



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
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RECORD PUBLIC INTEREST IN MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

Fully 44% of Americans are paying very close attention to news of the Middle East conflict, with another 33% following the story fairly closely. That is the highest level of interest ever recorded on this measure, which dates back to 1988. It also makes the Middle East conflict one of the most closely followed foreign news stories not directly involving Americans in the 16-year history of the Pew Research Center's news interest index.

<i>How interested</i>	Aug-Sept	Dec	Today
	2001	2001	
	%	%	%
Very	21	31	44
Somewhat	33	40	33
Not too	25	19	13
Not at all	20	9	9
Don't know	1	1	1
	100	100	100

Over the past seven months, interest in the story has risen among all age groups, but particularly among older Americans, leading to a stark difference in interest across generations. Today, 55% of those age 65 and older say they are following news from the Middle East very closely, compared with just 31% of those under age 30.

Men are also significantly more interested in news about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than are women. Just over half of men (51%) say they are following news from the region very closely, compared with 37% of women. As recently as December of 2001, women were just as interested in news from the region as were men.

		Followed Very Closely
		%
Opening of Berlin Wall	Nov. 89	50
Breakup of Soviet Union	Oct. 91	47
Political upheaval in China	July 89	47
Chernobyl accident	July 86	46
Violence in Mideast	Apr. 02	44
Hurricane Mitch in C. Amer.	Nov. 98	36
India/Pakistan nuclear tests	Jun. 98	36

* Not directly involving U.S. troops or citizens

In a broader context, current interest in Middle East violence is comparable to public interest in the breakup of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the political upheaval in China in the late 1980s, each of which were followed very closely by 47% of Americans. But the Middle East conflict still has not garnered as much public interest as the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Americans remain very attentive to news about U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan – 45% are following this news very closely, comparable to interest levels throughout the fall and winter. Interest in news about efforts to defend against terrorist attacks at home is equally high (49% following very closely). More men than women are closely following news about the war (51% vs. 39%), while interest in defenses against domestic terrorism is roughly equal among men and women.

By comparison, public interest in reports of child sexual abuse by Catholic priests is significantly lower. Just over a quarter (27%) of Americans are following this news very closely. While 19% of the public is following news about droughts and water shortages in the U.S. very closely, interest is much higher in the drought-stricken Northeast. More than a third of those living in the Northeast (35%) say they have been following stories about the droughts very closely compared with 19% of those in the South and West, and just 9% of Midwesterners.

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 1,362 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period April 3-8, 2002. 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 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.

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Q.B 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]

ASKED IN US ONLY:		<u>Very</u>	<u>Fairly</u>	<u>Not too</u>	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
		<u>Closely</u>	<u>Closely</u>	<u>Closely</u>	<u>Closely</u>	
a.	Continued violence in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis	44	33	13	9	1=100
	December, 2001	31	40	19	9	1=100
	Early September, 2001	21	33	25	20	1=100
	April, 2001 ¹	22	34	24	19	1=100
	Mid-October, 2000	30	38	18	13	1=100
	Early October, 2000	21	30	27	21	1=100
	November, 1998	18	33	28	19	2=100
	January, 1997	12	23	29	35	1=100
	October, 1996	17	34	26	23	*=100
	September, 1995	11	32	29	27	1=100
	September, 1993	23	33	24	19	1=100
	May, 1988	18	37	34	9	2=100
b.	The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan	45	37	12	5	1=100
	February, 2002	47	39	8	5	1=100
	January, 2002	51	35	9	4	1=100
	December, 2001	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 ²	67	28	4	1	0=100
c.	Defending against terrorist attacks in the U.S.	49	35	10	5	1=100
	December, 2001 ³	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 ⁴	73	22	4	1	*=100
	Mid-September, 2001	74	22	3	1	*=100
d.	Droughts and water shortages in the U.S.	19	25	28	26	2=100
e.	Reports of sexual abuses by Catholic priests	27	34	25	13	1=100
	December, 1993	18	32	31	18	1=100

¹ 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 November 1998 and September 1995 the story was listed as "The latest Mideast peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians." 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 September 1993 the story was listed as "The peace accords between Israel and the PLO." In May 1988 the story was listed as "The conflict in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis in the occupied territories."

² In January 1991 the question was worded: "How closely have you been following news about the War in the Gulf?"

³ From Mid-October 2001 to December 2001 the story was listed as "Terrorism attacks on the United States."

⁴ In Early October 2001 and Mid-September 2001 the story was listed as "News about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington?"