



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

SEPTEMBER 17, 2012

Middle East Turmoil Closely Followed; Romney's Comments Viewed Negatively

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Andrew Kohut

President, Pew Research Center

Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock

Associate Directors

Scott Keeter

Director of Survey Research

1615 L St, N.W., Suite 700

Washington, D.C. 20036

Tel (202) 419-4350

Fax (202) 419-4399

www.people-press.org

Middle East Turmoil Closely Followed; Romney's Comments Viewed Negatively

About four-in-ten Americans (43%) have followed news about the attacks on U.S. embassies in the Middle East and the killing of an American ambassador very closely, making it by far the most closely followed foreign news story of the year.

Those who have followed this story have much more positive opinions about Barack Obama's handling of the situation than Mitt Romney's comments on the crisis. Nearly half (45%) approve of Obama's handling of the recent attacks on U.S. embassies and the killing of the U.S. ambassador in Libya; 36% disapprove of Obama's handling of this situation.

In contrast, only about a quarter (26%) of those who have tracked news on turmoil in the Middle East approve of Romney's comments on the situation; nearly half (48%) disapprove.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted Sept. 13-16 among 1,001 adults, finds that public interest in the presidential campaign has increased sharply in the past week. Currently, 42% say they are following news about the presidential candidates very closely, up from 31% a week earlier, immediately after the party conventions.

As many followed the recent spate of attacks on U.S. embassies in the Middle East and the killing of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens very closely (43%) as tracked campaign news very closely (42%). News interest in events in the Middle East is as high today as it was in the early days of the "Arab spring" last year, or when the U.S. and its allies launched air strikes on Libya in April 2011. (For more, see ["Interest in Foreign News Declines,"](#) June 6, 2012.)

Few Approve of Romney's Middle East Comments

<i>Thinking about recent attacks on U.S. embassies in the Middle East, opinion of ...</i>	Approve	Disapprove	DK
	%	%	%
Obama's handling of situation	45	36	19=100
Romney's comments on situation	26	48	26=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Sept. 13-16, 2012. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Based on those who have followed news of attacks on embassies (N=854).

Weekly News Interest

% following each story very closely

U.S. embassy attacks	43
2012 election	42
U.S. economy	38
Chicago strike	18

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Sept. 13-16, 2012.

Across most demographic groups, far more of those who followed news about the embassy attacks approve of Obama's handling of the situation than approve of Romney's statements on the crisis. And while 75% of Democrats approve of Obama's handling of Middle East turmoil, fewer Republicans (58%) approve of Romney's comments on the situation.

Nearly identical percentages of those who have followed the situation very closely and those who have followed it less closely approve of Obama's handling of the situation (46% and 44%, respectively). However, disapproval of Obama's performance is much higher among those who have followed Mideast turmoil very closely (43%) than those who have followed it less closely (29%).

Romney gets higher marks among those who have followed Middle East events very closely than among those who followed them less closely. Even among this group, however, more disapprove (49%) than approve (34%) of his comments on the situation.

There are only modest partisan differences in attentiveness to the recent attacks on the embassies and the killing of the U.S. ambassador: 48% of Republicans, 41% of Democrats and 45% of independents have followed this story very closely

Views of Obama and Romney Reactions to Turmoil in Mideast

<i>Thinking about recent embassy attacks, do you approve of each...</i>	Obama's handling	Romney's comments
	%	%
Total	45	26
Men	46	27
Women	44	25
18-29	54	15
30-49	46	23
50-64	43	36
65+	39	30
College grad+	52	28
Some college	40	29
HS or less	44	23
Republican	11	58
Democrat	75	5
Independent	44	23
<i>Following news</i>		
Very closely	46	34
Less closely	44	17

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Sept. 13-16, 2012. Based on those who have followed news of attacks on embassies.

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted September 13-16, 2012 among a national sample of 1,001 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (600 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 401 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 188 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source 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 March 2011 Census Bureau's Current Population 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 2011 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 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	Sample Size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,001	3.6 percentage points
Republicans	270	6.9 percentage points
Democrats	322	6.4 percentage points
Independents	309	6.5 percentage points
Following Mid East news	854	3.9 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
September 13-16, 2012 OMNIBUS
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/Ref
a. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy					
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
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	*
December 15-18, 2011	36	32	14	16	1
December 8-11, 2011	41	29	13	16	1
December 1-4, 2011	40	33	13	13	1
November 17-20, 2011	35	33	16	15	1
November 10-13, 2011	39	31	15	14	*
November 3-6, 2011	37	31	15	17	1
October 27-30, 2011	38	33	14	15	1
October 20-23, 2011	38	32	14	16	1
October 13-16, 2011	39	32	14	14	*
October 6-9, 2011	43	28	14	14	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
September 29-October 2, 2011	46	26	14	14	*
September 22-25, 2011	44	33	11	11	*
September 8-11, 2011	40	30	15	14	1
September 1-4, 2011	44	30	11	15	*
August 25-28, 2011	44	28	14	13	1
August 18-21, 2011	44	29	12	14	1
August 4-7, 2011	46	30	11	13	1
July 28-31, 2011	43	30	13	13	*
July 21-24, 2011	41	32	13	13	1
July 14-17, 2011	41	30	14	14	1
July 7-10, 2011	36	30	15	18	1
June 30-July 3, 2011	38	32	13	16	1
June 23-26, 2011	37	29	15	19	*
June 16-19, 2011	39	33	14	13	*
June 9-12, 2011	39	30	15	16	1
June 2-5, 2011	35	34	17	14	*
May 19-22, 2011	33	34	17	16	*
May 12-15, 2011	32	32	17	18	2
May 5-8, 2011	40	35	15	9	1
April 21-25, 2011	41	33	12	14	*
April 14-17, 2011	44	30	14	12	1
April 7-10, 2011	46	30	14	10	*
March 31-April 3, 2011	42	31	16	11	0
March 24-27, 2011	36	32	17	15	*
March 17-20, 2011	38	32	17	13	*
March 10-13, 2011	40	30	16	13	*
March 3-6, 2011	37	31	17	13	1
February 24-27, 2011	49	29	11	10	*
February 17-20, 2011	35	33	14	17	*
February 10-13, 2011	36	34	13	16	*
February 3-6, 2011	35	37	14	14	*
January 20-23, 2011	37	33	14	15	1
January 13-16, 2011	37	29	15	18	1
January 6-9, 2011	39	37	11	12	1

[SEE TRENDS FOR PREVIOUS YEARS:](http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Economy-Trends.pdf) <http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Economy-Trends.pdf>

- b. Attacks on American embassies and consulates in the Middle East and the killing of the U.S. ambassador in Libya

September 13-16, 2012	43	24	15	17	1
-----------------------	----	----	----	----	---

- c. News about candidates for the 2012 presidential election

September 13-16, 2012	42	25	18	15	1
September 7-9, 2012	31	31	18	19	1
August 31-September 3, 2012	29	29	20	20	1
August 23-26, 2012	27	31	19	22	1
August 16-19, 2012	32	27	19	22	1
August 9-12, 2012	27	27	21	24	1
August 2-5, 2012	31	25	19	23	1
July 26-29, 2012	25	28	21	25	1
July 19-22, 2012	35	22	17	25	1
July 12-15, 2012	33	24	20	23	*
July 5-8, 2012	29	26	20	25	*
June 28-July 1, 2012	32	24	19	25	*
June 21-24, 2012	27	30	17	25	1
June 14-17, 2012	31	30	15	24	*
June 7-10, 2012	30	29	16	25	1
May 31-June 3, 2012	29	28	19	23	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
May 24-27, 2012	32	28	16	24	1
May 17-20, 2012	31	26	19	23	*
May 10-13, 2012	34	23	18	24	*
May 3-6, 2012	29	27	19	24	*
April 26-29, 2012	29	29	18	23	1
April 19-22, 2012	29	29	20	20	1
April 12-15, 2012	32	28	16	23	1
April 5-8, 2012	31	27	18	23	*
March 29-April 1, 2012	23	29	21	27	*
March 22-25, 2012	28	28	18	25	1
March 15-18, 2012	28	31	17	24	*
March 8-11, 2012	28	27	21	23	*
March 1-4, 2012	31	24	20	24	1
February 23-26, 2012	28	29	18	24	1
February 16-20, 2012	25	29	19	25	2
February 9-12, 2012	35	25	18	20	1
February 2-5, 2012	30	27	20	21	1
January 26-29, 2012	28	30	21	21	1
January 19-22, 2012	28	30	17	24	*
January 12-15, 2012	29	29	18	23	1
January 5-8, 2012	29	30	16	25	*
December 15-18, 2011	26	24	20	29	1
December 8-11, 2011	27	27	18	28	*
December 1-4, 2011	25	28	20	26	1
November 17-20, 2011	24	31	21	23	1
November 3-6, 2011	22	31	20	26	1
October 27-30, 2011	21	26	21	30	1
October 20-23, 2011	21	28	22	28	1
October 13-16, 2011	26	29	22	23	1
October 6-9, 2011	25	25	23	27	1
September 29-October 2, 2011	27	26	21	25	*
September 22-25, 2011	25	26	23	25	1
September 15-18, 2011	24	28	21	27	1
September 8-11, 2011	22	26	21	31	*
September 1-4, 2011	22	23	22	32	1
August 25-28, 2011	22	22	22	33	1
August 18-21, 2011	27	26	19	28	1
August 11-14, 2011	19	24	20	36	1
August 4-7, 2011	18	21	22	37	1
July 28-31, 2011	17	27	21	35	1
July 21-24, 2011	17	22	28	32	*
July 14-17, 2011	18	26	27	28	1
July 7-10, 2011	16	23	27	33	1
June 30-July 3, 2011	21	28	24	25	2
June 23-26, 2011	19	26	24	31	*
June 16-19, 2011	23	29	23	25	*
June 9-12, 2011	18	30	22	30	1
June 2-5, 2011	21	31	22	26	*
May 26-29, 2011	20	27	24	28	*
May 19-22, 2011	15	27	24	32	1
May 12-15, 2011	15	22	26	35	1
May 5-8, 2011	16	24	27	32	1
April 21-25, 2011	18	26	23	32	1
April 14-17, 2011	20	23	29	27	1
March 24-27, 2011	13	19	26	41	1
March 10-13, 2011	15	21	26	38	0
February 10-13, 2011	16	19	24	40	*
February 3-6, 2011	15	20	23	42	*

[SEE TRENDS FOR PREVIOUS YEARS:](http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Election-Trends.pdf) <http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Election-Trends.pdf>

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
d. A strike by public schoolteachers in Chicago September 13-16, 2012	18	24	23	34	1
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
February, 2008: <i>The end of the Hollywood writers' strike</i>	7	23	25	45	*
November, 2007: <i>A strike by Hollywood writers who work on scripts for TV series and movies</i>	9	27	28	36	8
September, 2007: <i>An agreement between General Motors and the United Auto Workers union that ended a two-day strike over wages and job security</i>	14	28	28	30	*
August, 1998: <i>The end of the United Auto Workers strike against General Motors</i>	20	34	26	19	1
September, 1997: <i>The end of the Teamsters Union strike against UPS</i>	36	40	14	10	*
February, 1995: <i>Negotiations to end the baseball strike</i>	12	26	26	35	1
October, 1994: <i>The baseball strike</i>	15	20	26	38	1
September, 1994	13	21	28	38	*
May, 1992: <i>The end of the UAW strike against Caterpillar Tractor</i>	13	24	25	36	3
April, 1990: <i>The Greyhound bus drivers' strike</i>	23	44	21	12	*

ASK IF FOLLOWED MIDDLE-EAST ATTACKS (PEW.1b=1,2,3) [N=854]:

Thinking about the recent attacks on U.S. embassies and consulates in the Middle East and the killing of the U.S. ambassador in Libya

ASK IF FOLLOWED MIDDLE-EAST ATTACKS (PEW.1b=1,2,3) [N=854]:

PEW.2 From what you've seen and heard, do you approve or disapprove of how Barack Obama has handled this situation?

Sep 13-16

2012

45 Approve
36 Disapprove
19 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

ASK IF FOLLOWED MIDDLE-EAST ATTACKS (PEW.1b=1,2,3) [N=854]:

PEW.3 Do you approve or disapprove of the comments Mitt Romney has made about this situation?

Sep 13-16

2012

26 Approve
48 Disapprove
26 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

PEW.4-PEW.7 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE