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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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Iraq Remains Top News Story
CALIFORNIA, KOBE AND GAY MARRIAGES SPARK LITTLE PUBLIC INTEREST

Four months after the fall of Baghdad, developments in Iraq continue to top the public’s news agenda. Nearly half of Americans (45%) say they are following news about the current situation in Iraq very closely, while another 39% say they are following the story fairly closely. But many fewer Americans are paying very close attention to other news stories that have been dominating coverage this summer.

Fewer than one-in-five say they are paying close attention to news about the California recall election, Kobe Bryant’s troubles or even the debate about gay marriages. Interest in coverage of the Democratic presidential candidates is equally limited, and lower than it was four year ago at this time when both parties had nomination races.

Just 19% of Americans are paying very close attention to the debate over allowing gays and lesbians to marry. But religious conservatives are tracking this story more closely than are members of other religious groups. White evangelical Protestants are far more likely to be following this news very closely (32%) than are white Catholics (20%), white mainline Protestants (12%) or seculars (10%).

Reports about the sexual assault case against NBA star Kobe Bryant are drawing high levels of interest from 17% of Americans. Comparable percentages of men and women are following this story (18% of men and 16% of women are following very closely), but there is a significant racial divide. Fully 47% of African-Americans say they are following news about the Bryant case very closely, compared with just 13% of non-Hispanic whites and 18% of Hispanics.

Despite extensive news coverage of the California recall, just 15% of Americans – 12% of those outside of California – are following this story very closely. But in California, this story rivals

<i>Following news about...</i>	<u>Very closely</u> %	<u>Fairly closely</u> %
Current situation in Iraq	45	39
Uday and Qusay killed	45	35
Gay & lesbian marriage	19	30
Kobe Bryant	17	30
California recall	15	25
Dem presidential race	12	27

news about the situation in Iraq on the public's agenda.

The public remains largely disinterested in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination. Just 12% say they are following news about the candidates and campaign very closely, with another 27% following fairly closely. This is up only slightly from May, when 8% were following this story very closely and January (14%), when most of the candidates were first announcing their campaigns.

Roughly half of Democrats are following news about the nomination race very (20%) or fairly (29%) closely, compared to only about a third of Republicans (9% very closely, 26% fairly). Overall, fully one-third of the public reports paying no attention to campaign news.

While public interest in news about Iraq tops other major national stories it is still significantly below what it was in the pre-war period. In February and March, 62% reported following the debate about the war very closely.

The survey also shows President Bush's approval rating is 56%, up slightly from his early August reading of 53%. About a third disapprove of Bush's job performance (32%), down from 37% in early August.

Different Audiences for Different Stories					
<i>Following news about...</i>	Very closely	Fairly closely	Not closely	DK	# of cases
Gay marriage					
Wh. Evangelical*	32	25	42	1=100	(238)
Wh. Mainline**	12	37	49	2=100	(234)
Wh. Catholic	20	35	44	1=100	(169)
Secular	9	30	60	1=100	(104)
Kobe Bryant case					
White	13	32	54	1=100	(792)
Black	47	23	30	0=100	(88)
California recall					
California	48	27	24	1=100	(84)
Rest of nation	12	25	62	1=100	(917)
Dem. candidates					
Democrats	20	29	50	1=100	(281)
Republicans	9	26	64	1=100	(341)
Independents	7	32	61	0=100	(254)

* Protestants who are "born again or evangelical".
 ** Protestants who are not "born again or evangelical".

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Results for the *August News Interest Index* survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among a nationwide sample of 1,001 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period August 5-11, 2003. 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. For results based on smaller subgroups the sampling error is higher.

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.1 Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president? **[IF DK ENTER AS DK. IF DEPENDS PROBE ONCE WITH: Overall do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president? [IF STILL DEPENDS ENTER AS DK]**

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Mid-August, 2003	56	32	12=100
Early August, 2003	53	37	10=100
Mid-July, 2003	58	32	10=100
Early July, 2003	60	29	11=100
June, 2003	62	27	11=100
May, 2003	65	27	8=100
April 10-16, 2003	72	22	6=100
April 9, 2003	74	20	6=100
April 2-7, 2003	69	25	6=100
March 28-April 1, 2003	71	23	6=100
March 25-27, 2003	70	24	6=100
March 20-24, 2003	67	26	7=100
March 13-16, 2003	55	34	11=100
February, 2003	54	36	10=100
January, 2003	58	32	10=100
December, 2002	61	28	11=100
Late October, 2002	59	29	12=100
Early October, 2002	61	30	9=100
Mid-September, 2002	67	22	11=100
Early September, 2002	63	26	11=100
Late August, 2002	60	27	13=100
August, 2002	67	21	12=100
Late July, 2002	65	25	10=100
July, 2002	67	21	12=100
June, 2002	70	20	10=100
April, 2002	69	18	13=100
Early April, 2002	74	16	10=100
February, 2002	78	13	9=100
January, 2002	80	11	9=100
Mid-November, 2001	84	9	7=100
Early October, 2001	84	8	8=100
Late September, 2001	86	7	7=100
Mid-September, 2001	80	9	11=100
Early September, 2001	51	34	15=100
August, 2001	50	32	18=100
July, 2001	51	32	17=100
June, 2001	50	33	17=100
May, 2001	53	32	15=100
April, 2001	56	27	17=100
March, 2001	55	25	20=100
February, 2001	53	21	26=100

Q.2 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; RANDOMIZE WITH ITEM f. ALWAYS LAST.]**

		Very Closely	Fairly Closely	Not too Closely	Not at all Closely	DK/Ref
a.	News about the current situation in Iraq	45	39	10	5	1=100
	Early July, 2003	37	41	13	8	1=100
	June, 2003	46	35	13	6	*=100
	May, 2003	63	29	6	2	*=100
	April 11-16, 2003 ¹	47	40	10	2	1=100
	April 2-7, 2003	54	34	9	2	1=100
	March 20-24, 2003	57	33	7	2	1=100
	March 13-16, 2003 ²	62	27	6	4	1=100
	February, 2003	62	25	8	4	1=100
	January, 2003	55	29	10	4	2=100
	December, 2002	51	32	10	6	1=100
	Late October, 2002	53	33	8	5	1=100
	Early October, 2002	60	28	6	5	1=100
	Early September, 2002	48	29	15	6	2=100
b.	The race for the Democratic presidential nomination	12	27	27	33	1=100
	May, 2003	8	19	31	41	1=100
	January, 2003 ³	14	28	29	28	1=100
	October, 1999	17	32	28	22	1=100
	September, 1999	15	31	33	20	1=100
	July, 1999	15	38	24	22	1=100
	June, 1999	11	25	29	34	1=100
	March, 1992	35	40	16	9	*=100
	January, 1992	11	25	36	27	1=100
	December, 1991	10	28	32	30	*=100
	October, 1991	12	26	31	29	2=100
	November, 1987	15	28	35	21	1=100
c.	Basketball star Kobe Bryant being accused of sexual assault	17	30	28	24	1=100
d.	The California recall election	15	25	24	35	1=100
e.	The debate about allowing gays and lesbians to marry	19	30	22	28	1=100
f.	The killing of Saddam Hussein's two sons by U.S. military forces	45	35	13	6	1=100

¹ From March 20 to April 16, 2003 the story was listed as “**News about the war in Iraq.**”

² From October 2002 to March 13-16, 2003 the story was listed as “**Debate over the possibility that the U.S. will take military action in Iraq.**” In Early September 2002 the story was listed as “**Debate over the possibility that the U.S. will invade Iraq.**”

³ In Jan 2003 the story was listed as “**Recent announcements by prominent Democrats about plans to run for president in 2004.**” From June to October 1999 the story was listed as “**News about candidates for the 2000 presidential election.**” From November 1987 to January 1992 the story was listed as “**News about the Democratic candidates for the Presidential nomination.**”