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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
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Worries Over New Attacks Decline

TERRORISM TRANSFORMS NEWS INTEREST

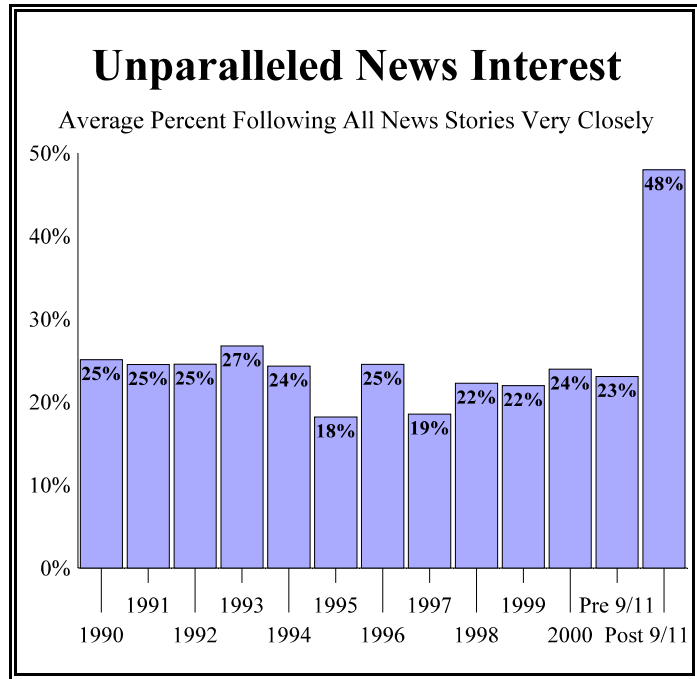
For the first eight months of 2001, public interest in the news was modest at best. The rising price of gas and China’s release of a detained American air crew were the only stories to attract close attention from majorities of the public. Other big stories – President Bush’s first year, the slowing economy, even the saga of Rep. Gary Condit – drew much smaller news audiences.

Then came the events of Sept. 11, which riveted the nation’s attention and galvanized Americans’ interest in news. In mid-September, 74% said they were very closely following news about the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon (another 22% reported following the attacks fairly closely). By mid-October, the number paying very close attention increased slightly (to 78%), so that three weeks after Sept. 11, interest in news of the attacks was still greater than for such stories as the Los Angeles riots of 1992 (70%), the end of the Persian Gulf War (67%) and the Oklahoma City bombing (58%).

Top News Interest Stories of 2001	
<i>Story ...</i>	<u>Following Very Closely</u> %
1. Terrorism attacks on the U.S. (10/17-21)	78
2. Trade Center/Pentagon attacks (9/13-17)	74
3. Identifying those who attacked U.S.(10/1-3)	72
4. High gasoline prices (May)	61
5. Defending against future terrorism (10/1-3)	57
6. Release of U.S. air crew from China (April)	55
7. Building anti-terror coalition (10/1-3)	53
8. Economic effects of terrorism (10/1-3)	52
9. Possible U.S. military action (10/1-3)	52
10. U.S. military effort in Afghanistan (10/15-17)	51
11. Airplane crash near Kennedy Airport (11/13-19)	48
12. Reports of anthrax around country (10/31-11/7)	47
13. Winter weather in Northeast and Midwest (Jan.)	42
14. Reports on the U.S. economy (11/13-19)	41
15. School shooting in San Diego (March)	39

The change in news interest in the post-Sept. 11 period was striking. On average, just 23% of the public paid very close attention to the typical news story before the attacks, which is comparable to yearly averages since 1990. But after the attacks, that number more than doubled, to 48%.

For the year, eight of the top ten news stories relate to the attacks and the U.S. military response. Rising gas prices, which typically draw considerable interest and led the list of top stories in 2000, was the top non-terrorism story (61% following very closely), followed by the release of the crew of the U.S. spy plane (55%). Non-terrorist events that occurred after Sept. 11, such as the crash of an American Airlines jet near New York in November, were somewhat overshadowed by the intense focus on terrorism. While nearly half the public (48%) followed this story very closely, far more (69%) tracked the crash of a TWA jet off of New York in 1996.



Worries Fall, Mideast Interest Rises

The latest Pew Research Center survey, conducted Dec. 10-16, finds that 60% of Americans say they are still closely following news about the terrorist attacks. While that represents a gradual decline since September, interest is on par with the top pre-Sept. 11 story (gas prices, at 61%). Fewer people (44%) say they are closely tracking news of U.S. military action in Afghanistan, though there has been only a modest dropoff since mid-October (51%).

News interest in terrorism has decreased as the public has become less concerned over the prospects of new attacks on the United States. A narrow majority of Americans (52%) say they are very or somewhat worried over new terrorist attacks, down from 73% in early October.

In the new survey, 31% say they are closely tracking the violence between Israelis in Palestinians, up from 21% in early September (before the Sept. 11 attacks). Aside from news on the war in Afghanistan and the release of the U.S. crew in China – both of which directly involve Americans – the Middle East violence was the year’s top foreign story. The current level of interest is comparable to that in October 2000, when the outbreak of Israeli-Palestinian violence and the terrorist attack on the USS Cole increased the public’s focus on the Middle East.

	<i>% following</i>	
	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>
December, 2001	31	40
Early September, 2001	21	33
April, 2001	22	34
Mid-October, 2000	30	38
Early October, 2000	21	30
January, 1997	12	23
October, 1996	17	34

About four-in-ten (37%) said they paid very close attention to economic news in December, which is down slightly from November (41%). Other stories attracted far smaller audiences. Only about one-in-ten (11%) paid very close attention to reports on the bankruptcy of Enron Corp. And about the same number (10%) were very interested in reports on the death of former Beatle George Harrison.

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Results for the survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among a nationwide sample of 1,011 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period December 10-16, 2001. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

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 FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE PRESS
MID-DECEMBER NII AND TERRORISM TRACKING SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
DECEMBER 10-16, 2001
N = 1,011

Q.1 Now I will read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past month. As I read each item, tell me if you happened to follow this news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. **[INSERT ITEM; ROTATE ITEMS A AND B FIRST, FOLLOWED BY ROTATED ITEMS C THROUGH F]**

		Very Closely	Fairly Closely	Not too Closely	Not at all Closely	DK/Ref
a.	The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan	44	38	12	5	1=100
	Mid-November, 2001	49	36	11	3	1=100
	Early November, 2001	45	36	12	6	1=100
	Mid-October, 2001	51	35	10	3	1=100
	January, 1991 ¹	67	28	4	1	0=100
b.	Terrorism attacks on the United States	60	29	7	3	1=100
	Mid-November, 2001	66	25	6	2	1=100
	Early November, 2001	63	26	6	3	2=100
	Mid-October, 2001	78	16	4	1	1=100
	Early October, 2001 ²	73	22	4	1	*=100
	Mid-September, 2001	74	22	3	1	*=100
	June, 1995 ³	58	32	8	2	*=100
c.	Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy	37	40	13	8	2=100
	Mid-November, 2001	41	36	15	7	1=100
	June, 2001	24	41	18	16	1=100
	May, 2001	34	36	15	15	0=100
	April, 2001	36	34	16	13	1=100
	February, 2001	30	39	18	12	1=100
	January, 2001	32	38	17	11	2=100
	June, 1995	26	41	22	11	*=100
	March, 1995	27	45	19	9	*=100
	February, 1995	23	41	22	13	1=100
	December, 1994	28	43	20	9	*=100
	October, 1994	27	40	20	12	1=100
	June, 1994	25	42	23	10	*=100
	May, 1994	33	40	16	10	1=100
	January, 1994	34	39	16	10	1=100
	Early January, 1994	36	44	13	7	*=100

¹ In January 1991 the question was worded: "How closely have you been following news about the War in the Gulf?"

² In Early October 2001 and Mid-September 2001 the question was worded: "News about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington?"

³ In June 1995 the question was worded: "the Oklahoma City bombing."

Q.1 CONTINUED ...

	Very Closely	Fairly Closely	Not too Closely	Not at all Closely	DK/Ref
(Item c continued)					
December, 1993	35	41	15	8	1=100
October, 1993	33	38	20	9	*=100
September, 1993	37	40	14	8	1=100
Early September, 1993	39	39	14	9	*=100
August, 1993	41	36	14	9	*=100
May, 1993	37	38	18	6	1=100
February, 1993	49	36	10	5	*=100
January, 1993	42	39	12	7	*=100
September, 1992	43	37	13	6	*=100
May, 1992	39	39	15	6	1=100
March, 1992	47	38	11	4	*=100
February, 1992	47	37	10	6	*=100
January, 1992	44	40	11	5	*=100
October, 1991	36	38	16	9	1=100
d. Continued violence in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis	31	40	19	9	1=100
Early September, 2001	21	33	25	20	1=100
April, 2001 ⁴	22	34	24	19	1=100
Mid-October, 2000	30	38	18	13	1=100
Early October, 2000	21	30	27	21	1=100
January, 1997	12	23	29	35	1=100
October, 1996	17	34	26	23	*=100
May, 1988	18	37	34	9	2=100
e. The bankruptcy of the Enron Corporation and its impact on the retirement investments of Enron employees	11	23	28	36	2=100
f. The death of former Beatle George Harrison	10	23	30	35	2=100

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In April 2001 the story was listed as "Continued violence in the Middle East." In Mid-October 2000 the story was listed as "Continued violence in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis." In Early October 2000 the story was listed as "Renewed violence in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis." In January 1997 the story was listed as "Renewed tensions between Israelis and Palestinians over Hebron." In October 1996 the story was listed as "Renewed violence between Israelis & Palestinians on the West Bank and in Jerusalem." In May 1988 the story was listed as "The conflict in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis in the occupied territories."

Q.2 In general, how would you rate the job the press has done in covering the terrorist attacks and the war against terrorism? [READ]⁵

		Mid-Nov <u>2001</u>	Mid-Oct <u>2001</u>	Early Oct <u>2001</u>	Mid-Sept <u>2001</u>	GULF WAR <u>Jan 1991</u>
32	Excellent	30	32	48	56	36
45	Good	47	42	37	33	42
15	Only fair	16	17	10	6	15
5	Poor	5	6	3	3	5
<u>3</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100

Q.3 How worried are you that there will soon be another terrorist attack in the United States? [READ]

		Oct 15-21 <u>2001</u>	Oct 10-14 <u>2001</u>	Early Oct <u>2001</u>
13	Very worried	29	27	28
39	Somewhat worried	42	40	45
27	Not too worried	18	19	15
19	Not at all worried	10	12	11
<u>2</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
100		100	100	100

⁵

In Early October 2001 and Mid-September 2001 the question was worded, "In general, how would you rate the job the press has done in covering the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon?" In January 1991 the question was worded "covering the War in the Gulf."