



**THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
For The People & The Press

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**Tuesday, March 6, 2012**

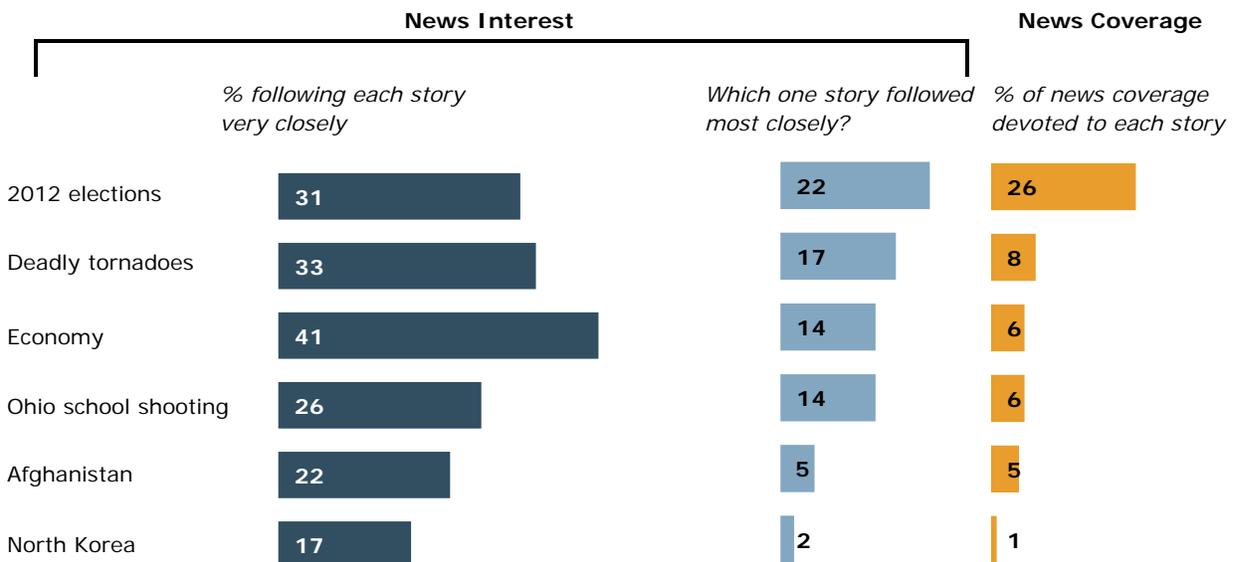
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## Interest Steady Heading into Super Tuesday Election Again Top Story for Public and Media

Election news continued to be the public's top story last week, just ahead of the March 6 Super Tuesday voting.

Just more than two-in-ten (22%) say they followed news about the candidates for president more closely than any other news. Somewhat fewer (17%) cite the tornadoes that hit parts of the Midwest, according to the latest weekly News Interest Index survey, conducted March 1-4 among 1,009 adults by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

### This Week's News Interest and News Coverage



News interest shows the percentage of people who say they followed each story very closely and which one story they followed most closely, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, March 1-4, 2012. News coverage show the percentage of news coverage devoted to each story, Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, February 27-March 4, 2012.

The buildup to Super Tuesday voting in 10 states also topped coverage, accounting for 26% of the newshole, according to a separate analysis by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ). News about the tornadoes made up 8% of coverage.

Looking at another measure, interest in news about the presidential election has been relatively steady in recent weeks. About three-in-ten (31%) say they followed news about the presidential candidates very closely last week, about the same as the 28% that said this one week before that. Though only the Republicans have a primary fight, comparable percentages of Republicans (38%) and Democrats (32%) say they followed election news very closely. Among independents, 28% say this.

In 2008, both parties had primary fights and Super Tuesday took place earlier in the year, on Feb. 5. The week leading up to the voting, campaign news accounted for about half of all coverage (51%). Interest in this news was somewhat greater than today: 37% said they were following election news very closely. That included 41% of Republicans, 43% of Democrats and 28% of independents. At that point, 32% said the primary fight was their top story.

In the current survey, 33% say they very closely followed news about the deadly storms and tornadoes that hit the Midwest last week. About four-in-ten (41%) very closely followed news about the condition of the U.S. economy, about the same as the 37% that said this one week earlier. News about the economy accounted for 6% of coverage.

About a quarter (26%) say they very closely followed news about the shootings at an Ohio high school. This was the top story for 14%. News about the shootings, which left three dead, made up 6% of coverage.

Just more than two-in-ten (22%) say they followed news about the situation in Afghanistan very closely in a week with continued attacks on American soldiers following protests over the burning of Korans at a NATO base; 5% say the situation in Afghanistan was their top story. More Republicans say they followed this news very closely (28%) than Democrats (20%) or independents (18%). News about Afghanistan accounted for 5% of coverage.

Fewer than two-in-ten (17%) say they very closely followed news about North Korea's steps to halt its nuclear program; 2% say this was the news they followed most closely. News about North Korea's actions accounted for 1% of 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 Feb. 27-March 4, and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected March 1-4, 2012 from a nationally representative sample of 1,009 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](http://www.journalism.org).) The News Interest Index survey collects data from Thursday through Sunday to gauge public interest in the most covered stories of the week.

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted March 1-4, 2012, among a national sample of 1,009 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (603 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 406 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 201 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.

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 is also 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 within the landline sample. 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	1,009	4.0 percentage points
Republicans	303	7.0 percentage points
Democrats	300	7.0 percentage points
Independents	318	6.5 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.

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
MARCH 1-4, 2012 OMNIBUS  
FINAL TOPLINE  
N=1,009**

**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>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
a. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy					
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
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	*

## PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	Very <u>closely</u>	Fairly <u>closely</u>	Not too <u>closely</u>	Not at all <u>closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
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. The current situation and events in Afghanistan

March 1-4, 2012	22	29	25	24	1
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**TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:**

February 23-26, 2012: <i>Protests in Afghanistan after NATO personnel burned copies of the Koran</i>	17	22	24	36	1
February 2-5, 2012: <i>The Defense Department announcing its plan to end the U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan</i>	22	31	22	24	1
October 6-9, 2011: <i>The current situation and events in Afghanistan</i>	20	28	25	26	1
September 15-18, 2011: <i>Attacks on the U.S. embassy and NATO's headquarters in Afghanistan</i>	16	24	22	37	1
September 1-4, 2011: <i>The current situation and events in Afghanistan</i>	17	32	26	25	*
August 11-14, 2011: <i>The 30 U.S. troops killed in Afghanistan in a helicopter attack</i>	39	33	13	14	1
June 30-July 3, 2011: <i>The current situation and events in Afghanistan</i>	22	34	24	20	1
June 23-26, 2011: <i>Discussions in Washington about U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan</i>	27	32	20	20	1
June 2-5, 2011: <i>The current situation and events in Afghanistan</i>	20	35	23	21	1
March 3-6, 2011: <i>U.S. airmen killed at an airport in Frankfurt, Germany</i>	16	22	19	42	1
April 1-3, 2011: <i>Deadly protests in Afghanistan after a Florida pastor burned a Koran</i>	15	19	29	36	1
December 16-19, 2010: <i>The Obama administration's review of the Afghanistan war strategy</i>	17	26	25	31	1
December 9-12, 2010: <i>The current situation and events in Afghanistan</i>	24	31	22	22	1
November 18-21, 2010	27	33	21	18	1
October 21-24, 2010	21	34	23	21	1
October 7-10, 2010	21	36	20	22	1
September 30-October 3, 2010	23	37	23	15	1
September 23-26, 2010	29	40	19	11	1
September 9-12, 2010	30	33	20	17	*
September 9-12, 2010: <i>Controversy over a Florida pastor's plan, later cancelled, to burn copies of the Koran on September 11th<sup>1</sup></i>	33	25	15	25	1
July 29-August 1, 2010	34	35	22	9	*

<sup>1</sup> On the first night of the field period (September 9) the item was worded: "Plans by a Florida pastor to burn copies of the Koran on September 11th."

## PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	Very <u>closely</u>	Fairly <u>closely</u>	Not too <u>closely</u>	Not at all <u>closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
July 15-18, 2010	22	33	23	22	*
July 8-11, 2010	23	32	24	20	1
July 1-5, 2010	29	34	23	14	1
June 24-27, 2010: <i>General Stanley McChrystal resigning as head of U.S. forces in Afghanistan after being quoted criticizing President Obama and his Afghanistan strategy</i>	28	31	19	21	1
June 17-20, 2010	21	30	27	22	*
May 20-23, 2010	22	33	25	20	*
April 9-12, 2010	21	29	27	22	1
February 19-22, 2010: <i>The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</i>	24	36	21	19	*
January 8-11, 2010: <i>Suicide bombing that killed seven Americans at a CIA base in Afghanistan</i>	24	31	27	17	1
December 11-14, 2009: <i>The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</i>	35	33	18	13	*
December 4-7, 2009: <i>President Obama's decision to send more U.S. troops to Afghanistan</i>	43	33	14	8	1
November 20-23, 2009: <i>The debate over whether to send more troops to Afghanistan</i>	29	31	17	22	1
November 13-16, 2009	29	28	20	22	1
November 6-9, 2009: <i>The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</i>	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	*
September 25-28, 2009: <i>The debate over whether to send more troops to Afghanistan</i>	27	40	17	16	*
September 18-21, 2009: <i>The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</i>	26	33	25	16	*
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: <i>The Obama administration's decision to send 17,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan</i>	27	29	24	19	1
January 30-February 2, 2009: <i>The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</i>	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: <i>The military effort in Afghanistan against Taliban fighters</i>	19	34	29	18	*
September 12-15, 2008	21	34	25	19	1
August 29-31, 2008	18	27	32	23	*
August 19-22, 2008: <i>A terrorist bombing at the U.S. embassy in Yemen</i>	15	27	31	26	1
July 18-21, 2008: <i>The military effort in Afghanistan against Taliban fighters</i>	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	*

## PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
March 2-5, 2007: <i>A bombing in Afghanistan near where Vice President Cheney was staying</i>	19	33	26	21	1
June, 2005: <i>Newsweek's retraction of a story about flushing the Koran down a toilet as part of prisoner interrogation</i>	20	29	21	29	1
Late July, 2002: <i>The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</i>	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
October, 2000: <i>The terrorist attack on the navy warship U.S.S. Cole</i>	44	35	12	9	*
August, 1998: <i>The bombing at U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania</i>	27	37	18	18	*
July, 1996: <i>The bombing of a military base in Saudi Arabia</i>	32	36	20	12	*
c. North Korea taking steps to halt its nuclear program					
March 1-4, 2012	17	22	24	36	1
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
January 5-8, 2012: <i>The situation in North Korea following the death of its leader Kim Jong-il</i>	17	29	24	30	*
December 2-5, 2010: <i>Tensions between North Korea and South Korea</i>	35	30	19	16	1
May 27-30, 2010	19	24	24	32	1
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

## PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
June, 1994: <i>Reports about North Korea's building of nuclear weapons and refusal to allow U.N. inspections</i>	27	33	26	14	*
d. Deadly storms and tornadoes in the Midwest March 1-4, 2012	33	31	17	18	1
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
May 26-29, 2011: <i>Deadly tornadoes in the Midwest</i>	45	33	13	9	*
May 5-8, 2011: <i>Tornadoes and flooding in the South and Midwest</i>	41	37	15	7	*
April 28-May 1, 2011: <i>Deadly storms in the South</i>	45	29	14	12	1
April 21-25, 2011: <i>Deadly storms in the South and Midwest</i>	29	33	18	20	*
June 13-16, 2008: <i>A tornado that killed four Boy Scouts at a camp in Iowa</i>	32	35	17	16	*
May 30-June 2, 2008: <i>Violent storms and tornadoes in the Midwest</i>	30	33	21	15	1
February 8-11, 2008: <i>Violent storms and tornadoes in the South and Midwest</i>	25	42	19	13	1
May 11-14, 2007: <i>Tornadoes and floods in the Midwest</i>	22	35	23	19	1
March 2-5, 2007: <i>Violent storms and tornadoes in the South and Midwest</i>	33	38	18	11	*
May, 1999: <i>Tornadoes in Oklahoma and Kansas</i>	38	40	15	6	1
e. A deadly school shooting near Cleveland March 1-4, 2012	26	31	22	19	1
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
December 8-11, 2011: <i>Deadly shootings at Virginia Tech University</i>	20	27	29	24	1
August 7-10, 2011: <i>A shooting at a fitness club in Pennsylvania</i>	13	28	25	34	1
June 12-15, 2009: <i>A deadly shooting at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.</i>	26	34	17	23	*
April 3-6, 2009: <i>A shooter killing several people at an immigration services center in Binghamton, New York</i>	26	32	19	23	*
March 13-16, 2009: <i>A shooting spree in Alabama that resulted in the death of 11 people</i>	18	33	24	25	*
February 15-18, 2008: <i>The shootings at Northern Illinois University that resulted in the death of 7 people</i>	26	40	19	15	0
February 8-11, 2008: <i>A shooting at a city council meeting in Missouri where six people were killed</i>	13	28	25	33	1
December 14-17, 2007: <i>Shootings at two religious centers in Colorado</i>	17	31	24	27	1
December 7-10, 2007: <i>A shooting at a shopping mall in Omaha, Nebraska where eight people were killed</i>	30	36	18	15	1
October 12-15, 2007: <i>The shooting at a high school in Cleveland, Ohio</i>	22	32	25	20	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/Ref
April 20-23, 2007: <i>The shootings at Virginia Tech University that resulted in the death of 33 people</i>	45	37	13	5	*
October, 2006: <i>Recent shootings at schools in Pennsylvania and other states</i>	46	33	12	8	1
March, 2000: <i>The shooting of a 6-year-old girl at a Michigan school</i>	40	38	15	7	*
September, 1999: <i>The shootings in a Jewish community center in Los Angeles</i>	29	34	22	14	1
Late April, 1999: <i>The shooting of students and teachers by two students at a Colorado high school</i>	68	24	6	2	*
June, 1998: <i>The shooting at a high school in Springfield, Oregon</i>	46	36	14	4	*
March, 1998: <i>The shooting at a middle school in Jonesboro, Arkansas</i>	49	33	12	5	1
f. News about candidates for the 2012 presidential elections					
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

**PEW.1 CONTINUED...**

	Very <u>closely</u>	Fairly <u>closely</u>	Not too <u>closely</u>	Not at all <u>closely</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
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/NI1-Election-Trends.pdf) <http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NI1-Election-Trends.pdf>

**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.]**

Mar 1-4

2012

22	News about candidates for the 2012 presidential elections
17	Deadly storms and tornadoes in the Midwest
14	Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
14	A deadly school shooting near Cleveland, Ohio
5	The current situation and events in Afghanistan
2	North Korea taking steps to halt its nuclear program
10	Some other story (VOL.)
15	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

**PEWWP.1 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**