



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
**Tuesday, February 28, 2012**

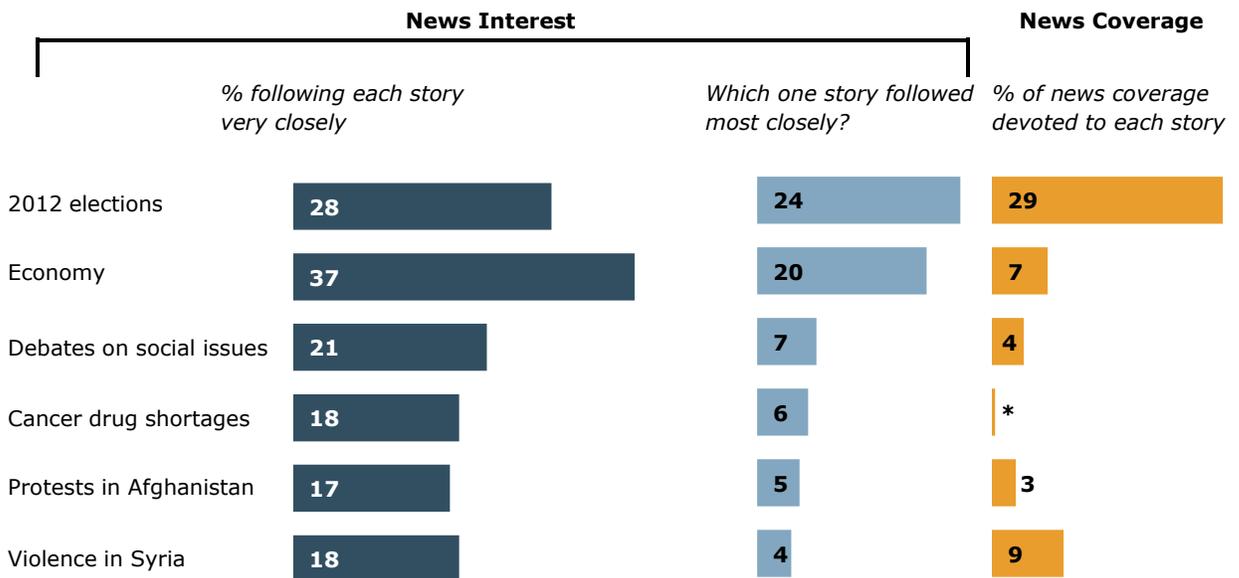
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:  
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## Elections, Economy Top Public's News Interest

Americans continued to focus most closely on two interrelated news stories last week: the 2012 elections and the condition of the U.S. economy.

About a quarter of the public (24%) says news about candidates for the 2012 presidential elections was their top story. About as many (20%) say they followed news about the economy most closely, according to the latest weekly News Interest Index survey, conducted Feb. 23-26 among 1,005 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, February 23-26, 2012. News coverage shows the percentage of news coverage devoted to each story, Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, February 20-26, 2012.

The economy dominated coverage, accounting for 29% of the newshole, according to a separate analysis by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ). News about Syria ranked second, accounting for 9% of coverage. Few (4%) say this was the news they followed most closely.

Nearly four-in-ten (37%) say they followed news about the economy very closely, a level of interest that has fluctuated only slightly in recent weeks. About three-in-ten (28%) say they followed news about the candidates very closely.

Just 7% say they most closely followed the recent debates about social issues such as gay marriage and contraception; 21% say they followed these debates very closely. Roughly equal percentages of Republicans (21%), Democrats (24%) and independents (21%) say they followed news about these issues very closely. News about recent debates over gay marriage, contraception and abortion accounted for 4% of the newshole last week.

Another 6% say their top story was news about shortages of drugs to treat cancer and other illnesses; 18% say they followed this news very closely. This news accounted for less than 1% of coverage.

Just 5% say their top story was the violence that erupted in Afghanistan after copies of the Koran were burned at a NATO air base. Nearly two-in-ten (17%) say they followed this news very closely. News about Afghanistan made up 3% of coverage.

News about the violence in Syria continued to attract modest interest with 4% saying this was the news they followed most closely. Nearly two-in-ten (18%) say they followed news about this situation very 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 Feb. 20-26, and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected Feb. 23-26, 2012 from a nationally representative sample of 1,005 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 February 23-26, 2012, among a national sample of 1,005 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (602 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 403 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:

| <b>Group</b> | <b>Sample Size</b> | <b>Plus or minus ...</b> |
|--------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Total sample | 1,005              | 4.0 percentage points    |
| Republicans  | 270                | 7.0 percentage points    |
| Democrats    | 294                | 7.0 percentage points    |
| Independents | 347                | 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.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
**FEBRUARY 23-26, 2012 NEWS INTEREST INDEX**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**N=1,005**

**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<br/>closely</u> | <u>Fairly<br/>closely</u> | <u>Not too<br/>closely</u> | <u>Not at all<br/>closely</u> | <b>(VOL.)<br/>DK/Ref</b> |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy |                         |                           |                            |                               |                          |
| 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                            | *                        |
| February 17-20, 2011                               | 35                      | 33                        | 14                         | 17                            | *                        |

**PEW.1 CONTINUED...**

|   | Very<br><u>closely</u> | Fairly<br><u>closely</u> | Not too<br><u>closely</u> | Not at all<br><u>closely</u> | (VOL.)<br>DK/Ref |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|
| 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                |
| <b>SEE TRENDS FOR PREVIOUS YEARS:</b> <a href="http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Economy-Trends.pdf">http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/11/NII-Economy-Trends.pdf</a> |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
| b. Protests in Afghanistan after NATO personnel burned copies of the Koran  |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
| February 23-26, 2012  | 17                     | 22                       | 24                        | 36                           | 1                |
| <b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>   |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
| April 1-3, 2011: <i>Deadly protests in Afghanistan after a Florida pastor burned a Koran</i>  |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
|   | 15                     | 19                       | 29                        | 36                           | 1                |
| 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                |
| 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                |
| c. Shortages of drugs to treat cancer and other conditions  |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
| February 23-26, 2012  | 18                     | 20                       | 24                        | 38                           | 1                |
| d. Political violence in Syria  |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
| February 23-26, 2012  | 18                     | 24                       | 21                        | 35                           | 1                |
| February 9-12, 2012   | 17                     | 23                       | 23                        | 36                           | *                |
| January 12-15, 2012   | 12                     | 17                       | 26                        | 45                           | 1                |
| <b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>   |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
| August 4-7, 2011: <i>Political violence following uprisings in Syria</i>  |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
|   | 10                     | 19                       | 26                        | 44                           | 1                |
| May 5-8, 2011   |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
|   | 14                     | 27                       | 30                        | 28                           | 1                |
| June 2-5, 2011: <i>Anti-government protests and violence in some Middle Eastern countries</i>   |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
|   | 18                     | 25                       | 25                        | 32                           | *                |
| April 28-May 1, 2011  |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
|   | 18                     | 29                       | 25                        | 27                           | 1                |
| February 3-6, 2011: <i>Anti-government protests in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries</i>   |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
|   | 32                     | 35                       | 16                        | 18                           | *                |
| January 27-30, 2011   |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
|   | 17                     | 26                       | 21                        | 35                           | *                |
| e. Recent debates over social issues such as gay marriage and contraception   |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
| February 23-26, 2012  | 21                     | 24                       | 22                        | 32                           | 1                |
| f. News about candidates for the 2012 presidential elections  |                        |                          |                           |                              |                  |
| 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                |

<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 11<sup>th</sup>."

**PEW.1 CONTINUED...**

|                              | <u>Very<br/>closely</u> | <u>Fairly<br/>closely</u> | <u>Not too<br/>closely</u> | <u>Not at all<br/>closely</u> | <b>(VOL.)<br/>DK/Ref</b> |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 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>

**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.]**

Feb 23-26

2012

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 24 | News about candidates for the 2012 presidential elections                |
| 20 | Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy                          |
| 7  | Recent debates over social issues such as gay marriage and contraception |
| 6  | Shortages of drugs to treat cancer and other conditions                  |
| 5  | Protests in Afghanistan after NATO personnel burned copies of the Koran  |
| 4  | Political violence in Syria  |
| 10 | Some other story <b>(VOL.)</b>   |
| 24 | Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>   |

**PEW.3-PEW.4 AND PEWWP.1 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**