



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

NEWS Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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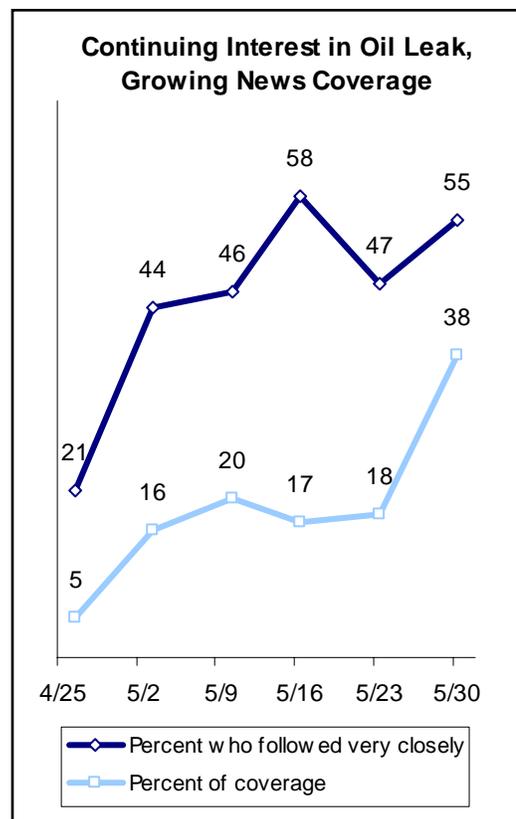
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Andrew Kohut, Director
Michael Remez, Senior Writer

Attentiveness Similar to Just After Haiti Quake
INTEREST IN OIL SPILL STAYS HIGH AS COVERAGE GROWS

As efforts to stop a major underwater oil leak faltered and President Obama traveled to Louisiana to assess the early damage, the crisis in the Gulf of Mexico grabbed public attention and dominated media coverage last week.

More than half of Americans (55%) say they followed news about the oil leak very closely. Close to six-in-ten (58%) say they followed this news more closely than any other major story, according to the latest News Interest Index survey, conducted May 27-30 among 1,001 adults by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. One week earlier, 47% said they were following news about the leak very closely.

News about the unfolding environmental disaster accounted for 38% of media coverage last week. That is more than double the share of newshole devoted to the story one week earlier (18%), when the media also focused heavily on the 2010 midterm elections (also 18%).



The public's attention to the spill rivals attention paid to the Haiti earthquake earlier this year. Just days after the Jan. 12 earthquake, 60% said they followed news about that disaster very closely; 57% said this was the story they were following most closely.

Interest in the oil spill, on the other hand, grew in the weeks following the deadly oil rig explosion on April 20. That first week, about two-in-ten (21%) said they were following the explosion very closely. One week later, as the leak continued to grow, 44% said they were tracking the worsening spill that closely. The number rose to 58% the week of May 13-16 as energy giant BP could not stop the flow of oil into the gulf. The number dipped slightly two weeks ago to 47% but jumped again last week as new efforts to stop the leak failed, more oil hit the coastline and debate grew about the Obama administration’s handling of the crisis.

Attentiveness rivals interest in several other major disasters. In May 1989, 52% of the public said they were very closely following news about the massive oil spill caused by the March 24 crash of the Exxon Valdez tanker in Alaska’s Prince William Sound. In early October 2005, 73% said they were very closely following news about the devastation wrought in New Orleans and elsewhere on the Gulf Coast by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Katrina had hit the coast on Aug. 29, leading to massive flooding, devastation and dislocation.

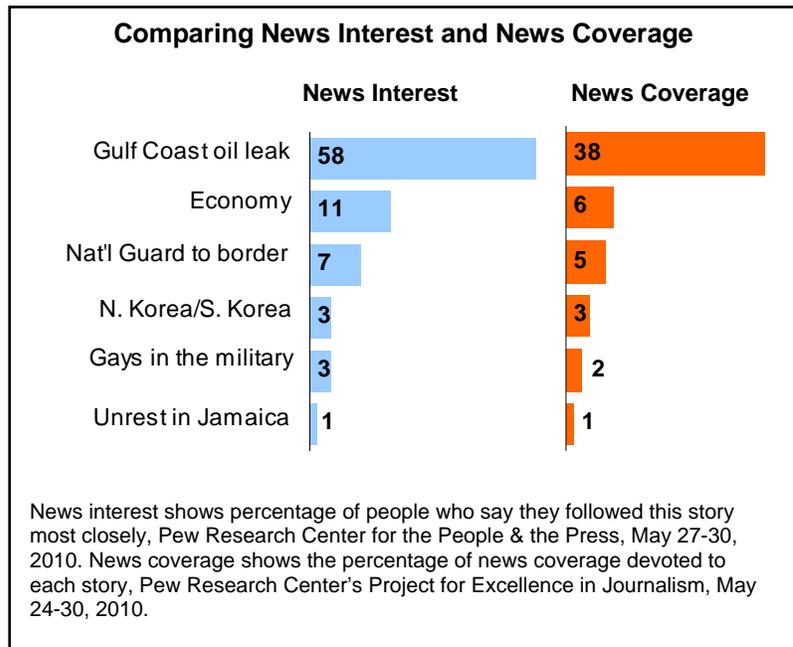
This April, 33% said they were very closely following the West Virginia coal mine explosion that left 29 dead.

High Interest in Major Disasters	
	<i>Following “Very closely” %</i>
<i>Current:</i> Major oil leak in Gulf of Mexico	55
Impact of hurricanes Katrina and Rita (Early October 2005)	73
Major earthquake in Haiti (Jan 15-18, 2010)	60
Major oil leak in Gulf of Mexico (May 13-16, 2010)	58
Alaska oil spill (Exxon Valdez) (May 1989)	52
West Virginia coal mine explosion (April 9-12, 2010)	33
Pew Research Center May 27-30. Highest interest in each story shown.	

Last week, interest in the oil leak was high across demographic and political groups. Six-in-ten men say they followed this news very closely, slightly higher than the 51% of women who say this. There were no differences across educational levels (55% each) and only slight differences among partisans. Six-in-ten Democrats say they followed news about the spill very closely, compared with 52% of Republicans. Among independents, 55% followed this news very closely.

The Week's News

Though most Americans focused on the oil spill last week, other stories also grabbed the public's attention. More than four-in-ten (43%) say they followed reports about the condition of the economy very closely. This was the most closely followed story for 11%. The media devoted 6% of coverage to news about the economy, according to a separate analysis by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ).

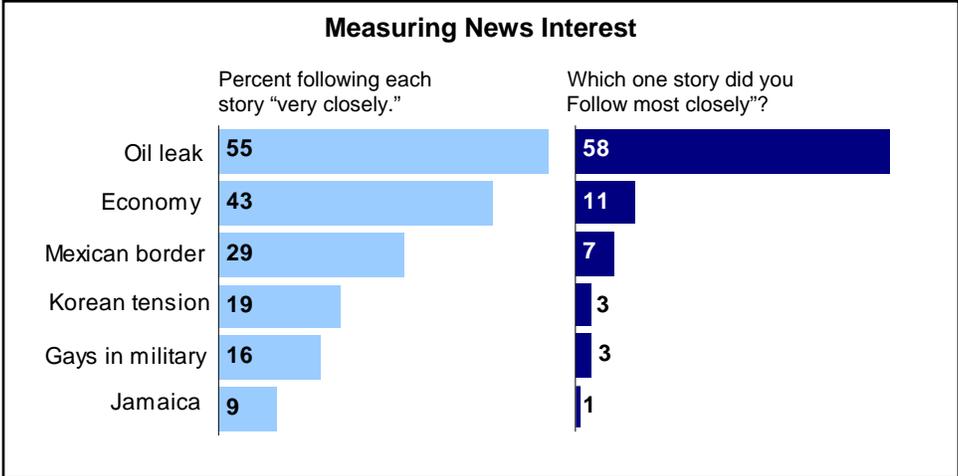


About three-in-ten (29%) say they very closely followed President Obama's announcement that he would send 1,200 National Guard troops to the Mexican border, a component in the long-running debate over immigration legislation; 7% say they followed this news more closely than any other major story. Reporting on this accounted for 5% of the newshole examined by PEJ.

About two-in-ten (19%) say they very closely followed news about tensions between North Korea and South Korea; 3% say this was the story they followed most closely. News about the tensions made up 3% of coverage.

Just 16% say they very closely followed the debate in Congress over whether to repeal the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy concerning gays in the military. The full House and a Senate panel both voted to end the policy; 3% say they followed this news more closely than any other major story. The media devoted 2% of coverage to this story.

About one-in-ten (9%) very closely followed news about unrest in Jamaica after attempts to arrest a major drug dealer. The story accounted for 1% of coverage and just 1% say this was the story they followed most closely.



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 May 24-30, and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected May 27-30, from a nationally representative sample of 1,001 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. (For more information about the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, go to www.journalism.org.) 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 this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a national sample of 1,001 adults living in the continental United States, 18 years of age or older, from May 27-30, 2010 (670 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 331 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 104 who had no landline telephone). Both the landline and cell phone samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2009 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample is also weighted to match current patterns of telephone status based on extrapolations from the 2009 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 within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Sample Size	Plus or minus...
Total sample	1,001	4.0 percentage points
Republicans	267	7.5 percentage points
Democrats	290	7.0 percentage points
Independents	331	6.5 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

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:

Andrew Kohut, Director, Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research,
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors, Michael Remez, Senior Writer
Robert Suls, Shawn Neidorf, Leah Christian, Jocelyn Kiley and Alec Tyson, Research Associates
Jacob Poushter, Research Analyst

For more information about the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press' weekly News Interest Index, go to www.people-press.org.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
May 27-30, 2010 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,001

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/ Refused
a. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy					
May 27-30, 2010	43	29	13	15	*
May 20-23, 2010	40	35	13	11	*
May 13-16, 2010	49	32	11	8	1
May 7-10, 2010	42	34	11	12	*
April 30-May 3, 2010	32	37	17	14	1
April 23-26, 2010	42	31	13	14	*
April 16-19, 2010	40	32	14	14	0
April 9-12, 2010	40	32	15	13	*
April 1-5, 2010	33	34	14	19	*
March 19-22, 2010	41	32	14	13	*
March 12-15, 2010	41	35	12	12	*
March 5-8, 2010	40	34	12	13	*
February 26-March 1, 2010	31	33	17	19	*
February 19-22, 2010	38	34	15	12	*
February 12-15, 2010	35	34	15	16	*
February 5-8, 2010	43	36	13	9	*
January 29-February 1, 2010	45	32	13	10	*
January 22-25, 2010	41	34	14	10	*
January 15-18, 2010	37	38	14	11	*
January 8-11, 2010	39	33	15	12	*
December 18-21, 2009	45	31	14	10	0
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	*

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	Very <u>closely</u>	Fairly <u>closely</u>	Not too <u>closely</u>	Not at all <u>closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/ <u>Refused</u>
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	*
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

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	Very <u>closely</u>	Fairly <u>closely</u>	Not too <u>closely</u>	Not at all <u>closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/ <u>Refused</u>
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	*
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
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

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/ Refused</u>
b. A major oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico					
May 27-30, 2010	55	26	11	7	*
May 20-23, 2010: <i>An oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico threatening the coast of several states</i>	47	35	11	7	*
May 13-16, 2010	58	29	9	4	*
May 7-10, 2010	46	33	11	10	*
April 30-May 3, 2010: <i>Oil leaking into the ocean near the Louisiana coast after an off-shore oil rig explosion</i>	44	35	11	10	*
April 23-26, 2010: <i>An explosion on an off-shore oil rig near the coast of Louisiana</i>	21	35	22	23	*
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
April 1-5, 2010: <i>President Obama's proposal to allow offshore oil and gas drilling</i>	20	24	21	33	1
July 25-28, 2008: <i>A major oil spill into the Mississippi River</i>	14	19	25	41	1
December 4-8, 2002: <i>The large oil spill polluting the coast of Spain</i>	15	29	28	27	1
May 4-7, 1989: <i>The Alaska oil spill</i>	52	37	7	4	--
c. Barack Obama announcing plans to send 1,200 National Guard troops to the Mexican border					
May 27-30, 2010	29	25	18	26	1
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
May 7-10, 2010: <i>A new Arizona law that gives police more authority to question people they suspect might be illegal immigrants</i>	38	27	13	21	1
April 30-May 3, 2010	36	31	13	20	*
March 19-22, 2010: <i>News about drug-related violence in Mexico</i>	12	21	26	40	1
March 27-30, 2009: <i>Hillary Clinton's recent trip to Mexico to discuss drug violence near the border</i>	14	24	23	39	*
February 27-March 2, 2009: <i>News about growing drug-related violence in Mexico</i>	18	28	23	31	*
August 14-17, 2009: <i>President Obama's trip to Mexico</i>	9	20	26	44	*
October 12-15, 2007: <i>The issue of immigration</i>	23	29	19	29	*
June 29-July 2, 2007: <i>The debate in Congress over new immigration policy</i>	26	30	21	23	*
June 22-25, 2007	24	28	22	26	*
June 15-18, 2007	22	32	21	25	*
June 8-11, 2007	24	29	20	26	1
May 24-27, 2007	27	31	22	19	1
April 12-16, 2007: <i>The issue of immigration</i>	21	29	24	26	*
August, 2006	34	40	16	9	1
June, 2006	36	41	15	7	1
May, 2006	44	33	13	9	1
April, 2006	39	34	16	10	1

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Refused</u>
December, 1994: <i>Passage of Proposition 187, the California law that bars education, health and welfare benefits from illegal immigrants and their children</i>	26	32	22	20	*
d. Tensions between North Korea and South Korea May 27-30, 2010	19	24	24	32	1
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
June 19-22, 2009: <i>New military threats from North Korea</i>	27	31	21	21	*
May 29-June 1, 2009: <i>Reports about North Korea testing nuclear weapons and missiles</i>	34	36	17	13	*
April 3-6, 2009: <i>North Korea's plans to test a long range missile</i>	23	31	19	27	*
June 27-30, 2008: <i>North Korea takes steps to halt its nuclear weapons program</i>	19	30	26	24	1
February 16-19, 2007: <i>Recent negotiations to shut down North Korea's nuclear weapons program</i>	15	31	22	31	1
Late October, 2006: <i>North Korea's announcement that it recently tested a nuclear weapon</i>	45	33	13	8	1
February, 2005: <i>North Korea's nuclear weapons program</i>	22	34	22	22	*
September, 2003	19	32	27	21	1
May, 2003	27	40	22	11	*
March, 2003	34	34	19	12	1
February, 2003	33	34	18	13	2
January, 2003	33	34	18	14	1
Late October, 2002: <i>North Korea's admission that it has been secretly developing nuclear weapons</i>	25	31	23	20	1
June, 1994: <i>Reports about North Korea's building of nuclear weapons and refusal to allow U.N. inspections</i>	27	33	26	14	*
e. Congressional debate over whether to repeal the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy concerning gays in the military May 27-30, 2010	16	22	24	37	1
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
February 5-8, 2010: <i>Military leaders saying they support allowing gays to serve openly in the military</i>	19	31	26	24	*
July 29-August 1, 1993: <i>Bill Clinton's decision to ease the ban on homosexuals in the military</i>	44	37	13	5	1
February 20-23, 1993: <i>Bill Clinton's attempts to lift the ban on gays in the military</i>	45	35	14	6	*

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Refused</u>
f. Unrest in Jamaica after attempts to arrest a major drug dealer					
May 27-30, 2010	9	17	22	52	1
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
March 19-22, 2010: <i>News about drug-related violence in Mexico</i>	12	21	26	40	1
February 27-March 2, 2009: <i>News about growing drug-related violence in Mexico</i>	18	28	23	31	*
September, 1989: <i>The war between the Columbian government and the major drug traffickers</i>	34	43	15	7	1

ASK ALL:

PEW.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.**]

May 27-30

2010

58	A major oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico
11	Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
7	Barack Obama announcing plans to send 1,200 National Guard troops to the Mexican border
3	Tensions between North Korea and South Korea
3	Congressional debate over whether to repeal the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy concerning gays in the military
1	Unrest in Jamaica after attempts to arrest a major drug dealer
7	Some other story (VOL.)
9	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)