

PewResearchCenter

The Project for
Excellence in Journalism

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The Year in the News 2011

Coverage of Economy and International News Jump in a Year of
Major Breaking Stories

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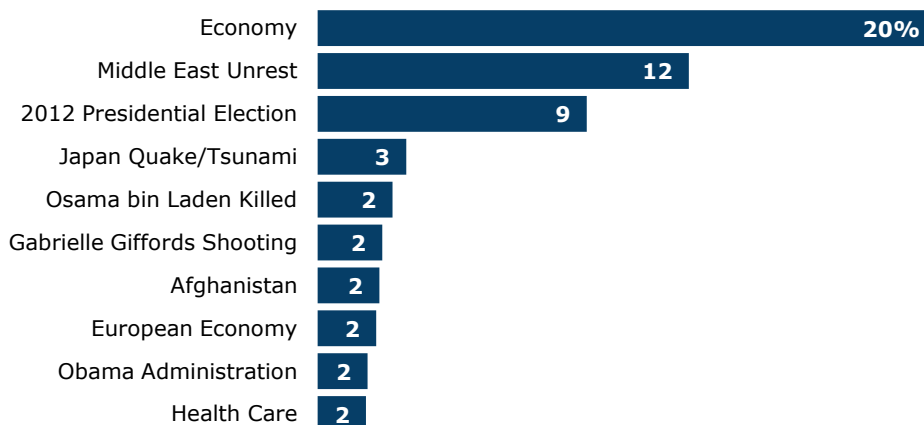
The faltering U.S. economy was the No. 1 story in the American news media in 2011, with coverage increasing substantially from a year earlier when economic unease helped alter the political landscape in the midterm elections, according to *The Year in the News 2011*, a new report conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism.

The year 2011 was also characterized by a jump of more than a third in coverage of international news, by a growing contrast in the content of the three broadcast networks and by a series of dramatic breaking news events that dominated coverage in ways unprecedented in PEJ’s five years of studying news agenda.

The biggest story of the year, however, was the economy. As the recovery weakened and Washington engaged in partisan warfare over the debt ceiling, news about the state of the economy jumped to the same level of attention it had received in 2009 when newly elected president Barack Obama passed his controversial stimulus package in response to the “Great Recession.” For all of 2011, the economy made up 20% of the space studied in newspapers and online and time on television and radio news, an increase of more than 40% from 14% of the newshole studied in 2010.

Top Stories of 2011

Percent of Newshole



Source: PEJ’s News Coverage Index

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The unfolding uprisings in the Middle East—from the mass protests in Egypt in February to the hunt for Muammar Gaddafi in October—was the second biggest story of the year. Those events filled 12% of the newshole studied in 2011. That makes the Middle East uprisings the second-biggest annual foreign story on record since PEJ began analyzing the news agenda five years earlier. The only bigger international story was Iraq in 2007, the year of the “surge” under George Bush.

The biggest component of the Mideast story in 2011 was the uprising in Libya, which involved international military intervention and the dramatic search for the fleeing Libyan dictator. The

overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt was the second biggest part of the Mideast uprisings story. The ongoing violence in Syria was the third biggest element.

The No. 3 story of the year overall in 2011 was the race for U.S. president, even though no primary or caucus has yet been held or single vote cast. The race for president consumed 9% of the news space in the last year. What was once called pre-primary period, or the invisible primary, is invisible no longer. Four years ago, in 2007, with nomination battles raging in both parties, the presidential campaign was a bigger story, however, accounting for 11% of the newshole.

PEJ's The Year in the News is derived from an analysis of close to 46,000 stories produced from January 1-December 11, 2011 that were examined as part of the group's ongoing content analysis of 52 different traditional news outlets from the main five media sectors, its News Coverage Index. The report also includes an analysis of the year in social media, based on the group's weekly analysis of blogs and Twitter, the New Media Index.

The findings are also available for users to examine themselves in PEJ's [Year in the News Interactive](#), where users can delve into the data base by story, by broad topic and compare different news sectors and outlets with one another.

After the top three stories, a host of major breaking news stories, followed by a group of ongoing trend stories, filled out the top 10 stories of the year. The March 11 Japanese earthquake and tsunami was the 4th biggest story (3% of the newshole), followed by the May 1 killing of Osama bin Laden (2%), and the January 8 Tucson shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords that wounded 18 other people, six of them fatally (2%). The week it happened, the killing of bin Laden was the biggest story in any given week in 2011, when it accounted for 69% of all the news studied. That made it the biggest one-week story recorded since PEJ began monitoring the news agenda.

The next four stories were ongoing events—the situation in Afghanistan, the European economic crisis, coverage of the Obama Administration (including the workings of the West Wing and family issues, but not including policy debates) and the health care debate.

A year ago, in 2010, education, immigration and the fight against terrorism were all among the top 10 stories. They fell back just slightly in 2011 (to 11th for education and 12th for terror threats). Immigration fell to No. 18.

In general, the public tended to agree with the news agenda of the media in 2011, at least as measured by data from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press in its weekly comparison of what stories the media covered and what the public was following. On several of the biggest stories of the year, such as the killing of bin Laden, the Japanese earthquake and the shootings in Tucson, public attention matched the high level of media coverage. Where the public tended to differ with the media in 2011 is that their interest in some stories tended to last longer than the media's.

Top Stories: 2011 Compared to 2010

Percent of Newshole

2011 Big Stories		2010 Big Stories	
Economy	20 %	Economy	14%
Middle East Unrest	12	2010 elections	10
2012 Presidential Election	9	BP Oil Spill	7
Japan Quake/Tsunami	3	Health Care	5
Osama bin Laden Killed	2	Afghanistan	4
Gabrielle Giffords Shooting	2	Obama Administration	2
Afghanistan	2	Haiti Earthquake	2
European Economy	2	Terror Threats/Homeland Security	2
Obama Administration	2	Immigration	2
Health Care	2	Education	2

Source: PEJ's News Coverage Index

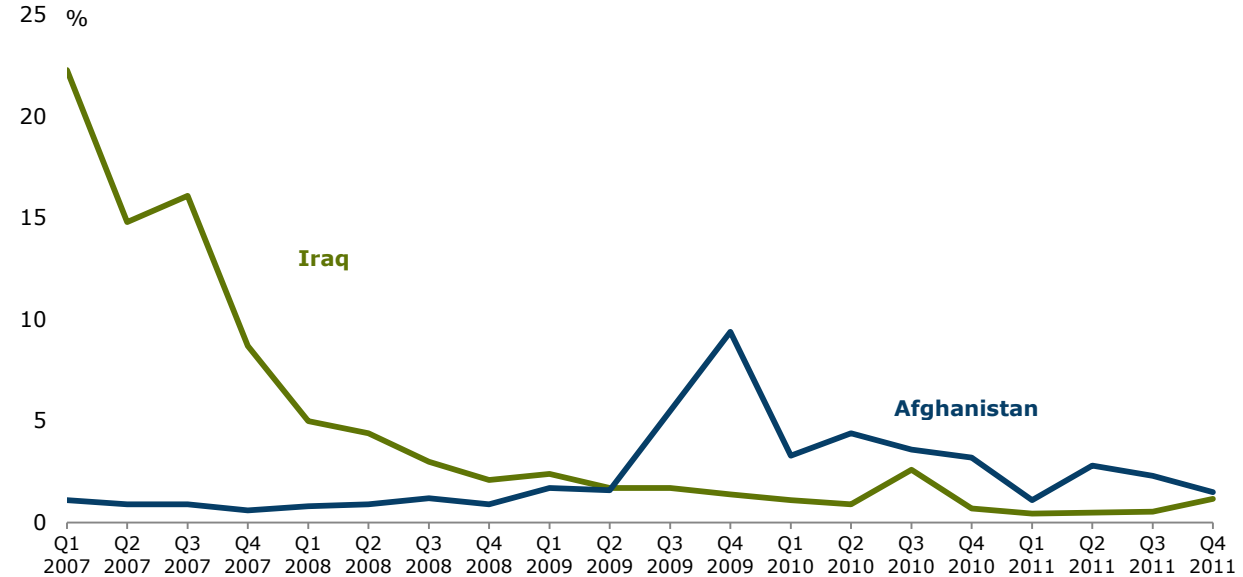
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One significant difference in 2011 was the heavier focus on international news. Five of the 10 biggest stories of the year (and eight of the top 20) were international. Together these five stories alone accounted for 21% of the newshole studied. A year ago, only two of the top 10 stories were international (Afghanistan and the Haiti earthquake), representing 6% of the news agenda.

Iraq and Afghanistan Coverage Over Time

Percent of Newshole



Source: PEJ's News Coverage Index

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The increase in foreign news in 2011 also came despite a drop in coverage of the war in Afghanistan—the major U.S. military engagement in the world. Coverage of the war dropped by half—to 2% in 2011 from 4% in 2010.

And when all stories—not just the top 10 of the year—are tallied together, the percentage of foreign news grows even more. By that measure, 28% of the news studied was international. The largest share (18%) focused on strictly foreign events. Another 10% focused on events in which the U.S. was directly involved. That is an increase of more than a third from a year ago, when the total newshole for international events was 20%.

Another difference in 2011 was that the focus of economic coverage shifted. The story changed from being about taxes and jobs to being much more a story about government. Almost a third of the economic coverage in the last year (32%) was focused on the budget and national debt (heavily influenced by the debt ceiling crisis). The second biggest storyline was the effect the economy was having on state and local government (12% of the economy coverage). A year ago the two biggest themes were taxes and unemployment.

One new aspect to the economy story in 2011—the Occupy Wall Street Protests which began in September—proved to be the fourth-biggest storyline, at 5% of the overall economic coverage.

The Year of the Mega Story

This past year was also distinguished by the number of times that key breaking news events thoroughly dominated the news.

Top Stories in a Given Week

Percent of Newshole

Osama bin Laden Killed	May 2-8	69%
Gabrielle Giffords Shooting	Jan 10-16	57
Japan Quake/Tsunami	March 14-20	57
Middle East Unrest	Jan 31 – Feb 6	56
Economy	July 25-31	52
Middle East Unrest	March 21-27	47
Economy	Aug 1-7	45
Middle East Unrest	Feb 7-13	40
Economy	April 11-17	39
Middle East Unrest	March 28 – April 3	38
Economy	July 11-17	37
Middle East Unrest	Feb 21-27	35
Economy	July 18-24	35
Economy	Feb 14-20	34
Middle East Unrest	Feb 28 – March 6	32
Economy	Aug 8-14	32
Potential Government Shutdown	April 4-10	29
2012 Campaign	Oct 31 – Nov 6	29
Economy	Sept 5-11	28

Source: PEJ's News Coverage Index

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Five different times during the year, a news event filled more than half of all the newshole studied in a given week, a rarity in our years of charting news coverage.

The biggest one-week story of the year was the killing May 1 of Osama bin Laden by Navy Seals. That week, the story filled 69% of the newshole, making it the biggest weekly story PEJ has measured since January 2007. The previous biggest story, (also at about 69%,) was the 2008 presidential campaign from August 25-31, 2008, when Democrats nominated Barack Obama at their Denver convention and John McCain introduced Sarah Palin as his surprise running mate.

But four other subjects also surpassed the 50% mark in a week in 2011—the Tucson shooting spree that wounded Congresswoman Giffords, the Japanese quake and tsunami, Mideast turmoil, and the U.S. economy.

That is the first time since PEJ began studying the news agenda that we have seen more than one story break the threshold of filling a majority of the news in a week. The race for president broke that threshold eight times in 2008. But outside of that election, we have never before seen different stories in the same year of such magnitude. Indeed, other than the 2008 election, there have only been three one-week stories that were so big and they were spread across three different years—the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007, the U.S. economy in 2009 and the midterm elections in 2010.

All News by Topic

Besides looking at just the biggest stories of the year, one advantage of PEJ's The Year in the News is that it can also categorize all the stories studied during the year by topic to measure the broader agenda-setting influence of the media. What topics got covered and what did not? This probes deeper patterns in news beyond what the biggest breaking news events tended to be.

The jump in coverage of overseas events not directly involving the U.S. (from 11% to 18%) was the biggest change in the year. There was a much smaller increase in attention to international stories that involved the U.S.—10% in 2011 compared with 9% in 2010.

The No. 2 topic category of the year was government itself (other than politics and elections). The workings of government received almost a third more attention than a year earlier (13% vs. 10%). Another topic that received more attention in 2011 was crime, with coverage up 50% (6% from 4%).

Several topics that had received significant coverage in recent years fell in 2011. Coverage of health and medicine, for instance, fell by half (to 3% down from 6% in 2010). Coverage of the environment, the No. 15 topic a year ago, fell (to 1% from 2%), to 17th. Coverage of the military also fell (to 1% from 2%) and from 16th to 19th.

The reason that a running news story, such as the faltering economy and the debates over what to do about it, can be the No. 1 story of the year, but not the No. 1 topic is because topic is broader. Many different foreign events can make up the topic of foreign news. Coverage of government, similarly, can encompass a wide range of news events as well, surpassing coverage of the state of the economy when tallied together.

General Topic Categories: 2011 vs. 2010

Percent of Newshole

2011 Topics		2010 Topics	
Foreign (Non-U.S.)	18%	Campaigns/Elections	12%
Government Agencies/Legislatures	13	Foreign (Non-U.S.)	11
Campaigns/Elections	11	Government Agencies	10
U.S. Foreign Affairs	10	U.S. Foreign Affairs	9
Economy	9	Economy	8
Crime	6	Disasters/Accidents	8
Disasters/Accidents	4	Health/Medicine	6
Additional Domestic Affairs	4	Business	4
Business	4	Crime	4
Health/Medicine	3	Lifestyle	3
Sports	2	Domestic Terrorism	3
Lifestyle	2	U.S. Miscellaneous	2
Domestic Terrorism	2	Sports	2
Media	2	Additional Domestic Affairs	2
U.S. Miscellaneous	2	Environment	2
Education	2	Defense/Military (Domestic)	2
Environment	1	Science/Technology	2
Science/Technology	1	Immigration	2
Defense/Military (Domestic)	1	Race/Gender/Gay Issues	2
Celebrity/Entertainment	1	Education	2
Race/Gender/Gay Issues	1	Media	2
Transportation	1	Religion	1
Immigration	1	Court/Legal System	1
Religion	1	Transportation	1
Court/Legal System	<1	Celebrity/Entertainment	<1
Development/Sprawl	<1	Development/Sprawl	<1

Source: PEJ's News Coverage Index

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The Year on Blogs and Twitter

While blogs and Twitter are both called social media and have a similar basic function—the sharing of information and opinion—their news agendas differed markedly in 2011 (something we also saw in 2010). The data examined by PEJ reveal that Twitter users were more consumed by new digital technology and products. The blogosphere more closely followed the traditional press focus on current events and issues.

In effect, while similar percentages of adults in the U.S. blog and [use Twitter](#) (14% and 13% respectively), they use the two platforms differently. The conversation on Twitter has a distinct and narrower set of news priorities, at least as measured by the top five subjects each week. Bloggers are forging a hybrid news agenda that shares elements with both Twitter and the mainstream media.

To evaluate the most popular topics on Twitter and blogs, PEJ uses a mix of content analysis combined with tracking services that measure the links present in blog posts and tweets. Each weekday, PEJ captures the top five stories on each of four social media tracking sites

Top Topics on Blogs and Twitter

Percent of Stories

Blogs		Twitter	
Consumer News	12%	Technology	25%
Government	10	Business	17
Campaign/Politics	9	Celebrities/Pop Culture	13
Business	8	Crime	6
Economy	7	Foreign Government/Internal Affairs	5
Technology	6	Media	5
US Foreign Affairs	5	Consumer News	4
Foreign Government/Internal Affairs	4	Other	4
Celebrities/Pop Culture	4	Environment	3
Environment	4	Accidents/Disasters	3
Obituaries	4		

Source: PEJ's New Media Index

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([Tweetmeme](#), [Technorati](#), [Icerocket](#) and [Twitteruly](#)). Our researchers then code each story for its subject matter. On a weekly basis, we tabulate which subjects were present the most often separately for blogs and Twitter. PEJ releases the findings weekly in our [New Media Index reports](#). In August 2011, PEJ made some changes to the [methodology](#) that expanded the number of social media tracking sites and expanded the number of sources from which content could originate—thus broadening the sample.

The 2011 data indicate that, first and foremost, people use Twitter to discuss and disseminate news and reviews about the latest high-tech products. When added together, the three related topics—consumer news, technology and business—made up almost half the stories that made the top five list derived from our multiple tracking services in a given week.

Breaking down that conversation from topic to storyline, in 2011 the four most popular stories on Twitter were, in descending order, news about Facebook, Google, Twitter itself and Apple—all giants of the new information ecosystem. Twitter users displayed an almost insatiable appetite for news and rumors about the latest gadgets and upgrades by the major companies and in many cases, functioned as consumer reporters evaluating these products.

Another category of news more popular on Twitter than blogs was information regarding celebrities, fueled by entertainers who have huge followings on the social media platform. Fully 13% of the top stories in any given week were about celebrity on Twitter. That number was just 4% in blogs. Ubiquitous pop idol Justin Bieber ranked as the fifth most popular story of the year on Twitter; Lady Gaga tied for No. 7.

Considerably less prominent on Twitter were the news events and issues that are fodder for newspaper front pages and cable talk shows. In the year leading up to a presidential election, for instance, the conversation about government and politics was rarely among the top stories on Twitter in any given week. Foreign affairs and diplomacy also represented a small portion of top topics on Twitter, even with such overseas events as the Arab Spring and the Japanese

earthquake. Those categories combined accounted for only 9% of the stories that made the top five list in a given week.

Top Ten Stories on Blogs, Twitter, and Mainstream News					
Blogs		Twitter		Mainstream News	
Economy	10%	Facebook	9%	Economy	20%
Apple News	10	Google	8	Middle East Unrest	12
2012 Presidential Election	8	Twitter	8	2012 Presidential Election	9
Cell Phones (Other Than Apple)	5	Apple News	7	Japan Earthquake/Tsunami	3
Google	4	Justin Bieber	4	Osama bin Laden Killed	2
Terror Threats/Homeland Security	2	Cell Phones (Other Than Apple)	3	Gabrielle Giffords Shooting	2
Occupy Wall Street	2	Economy	2	Afghanistan	2
Health Care	2	Lady Gaga	2	European Economy/Austerity/Strikes	2
Libya	2	News of the World Hacking	2	Obama Administration	2
Osama bin Laden Killed	2	Social Media General	2	Health Care	2

Source: PEJ's New Media Index and News Coverage Index
Note: For the New Media Index, the priorities of bloggers and users of Twitter are measured in terms of percentage of stories. The mainstream coverage is measured as a percentage of newshole.
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Bloggers were also interested in technology and new digital products in 2011, but just not to the extent that Twitter users were. The business, consumer news and technology topics combined to account for about 26% of the top weekly stories, little more than half of what it was on Twitter. Still, Apple, cell phones and Google registered among the top five stories on blogs for the year.

But aside from that, the new priorities in blogs largely diverged from those on Twitter and the blogosphere's function as a forum to debate public events became more evident.

In blogs, the conversation about government and politics, as well as diplomacy and overseas events, combined to account for almost one-third of the stories in the top five list in a given week. In addition, roughly another third (29%) of the dialogue on blogs was devoted to a series of public policy issues that included the economy, the environment, health care, education and others.

In one indication that bloggers often take their cues from what is happening in the mainstream media, five of the top 10 stories on blogs—the economy, the presidential campaign, health care, the civil war in Libya, and the death of Osama bin Laden—were also among the top 10 stories in traditional news coverage.

The Press and the Public: Where They Diverged and Where They Met

In a year defined by a number of major news events, the mainstream media and the U.S. public often agreed on the most important stories.

According to data from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, three of five stories that generated the most public attention in a single week were among those that also received the highest level of weekly coverage from the press. (The research was conducted as part of the group's News Interest Index.)

The story that generated the most public interest for the year was the Japanese earthquake and tsunami. The week of March 14-20, a full 55% of those surveyed said they were following events there very closely. That week news coverage of the disaster filled 57% of the newshole. The week following the death, on May 1, of Osama bin Laden, 50% of the public said they were following that story very closely; that was the biggest weekly story of the year in terms of coverage (it filled 69% of the newshole studied). In the wake of the Tucson shooting spree that killed six people and seriously wounded Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, 49% of the public was following the saga very closely; from January 10-16, the tragedy accounted for 57% of the coverage studied by PEJ.

If there was a divergence between public interest and the media interest on these major stories, however, it could be found in how long the public was interested in something versus the media. In several cases, high levels of public interest outlasted media coverage as the press moved on to other events.

When Public Interest and Media Coverage Match

Percent of Links

	Percent Followed Very Closely	Percent of Newshole
Japan Quake/Tsunami (May 14-20)	55%	57%
Osama bin Laden Killed (May 2-8)	50	69
Gabrielle Giffords Shooting (January 10-16)	49	57
Economy (August 1-7)	46	45

Source: PEJ's News Coverage Index and People & the Press News Interest Index

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When Public Interest and Media Coverage Diverge

Percent of Links

	Percent Followed Very Closely	Percent of Newshole
Winter Storms (January 31-February 6)	45%	3%
Hurricane Irene (August 22-28)	45	21
July Heat Wave (July 18-24)	38	5
Iraq Troop Withdrawal (August 1-7)	34	8

Source: PEJ's News Coverage Index and People & the Press News Interest Index

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In the week of March 21-27, for example, half (50%) of the respondents were still following the aftermath of the Japanese earthquake very closely, but media coverage had plunged to 15% from 57% the week before. That was also the case with the Tucson shooting when coverage dropped

to 17% (the week of January 17-23) from 57% the week before, while news interest stayed very high, with 45% saying they were still following the story very closely.

Major weather events generated substantial coverage in the media in 2011, but even then not at the levels registered by the public. Coverage of the deadly Joplin Missouri tornado filled 22% of the newshole from May 23-29, but a full 45% of the public said they were following that story very closely. In a more dramatic divergence, the blizzards that blasted the Midwest the week of January 31-February 6 accounted for 8% of the newshole while almost half (45%) of the public were paying very close attention to them.

One other story late in the year seemed to be of considerably more interest to the public than the media. When the last U.S. troops packed up and came home, ending the nearly nine-year war in Iraq, 34% of Americans said they were following that milestone very closely. In the media from December 12-18, the story ranked behind the presidential election and the economy—filling 8% of the newshole.

Top Newsmakers

Barack Obama was the top newsmaker of the year. He was the primary newsmaker (meaning 50% of the story focused on him) in a total of 3,802 stories or 8% of the stories studied—the same percentage as a year earlier. Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan strongman who was deposed and later killed by rebels, was the second-biggest newsmaker by this measure, the focus of 1% of

Lead Newsmakers of 2011

Number of Stories

Barack Obama*	3802
Muammar Gaddafi	606
Herman Cain	577
Mitt Romney	527
Rick Perry	474
Newt Gingrich	410
Gabrielle Giffords	375
Osama bin Laden	357
John Boehner	269
Anthony Weiner	235
Michele Bachmann	230
Dominique Strauss-Kahn	213
Casey Anthony	207
Sarah Palin	199
Hillary Clinton	199
Jared Lee Loughner	197
Donald Trump	187
Hosni Mubarak	187
Conrad Murray	177
Jerry Sandusky	167

Note: Barack Obama includes Barack Obama and Obama Administration

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all stories studied. Indeed, three of the top 20 newsmakers last year were key Mideast figures who were either deposed or killed—Gaddafi, bin Laden (1%) and former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak (less than 1%).

Among Republican hopefuls for president, Herman Cain was the most covered candidate in 2011, followed closely by Mitt Romney, Rick Perry and Newt Gingrich, who rounded out the top half dozen newsmakers.

Among elected Republican lawmakers, House Speaker John Boehner was the most covered. Among Democrats other than President Obama, that distinction went to disgraced Congressman Anthony Weiner, who resigned his office after sending suggestive photos of himself to women.

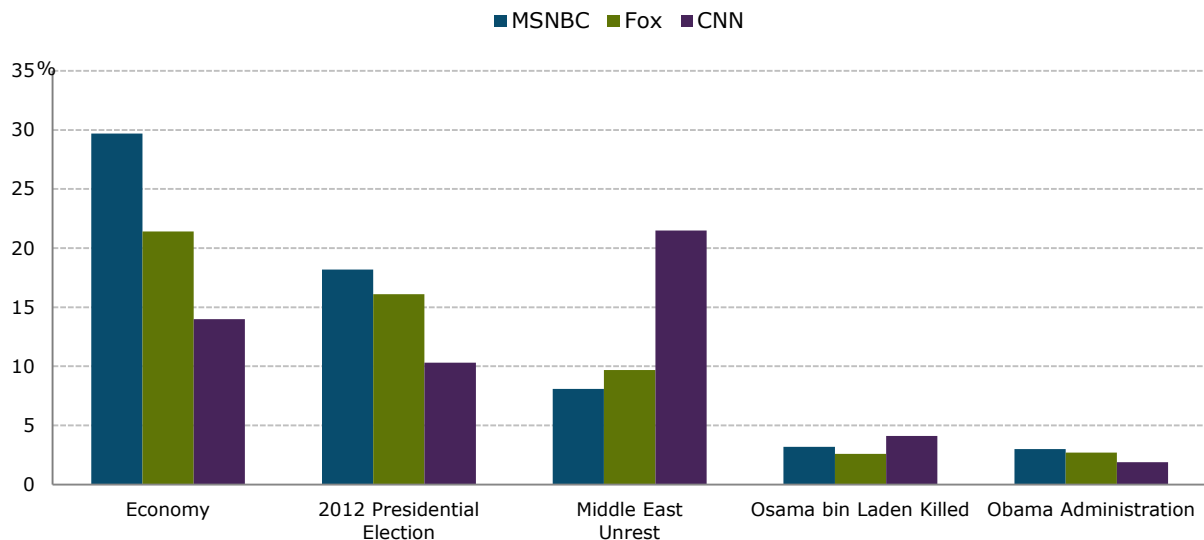
The Cable Difference

With different audience bases, different sibling networks and different styles, the three main cable news channels also had different definitions of what constituted news in 2011. Some of the distinctions between the three main channels, in other words, are in story selection, not only style or tone.

The weakening economy, for instance, was a much bigger story on MSNBC (30% of the airtime studied), a sibling of business channel CNBC, than anywhere else. It received the second-most attention on Fox (21%), which also has a sibling channel focused on financial matters, Fox Business. The economy was a much smaller story on CNN (14%).

Top Five Stories on Cable News Channels

Percent of Newshole



Source: PEJ's News Coverage Index

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CNN, by contrast, was generally much more international, and it has a sibling international channel. Overall, more than a third of its airtime for the year was devoted to international events and matters that concerned U.S. involvement abroad (34%). The percentage was considerably less, 20%, on Fox and even smaller, 14%, on MSNBC. The biggest story of the year on CNN was unrest in the Middle East. It was third on Fox and MSNBC.

CNN also covered lifestyle, celebrity and sports more heavily (comprising 4% together) than Fox (3%) or MSNBC (2%). And it covered disasters more heavily (7%) than Fox (3%) or MSNBC (3%).

The two channels whose evening programming is dominated by ideological talk show hosts, Fox News and MSNBC, were actually more similar in their news agendas generally.

Users can explore these differences in depth in The Year in the News Interactive.

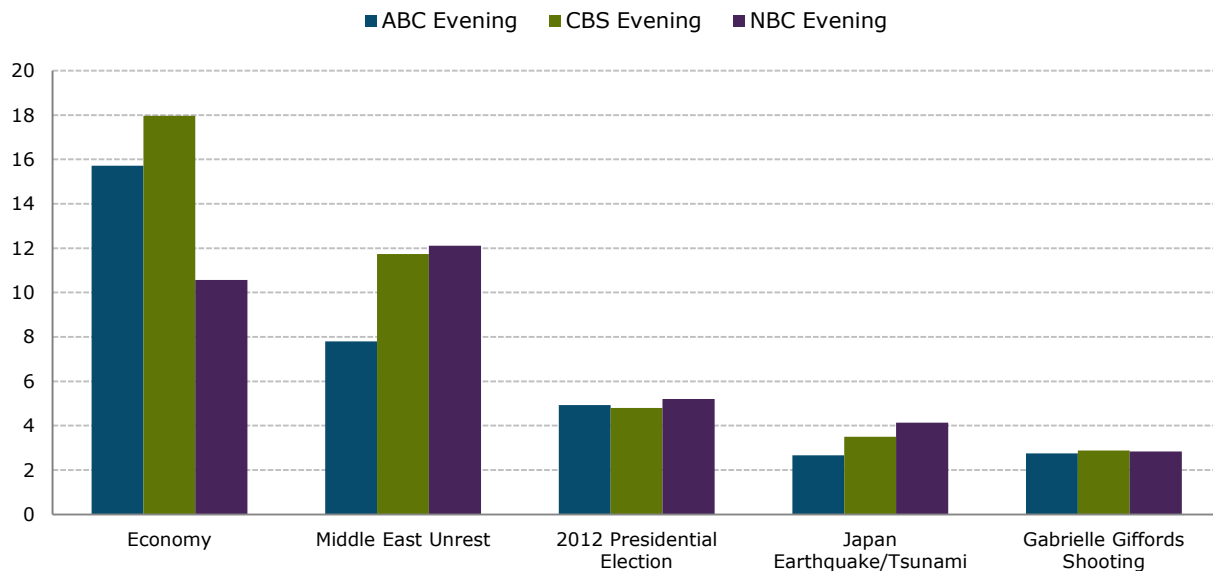
The Network News Agendas

Traditionally, the three broadcast networks have not had marked variations in their selection of news. That appears to be changing. In 2011, one network appears to be differentiating itself with a more hard news orientation.

CBS, which publicly has announced that it is trying to define itself with a more hard news approach, devoted almost one-third of the airtime studied on its evening newscasts (30%) to two major stories—the economy and Middle East unrest—over the course of the year. That compares with 24% on the ABC’s World News Tonight and 23% on The NBC Nightly News.

Top Five Stories on Network Evening Newscasts

Percent of Newshole



Source: PEJ's News Coverage Index

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The CBS Evening News also spent less time on lifestyle, celebrity and sports (7%) and disasters (7%) than did ABC’s World News (11% and 9%) or NBC Nightly (9% and 11%).

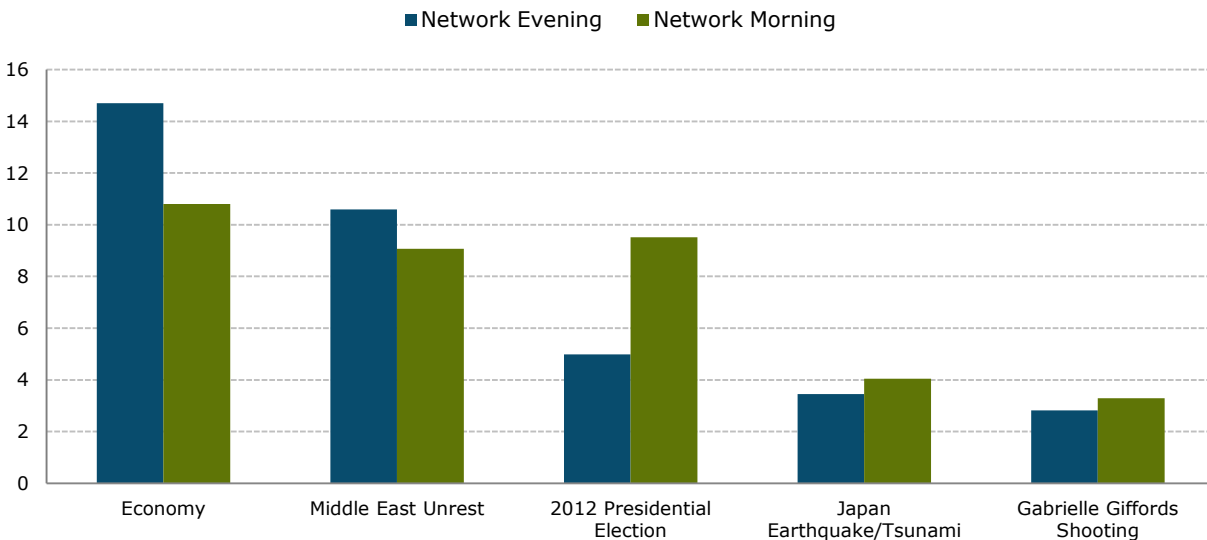
The same basic pattern was also evident in the three networks’ morning news shows. PEJ examines the first 30 minutes of these programs, the period during which producers acknowledge they are most inclined to provide their hard news segments. Again CBS spent more on the economy and Mideast combined (26%) than either NBC (18%) or ABC (16%).

The CBS morning Show also spent less time on lifestyle, celebrity and sports (6%) compared with ABC (10%). NBC’s Today Show was similar to CBS (6%).

Traditionally, there have been bigger differences in the news agendas of the morning and evening news shows than there have been between the three different networks. Some of those time slot differences remain. The troubled U.S. economy was a significantly bigger story on the network evening newscasts (15%) than on the morning shows (11%). There was also somewhat more attention to the Mideast in the evening (11%) than the morning (9%). The campaign, by contrast, was a bigger story in the morning—twice as big (10%) than it was on the evening broadcasts (5%).

Network Evening and Morning Story Comparisons

Percent of Newshole



Source: PEJ’s News Coverage Index

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Yet for now, a new pattern appears to be emerging in which the networks, and particularly third place CBS, is appearing to try to brand its newscasts as different than the others in the news they choose to feature.

That new pattern coincides with new management at two of three broadcast news divisions in the last year. At CBS, Jeff Fager, the executive producer of 60 Minutes took the helm as chairman of CBS News with David Rhodes as president while Scott Pelley became anchor in 2011. At ABC, Ben Sherwood took over as news president from David Westin early in 2011.

The PBS Difference

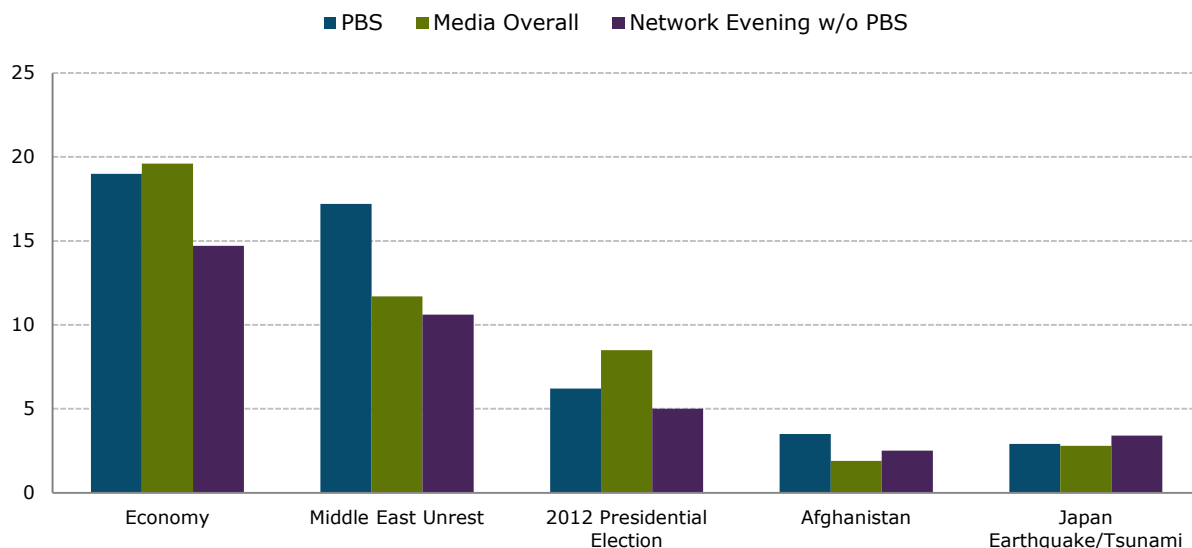
An examination of 2011 coverage also reveals some ways in which the PBS NewsHour differs in its agenda from the rest of the media, particularly in what viewers can find elsewhere on television.

The most striking difference is that the NewsHour offered more than one-third more coverage of international events over the last year than the media overall, including all other forms of television news (cable, morning and network evening). In total, 39% of the time on the NewsHour was devoted to foreign events and U.S. foreign policy, compared with 28% in the media sample generally, 23% on cable news, 24% on the network morning news shows and 24% on the network evening broadcasts.

The NewsHour is probably closest as a rival to the network evening news—the programs appear opposite each other and all offer an evening summary of the day’s events. Here the contrasts are even clearer. The NewsHour spent a third more time covering government than the commercial network evening newscasts (12% vs. 9%), more time on the election and politics (7% vs. 5%), much less on crime (2% vs. 6%), less on disasters (4% vs. 9%), and on lifestyle (2% vs. 5%).

PBS Compared to Media Overall and Commercial Network Evening News

Percent of Newshole



Source: PEJ's News Coverage Index

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Users can explore all of these comparisons for themselves using the Year in the News Interactive, as well as comparing different kinds of radio news, such as NPR vs. Talk Radio or even top of the hour radio headlines.

Methodology

The study, The Year in the News 2011, is based primarily on the real-time content analysis data derived from the Project for Excellence in Journalism's in-house news coding operation.

The data regarding media coverage from traditional news outlets come from a summative analysis of the weekly reports known as PEJ's [News Coverage Index](#). ([Click here](#) for a detailed methodology on how this real-time weekly coding is conducted.) PEJ began the NCI in January 2007, and it is the largest effort in the United States that measures and analyzes the agenda of the American news media on a continuing basis. The Index examines 52 news outlets in real time to determine what is being covered and what is not, who are the leading newsmakers and other elements of the news each week. A team of coders works on the project. Each member of the coding team has been given extensive training in PEJ's methods and met high standards of reliability. The work is measured regularly for inter-coder reliability and agreement. Coders read, listen-to or watch each piece of news content from newspapers, online news sites, television broadcasts and radio programming.

The data regarding social media, specifically Twitter and blogs, come from the weekly reports known as PEJ's [New Media Index](#). ([Click here](#) for a detailed methodology.) The goal of the NMI is to measure the leading topics of conversation on various social media outlets. PEJ relies on a combination of human coding and tracking services for social media to derive this analysis. The tracking services measure the links present on blog posts or tweets to determine the most discussed issues. When a social media user links to a page online, it suggests that the user believes the page is important, even if they do not agree with the contents. PEJ relies on four social media tracking sites ([Tweetmeme](#), [Technorati](#), [Icerocket](#) and [Twitteruly](#)) to tabulate the most linked-to pages.

PEJ began the New Media Index in January 2009. In August 2011 we made some changes to the methodology to improve the system. Those adjustments are described in detail [here](#). There were two major changes. First, PEJ expanded the number of tracking sites used from two to four. Second, PEJ expanded the number of sources from which content could originate. Previously, the NMI was focused on "news" stories as determined by tracking sites which were mostly from traditional news outlets such as CNN.com and Washingtonpost.com. However, the current methodology places no such restrictions on where content can originate.

The report also uses survey data from the [Pew Research Center for the People & the Press](#). In particular, the survey results regarding public interest come from their weekly [News Interest Index](#).