



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**Wednesday, June 6, 2012**

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**  
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## Interest in Foreign News Declines

Public interest in foreign news stories has been modest so far this year, in stark contrast to 2011 when several overseas news stories, from the Japanese tsunami and nuclear disaster to the “Arab spring,” attracted substantial attention.

The latest weekly News Interest Index, conducted May 31 to June 2 among 1,012 adults, is fairly typical in this regard. Just 17% tracked news about the ongoing economic problems in Europe very closely. And despite reports of a recent massacre of civilians in Syria, just 12% followed political violence in that country very closely.

That is relatively consistent with interest in the European economic crisis and events in Syria since the beginning of the year.

The most closely followed foreign stories this year have been the deadly crash of a cruise ship off of the coast of Italy and allegations a U.S. soldier killed a number of civilians in Afghanistan. About three in-ten followed each of these stories very closely (30% cruise ship, 28% Afghan killings).

### For Public, No Breakthrough Foreign Stories So Far in 2012

<i>Top foreign stories ...</i>	<b>Very closely</b>	<b>Less closely</b>	<b>DK</b>
<b>2012</b>	%	%	%
Cruise ship accident off coast of Italy ( <i>Jan</i> )	30	70	1=100
U.S. soldier in Afghanistan accused of killings ( <i>Mar</i> )	28	71	1=100
Iran-Israel tensions ( <i>Feb</i> )	26	75	*=100
Undercover agent in Yemen foils plane plot ( <i>May</i> )	24	75	1=100
N. Korea's failed rocket launch	22	77	1=100
U.S. rescue of aid workers in Somalia ( <i>Jan</i> )	21	78	1=100
<i>European economic problems (current)</i>	17	83	1=100
<i>Political violence in Syria (current)</i>	12	87	1=100
<b>2011</b>			
Japan earthquake and nuclear disaster ( <i>March</i> )	55	44	*=100
Osama bin laden killed ( <i>May</i> )	50	49	1=100
U.S. troops killed in copter crash in Afghanistan ( <i>Aug</i> )	39	60	1=100
Anti-government protests in Egypt ( <i>Feb</i> )	39	60	1=100
Violence in Libya ( <i>Feb</i> )	38	61	*=100
Libya air strikes ( <i>Apr</i> )	37	62	1=100
U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq ( <i>Dec</i> )	34	64	2=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 31-June 3, 2012. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

In 2011, several foreign news stories attracted high levels of public interest. In fact, two of the year's three top stories were overseas events – the Japanese tsunami and nuclear disaster (55% very closely) and bin Laden's killing (50%). The third was a run-up in gas and oil prices last year, which 53% followed very closely. (For more, see [\*“2011: A Year of Big Stories Both Foreign and Domestic”\*](#) Dec. 21, 2011.)

The dramatic changes unfolding in several Middle Eastern countries also drew considerable public attention. In February 2011, nearly four-in-ten Americans (39%) followed anti-government protests in Egypt and the resignation of Hosni Mubarak very closely. And even before the United States and its allies launched airstrikes in support of anti-government rebels in Libya in late March, 38% tracked news about violence in Libya very closely.

This year, violence in Syria and other events in the Middle East have drawn far less interest. They also have drawn far less press coverage than did the standoff in Cairo's Tahrir Square and other events in the region last year. The Syrian government has placed severe restrictions on foreign press coverage of the conflict in the country. Reports by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) have found that over the past year events in Syria have generally accounted for no more than 3%-4% of news coverage per month. (For more, see PEJ's [\*“What Happened to Coverage of the Arab Spring.”\*](#) April 13, 2012.)

## Week's Top Stories: Economy, Election

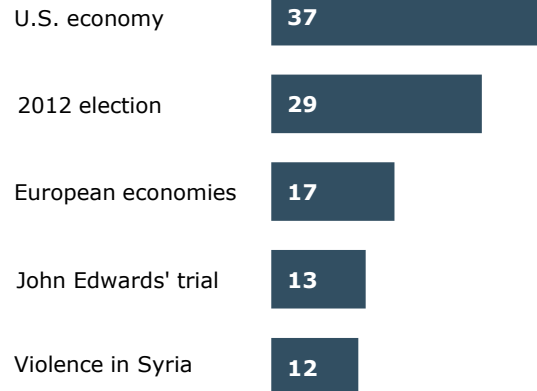
News about the economy is the week's top story. Nearly four-in-ten (37%) followed news about the condition of the economy very closely, which is on par with interest in the economy for the past several months. An increasing percentage said the news they are hearing about the economy is mostly bad; 37% say that currently, the highest percentage this year. (For more see [“Perceptions of Economic News Turn More Negative.”](#) June 5, 2012.)

Nearly three-in-ten (29%) say they are following news about the presidential candidates very closely, which also is little changed from the past few months. And while there is scant public interest in news about Europe's economic problems and political violence in Syria, interest in the conclusion of the John Edwards trial also attracted little interest. Just 13% say they followed news about the Edwards verdict very closely. Edwards was acquitted on one campaign fraud charge, while the jury deadlocked on five other charges.

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, building on the Center's longstanding research into public attentiveness to major news stories. Survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected May 31-June 3 from a nationally representative sample of 1,012 adults.

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### Little Interest in Edwards Trial



PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 31-June 3, 2012.

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## 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. 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 May 31-June 3, 2012, among a national sample of 1,012 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (603 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 409 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 191 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted 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	1,012	3.6 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for 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**  
**MAY 31-JUNE 3, 2012, NEWS INTEREST INDEX**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**N=1,012**

**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					
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
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	*

**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 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. Political violence in Syria  
May 31-June 3, 2012

12 25 25 37 1

**TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:**

April 12-15, 2012: <i>International efforts to stop political violence in Syria</i>	14	23	25	37	1
April 5-8, 2012	15	21	27	37	1
March 15-28, 2012: <i>Political violence in Syria</i>	16	26	27	30	1
March 8-11, 2012	17	23	23	37	1
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
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	*

- c. Reports about economic problems in several European countries

May 31-June 3, 2012

17 27 23 33 1

**TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:**

May 17-20, 2012: <i>Political and economic uncertainty in Greece</i>	15	22	22	41	*
May 10-13, 2012: <i>Reports about economic problems in several European countries</i>	17	24	24	34	*
May 3-6, 2012	16	23	24	36	*
February 16-20, 2012: <i>Efforts to deal with the debt crisis in Europe</i>	11	21	23	45	*
January 12-15, 2012	12	23	23	42	1
December 8-11, 2011	14	22	27	37	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
December 1-4, 2011	14	24	25	36	1
November 10-13, 2011: <i>Efforts to deal with the debt crisis in Greece and Italy</i>	15	23	23	38	1
November 3-6, 2011: <i>Efforts to deal with the debt crisis in Greece and other European countries</i>	18	26	21	34	1
October 27-30, 2011	12	27	24	36	*
September 29-October 2, 2011: <i>The debt crisis in Greece and other European countries</i>	15	21	24	39	1
September 15-18, 2011	16	23	24	37	1
August 18-21, 2011: <i>The debate among European leaders on how to address the region's debt crisis</i>	12	21	22	44	1
August 11-14, 2011: <i>Riots in London and other parts of Britain</i>	17	28	21	32	1
June 30-July 3, 2011: <i>The financial crisis and violent protests in Greece</i>	14	22	23	39	1
June 16-19, 2011	10	20	25	45	1
May 13-16, 2010: <i>A trillion-dollar bailout package for European governments facing debt problems</i>	21	26	24	28	2
May 7-10, 2010: <i>The financial crisis in Greece and violent protests there</i>	19	23	26	31	*
April 30-May 3, 2010: <i>The financial crisis in Greece</i>	6	15	28	51	1
October, 1998: <i>Financial instability around the world</i>	32	40	19	9	*
September, 1998: <i>Economic and political instability in Russia</i>	18	30	28	24	*
Late August, 1998: <i>Economic problems in Russia</i>	8	22	29	41	*
January, 1998: <i>The deepening financial crisis in many Asian countries</i>	15	25	27	33	*
March, 1995: <i>The financial and political instability in Mexico</i>	12	28	30	29	1
d. News about candidates for the 2012 presidential election					
May 31-June 3, 2012	29	28	19	23	1
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	*

**PEW.1 CONTINUED...**

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

- e. A jury acquitting John Edwards of one campaign fraud charge and deadlocking on five others

May 31-June 3, 2012	13	20	29	36	2
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**TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:**

April 26-29, 2012: <i>The trial of John Edwards on charges of conspiring to send illegal campaign donations to his mistress</i>	9	14	27	49	1
August 15-18, 2008: <i>John Edwards' admission that he had an affair</i>	13	26	30	30	1

**NO QUESTION PEW.2****QUESTIONS PEW.3 AND PEW.4 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**