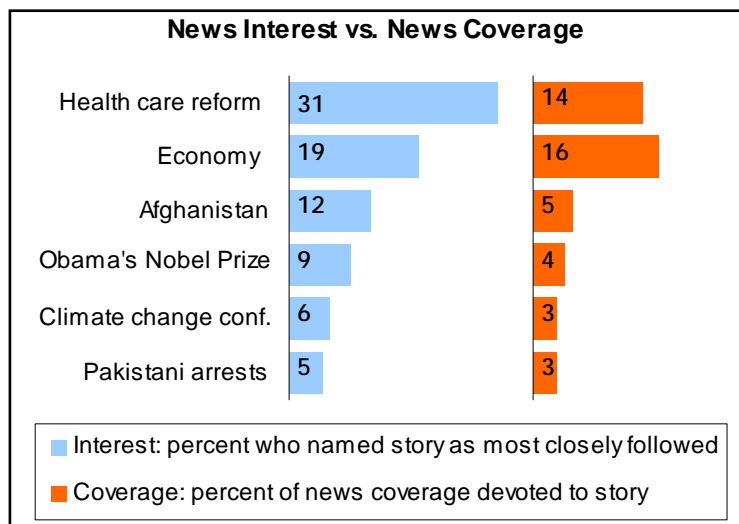
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
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Most Still Say Reform Issues Hard to Understand
PUBLIC CLOSELY TRACKING HEALTH CARE DEBATE

Americans followed the health care debate more closely than any other news story last week as Senate Democrats struggled to find a compromise that would allow them to move legislation through their chamber despite strong Republican opposition.

About three-in-ten (31%) say the health care debate was the story they followed most closely, while 19% say they followed reports about the U.S. economy more closely than any other story. More than four-in-ten (42% each) say they followed news about these topics *very closely*, according to the Pew Research Center's latest weekly News Interest Index, conducted Dec. 11-14 among 1,024 adults.

The percentage of the public that thinks that Congress will pass health care legislation within the next year stands at 56%, effectively matching the 57% recorded in mid-October just after the Senate Finance Committee approved its version of the measure. The current level is not up significantly from 52% the previous week, but the number has been

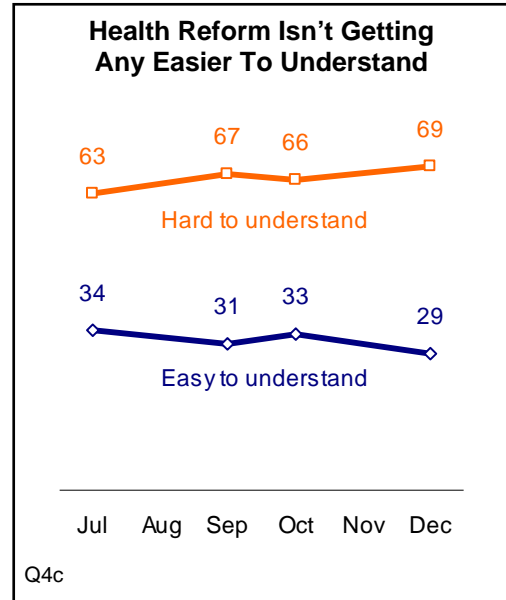


trending higher since early November, when it was 47%. Close to four-in-ten (38%) say they do not think health care legislation will pass, a level not much changed in recent weeks. As they have in recent weeks, a greater percentage of Democrats (64%) than Republicans (48%) or independents (55%) says they expect legislation to pass.

The economy and the health care debate also were the week's top stories in terms of coverage. According to a separate analysis by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, stories about the economic crisis made up 16% of the newshole, while stories about the health care debate made up 14%.

Debate Remains Hard to Understand

Despite consistently high interest and the large percentage of Americans who say the issue affects them personally, the public continues to find the health care debate difficult to grasp. About seven-in-ten (69%) say health care reform is hard to understand, not much different from the 66% that said the same in early October. In the current survey, 29% say the issue is easy to understand, compared with 33% in the Oct. 2-5 survey.



Three-quarters of Republicans and 73% of independents say the debate is hard to understand, compared with 60% of Democrats.

More than nine-in-ten (93%) say the issue is important, while 6% say it is not. The answers on this question have changed little since it was first asked in mid-July. At that point, 95% said it was important and 4% said it was not.

Eight-in-ten say the issue affects them personally, up slightly from the 74% that said the same in October, but almost the same as the 78% that agreed in mid-July. Two-in-

	July 17-20 2009 %	Sept 3-6 2009 %	Oct 2-5 2009 %	Dec 11-14 2009 %
Interesting	72	72	71	70
Boring	25	26	26	27
Don't know	3	2	2	2
	100	100	100	100
Affects you personally	78	73	74	80
Does not	21	26	24	19
Don't know	1	1	2	1
	100	100	100	100
Easy to understand	34	31	33	29
Hard to understand	63	67	66	69
Don't know	3	2	1	2
	100	100	100	100
Important	95	93	94	93
Unimportant	4	6	6	6
Don't know	1	*	*	1
	100	100	100	100

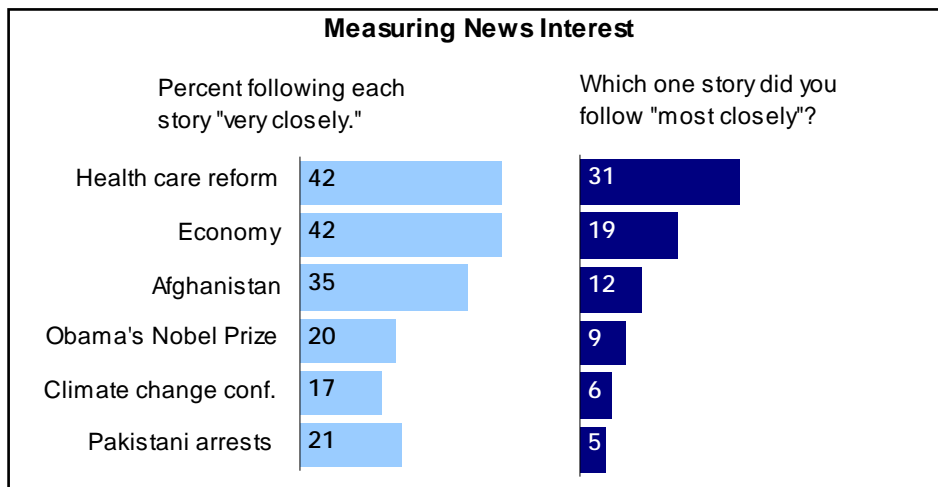
Q.4a-d. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

ten (19%) say it does not affect them personally, down slightly from 24% in October.

Seven-in-ten say the issue is interesting, while 27% say it is boring. Those figures have changed little since the question was first asked in mid-July.

The Week's Top Stories

After the health care debate and the economy, the public continued to closely follow news about the war in Afghanistan. More than a third (35%) say they followed news about Afghanistan very closely; 12% say this was the news they followed most closely. According to PEJ, the media allocated 5% of newshole to Afghanistan, a significant drop from one week earlier as Obama announced his new war strategy. That week, the war took up 27% of the newshole.



Two-in-ten say they very closely followed the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Obama in Oslo, while 9% say this was the story they followed most closely. Obama's trip and speech at the award ceremony received 4% of the coverage as measured by PEJ. Democrats were much more likely than Republicans or independents to have followed this story closely. About three-in-ten Democrats (31%) say they followed this story very closely, compared with 9% of Republicans and 16% of independents.

A smaller percentage (17%) says they followed the climate change conference in Copenhagen very closely, while 6% say this was the story they followed most closely. Stories about global climate change – including the conference, the controversy over hacked e-mails between climate scientists and actions by the Environmental Protection Agency on greenhouse gases – made up 10% of the newshole. About 3% of that was specifically tied to the international summit in Copenhagen.

About two-in-ten (21%) say they very closely followed reports about the arrests in Pakistan of five Muslim American men with suspected ties to terrorists; 5% say this was their most closely followed story of the week. The story line made up 3% of news coverage.

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 December 7-13, 2009, and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected December 11-14, 2009, from a nationally representative sample of 1,024 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 landline 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 4 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
December 11-14, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1024

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. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy					
December 11-14, 2009	42	31	14	13	*
December 4-7, 2009	41	36	13	9	1
November 13-16, 2009	38	33	14	15	*
October 30-November 2, 2009	34	32	17	16	*
October 23-26, 2009	44	30	15	10	1
October 9-12, 2009	41	29	16	13	*
October 2-5, 2009	44	30	15	11	0
September 25-28, 2009	44	37	10	10	*
September 18-21, 2009	44	34	15	7	*
September 11-14, 2009	45	32	14	9	*
September 3-6, 2009	41	31	15	13	*
August 28-31, 2009	45	30	13	12	1
August 21-24, 2009	50	27	13	10	1
August 14-17, 2009	41	37	11	12	*
August 7-10, 2009	42	34	13	10	*
July 31-August 3, 2009	46	34	11	8	*
July 24-27, 2009	45	35	12	8	*
July 17-20, 2009	43	35	11	11	1
July 10-13, 2009	37	38	13	11	*
July 2-5, 2009	38	35	15	12	*
June 19-22, 2009	42	33	15	10	*
June 12-15, 2009	41	35	12	12	*
June 5-8, 2009	41	34	11	14	*
May 29-June 1, 2009	43	37	11	8	*
May 21-24, 2009	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	*

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>
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	*
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

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>
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
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
b. Debate over health care reform					
December 11-14, 2009	42	30	15	14	*
December 4-7, 2009	42	28	15	14	1
November 20-23, 2009	42	29	14	15	*
November 13-16, 2009	38	26	17	17	1
November 6-9, 2009	35	28	15	22	1
October 30-November 2, 2009	32	26	19	23	*
October 23-26, 2009	40	27	16	17	1
October 16-19, 2009	36	28	15	21	*
October 9-12, 2009	37	29	14	19	1
October 2-5, 2009	39	29	16	16	*
September 25-28, 2009	45	31	12	12	0
September 18-21, 2009	44	26	19	11	*
September 11-14, 2009	44	27	14	15	*
September 3-6, 2009	40	26	16	17	0
August 28-31, 2009	40	28	17	14	1
August 21-24, 2009	49	24	12	15	1
August 14-17, 2009	39	31	15	15	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>
TREND FOR COMPARISON:¹					
<i>August 7-10, 2009: Debate in Washington over health care reform</i>					
August 7-10, 2009	40	27	17	15	1
July 31-August 3, 2009	47	26	14	13	1
July 24-27, 2009	44	28	15	13	*
July 17-20, 2009	33	31	13	21	2
July 10-13, 2009	24	29	20	27	*
June 26-29, 2009	29	26	20	25	1
June 19-22, 2009	28	28	20	23	*
June 12-15, 2009	29	26	18	26	*
May 15-18, 2009	25	30	20	24	*
<i>March 6-9, 2009: Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling health care</i>					
March 6-9, 2009	41	32	13	14	*
<i>September, 1994: The Clinton administration's health care reform proposals</i>					
September, 1994	32	41	18	9	*
June, 1994	34	40	19	7	*
May, 1994	37	37	16	9	1
January, 1994	38	38	15	9	*
Early January, 1994	40	40	14	6	*
December, 1993	45	35	12	7	1
October, 1993	44	32	17	6	1
September, 1993	49	34	11	6	*
<i>August, 1993: Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton</i>					
August, 1993	27	32	25	15	1
June, 1993	28	38	19	15	*
May, 1993	30	30	25	14	1
c. The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan					
December 11-14, 2009	35	33	18	13	*
December 4-7, 2009 ²	43	33	14	8	1
November 20-23, 2009	29	31	17	22	1
November 13-16, 2009	29	28	20	22	1
November 6-9, 2009	22	35	24	18	*
October 30-November 2, 2009	24	32	21	22	*
October 23-26, 2009	32	29	21	18	*
October 16-19, 2009	25	31	20	24	*
October 9-12, 2009	31	31	21	17	0
September 25-28, 2009	27	40	17	16	*
September 18-21, 2009	26	33	25	16	*

¹ June 12-15, 2009 through August 7-10, 2009 asked about: "Debate in Washington over health care reform." May 15-18, 2009 asked about: "Debate over Barack Obama's health care plans." March 6-9, 2009 asked about: "Barack Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling the U.S. health care system." September, 1993 through September, 1994 asked about: "The Clinton Administration's health care reform proposals." May, 1993 through August, 1993 asked about: "Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton."

² December 4-7, 2009 asked about "President Obama's decision to send more U.S. troops to Afghanistan." From November 13-16, 2009, to November 20-23, 2009, the question asked about "The debate over whether to send more troops to Afghanistan." From October 9-12, 2009, through November 6-9, 2009, the question asked about "The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan." September 25-28, 2009 asked about "The debate over whether to send more troops to Afghanistan." February 20-23, 2009 asked about "The Obama administration's decision to send 17,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan." From June 20-23, 2008 to October 10-13, 2008 the story was listed as "The military effort in Afghanistan against Taliban fighters." All other dates asked about "The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan."

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 11-14, 2009	25	35	22	18	1
September 3-6, 2009	23	33	23	21	0
August 7-10, 2009	24	32	23	21	1
March 20-23, 2009	24	32	22	22	*
February 20-23, 2009	27	29	24	19	1
January 30-February 2, 2009	26	34	24	16	*
January 2-4, 2009	22	33	23	21	1
October 24-27, 2008	28	32	22	17	1
October 10-13, 2008	19	34	29	18	*
September 12-15, 2008	21	34	25	19	1
August 29-31, 2008	18	27	32	23	*
July 18-21, 2008	27	33	24	16	*
July 11-14, 2008	19	28	29	23	1
July 3-7, 2008	19	28	32	21	*
June 20-23, 2008	20	30	30	20	*
Late July, 2002	41	38	13	7	1
June, 2002	38	32	20	9	1
April, 2002	39	39	13	8	1
Early April, 2002	45	37	12	5	1
February, 2002	47	39	8	5	1
January, 2002	51	35	9	4	1
December, 2001	44	38	12	5	1
Mid-November, 2001	49	36	11	3	1
Early November, 2001	45	36	12	6	1
Mid-October, 2001	51	35	10	3	1
d. The arrest of five Muslim American men in Pakistan with suspected ties to terrorists					
December 11-14, 2009	21	28	24	27	*
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
September 25-28, 2009: <i>News about recent terrorist plots in the United States</i>	32	38	17	14	0
September 7-10, 2007: <i>German officials stopping a terrorist plot to bomb several locations, including a U.S. military base in Germany</i>	20	27	23	28	2
May 11-14, 2007: <i>The arrest of six men charged with plotting an attack on the Fort Dix Army base</i>	19	29	20	31	1
August 9-13, 2006: <i>British officials stopping a terrorist plot to blow up planes flying to the U.S.</i>	54	26	9	9	2
August 2004: <i>The recent "code orange" alert about the increased risk of a terrorist attack</i>	34	36	18	11	1
Mid-January, 2004	35	38	16	10	1
February, 2003	39	35	16	9	1
Early September, 2002: <i>The Homeland Security office issuing a "code orange" alert about the increased risk of a terrorist attack</i>	39	29	16	15	1
July, 2002: <i>Defending against terrorist attacks in the U.S.</i>	51	33	9	6	1
June, 2002: <i>The arrest of a man for planning a "dirty bomb" terrorist attack on the U.S.</i>	30	30	24	15	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>
June, 2002: <i>Defending against terrorist attacks in the U.S.</i>	45	35	12	7	1
April, 2002	46	36	10	7	1
Early April, 2002	49	35	10	5	1
December, 2001 ³	60	29	7	3	1
Mid-November, 2001	66	25	6	2	1
Early November, 2001	63	26	6	3	2
Mid-October, 2001	78	16	4	1	1
Early October, 2001	73	22	4	1	*
Mid-September, 2001	74	22	3	1	*
January, 2000: <i>The recent arrests of suspected terrorists in the U.S.</i>	23	36	23	17	1
e. President Obama accepting the Nobel Peace Prize December 11-14, 2009	20	26	22	32	*
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
October 9-12, 2009: <i>Barack Obama winning the Nobel Peace Prize</i>	23	27	21	29	*
October 12-15, 2007: <i>Former Vice President Al Gore receiving the Nobel Peace Prize</i>	19	28	20	32	1
f. International meeting about climate change in Copenhagen December 11-14, 2009	17	24	23	36	*

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.**]

- 31 Debate over health care reform
- 19 Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
- 12 The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan
- 9 President Obama accepting the Nobel Peace Prize
- 6 International meeting about climate change in Copenhagen
- 5 The arrest of five Muslim American men in Pakistan with suspected ties to terrorists
- 10 Some other story (VOL.)
- 9 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

³ From Mid-October 2001 to December 2001 the story was listed as "Terrorism attacks on the United States." In Early October 2001 and Mid-September 2001 the story was listed as "News about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington?"

Q.3 Thinking now about the issue of health care, from what you've seen and heard, do you think a health care reform bill will pass over the next year or not?

	<u>Yes, will</u>	<u>No, will not</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
December 11-14, 2009	56	38	6
December 4-7, 2009	52	35	14
November 20-23, 2009	52	37	11
November 13-16, 2009	49	37	14
November 6-9, 2009	48	40	11
October 30-November 2, 2009	47	39	14
October 23-26, 2009	53	40	7
October 16-19, 2009	57	38	5
October 9-12, 2009	45	46	9

Q.4 Thinking about the issue of health care reform, do you think it... [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]. DO you think it is [NEXT ITEM]?

	<u>December 11-14 2009</u>		<u>October 2-5 2009</u>	<u>September 3-6 2009</u>	<u>July 17-20 2009</u>
a.	70	Is interesting [OR]	71	72	72
	27	Boring	26	26	25
	2	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	2	2	3
b.	80	Affects you personally [OR]	74	73	78
	19	Does not affect you personally	24	26	21
	1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	2	1	1
c.	29	Is easy to understand [OR]	33	31	34
	69	Hard to understand	66	67	63
	2	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	1	2	3
d.	93	Is important [OR]	94	93	95
	6	Unimportant	6	6	4
	1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	*	*	1