



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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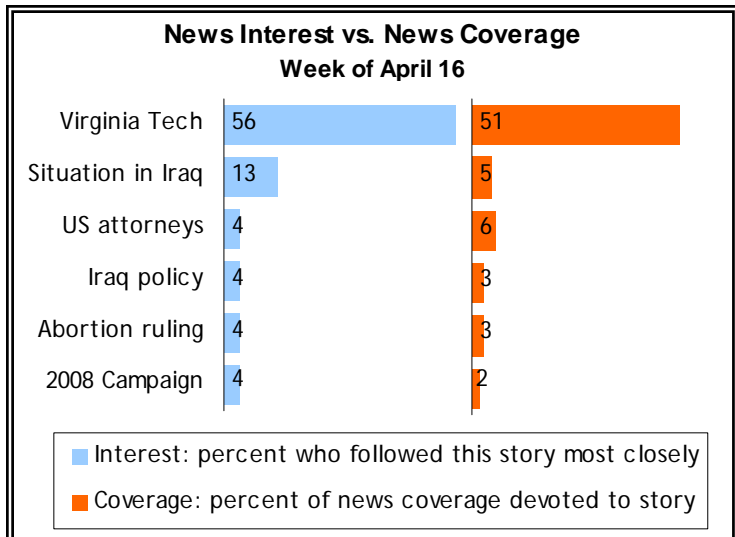
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But Public Paid Closer Attention to Columbine
WIDESPREAD INTEREST IN VIRGINIA TECH SHOOTINGS

The shootings at Virginia Tech University overshadowed all other news stories last week – both in terms of coverage and public interest. Fully 45% of Americans paid very close attention to the tragedy and 56% said it was the single news story they followed more closely than any other last week. However, interest in the Virginia Tech shootings was considerably lower than interest in the Columbine High School shootings which occurred almost exactly eight years earlier. More than two-thirds of Americans (68%) paid very close attention to the Columbine incident. Interest in the Virginia Tech shootings was on a par with school shootings that took place in the fall of 2006 (including the shooting at an Amish school house in Pennsylvania), as well as the 1998 shootings at a middle school in Jonesboro, Arkansas and a high school in Springfield Oregon.

	% following Very closely
Columbine High School {4-99}	68
Jonesboro, AR middle school {3-98}	49
Springfield, OR high school {6-98}	46
Amish schoolhouse & others {10-06}	46
Virginia Tech {5-07}	45
MI elementary school {3-00}	40
San Diego high school {3-01}	39

In a busy news week, the public’s focus was primarily on the events in Blacksburg, Virginia. While interest in the situation in Iraq was substantial, the war did not dominate the public’s attention this past week as it has throughout most of the year. Only 13% said they followed the events in Iraq more closely than any



other news story. Neither Attorney General Alberto Gonzales’s testimony before Congress concerning the firing of eight U.S. attorneys nor the Supreme Court’s abortion ruling put a dent in the Virginia Tech audience. Only 4% of the public named either of these stories as the one they followed most closely last week.

The Virginia Tech shootings attracted more public interest and received more news coverage than any other story this year. Fully 51% of all news coverage for the week was devoted to the Virginia Tech shootings and its aftermath. Cable news led the way devoting 76% of its coverage to the story. More than 60% of network television news focused on this story, as did half of all radio news. The public relied mainly on television for news about the shootings: 36% say their main source of information about the story was cable news and another 32% say they relied primarily on network TV news. The Internet was the main source of news on the shootings for 11% of the public, while 9% relied mainly on newspapers and another 9% relied on radio.

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 agenda. 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.

Mixed Reactions to Media Coverage

Overall, the press receives positive ratings for its coverage of the shootings at Virginia Tech. Two-thirds of the public says the press has done an excellent (23%) or good (43%) job in covering the story. Three-in-ten say the press has done only a fair (20%) or poor (10%) job. Nonetheless, half of the public believes the Virginia Tech story has been over-covered, while 40% say it has gotten the right amount of coverage. Only 6% say the story has received too little coverage. The public had a similar reaction to coverage of the Columbine shootings eight years ago – 45% of the public said the media had given that story too much coverage, and

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
	%	%	%	%
<i>Job press has done:</i>				
Excellent	23	18	30	19
Good	43	48	47	38
Only fair	20	21	15	25
Poor	10	10	6	13
Don't know	4	3	2	5
	100	100	100	100
<i>Amount of coverage:</i>				
Too much	50	57	46	48
Too little	6	4	5	9
Right amount	40	35	46	39
Don't know	4	4	3	4
	100	100	100	100
<i>NBC's decision to broadcast shooter's materials:</i>				
Approve	49	39	58	50
Disapprove	41	53	35	39
Don't know	10	8	7	11
	100	100	100	100

48% said it had received about the right amount of coverage.

The vast majority of Americans (69%) have seen the pictures and video of the Virginia Tech shooter that he himself sent to NBC news. The public is divided as to whether or not NBC news made the right decision releasing and broadcasting these materials: 49% approve of NBC's decision, 41% disapprove.

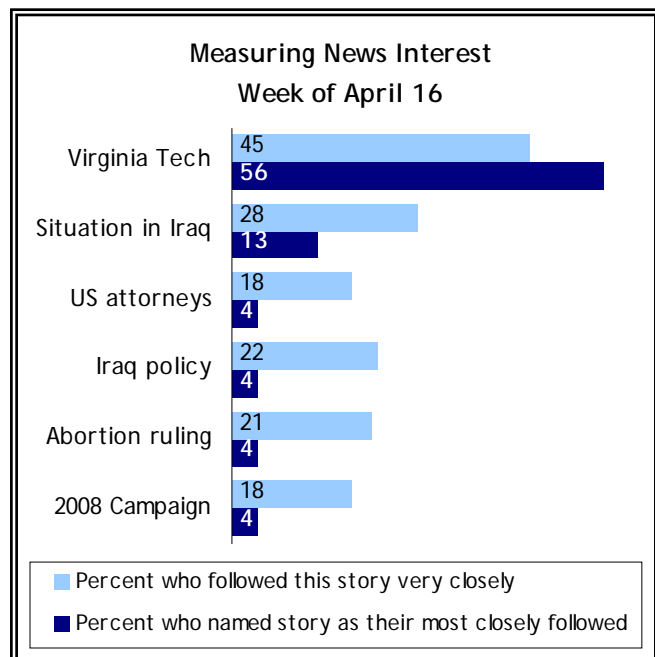
As is often the case, evaluations of press coverage of the shootings differ substantially along party lines. Republicans are slightly more critical of the job the media has done in covering the story and they are more likely to say the story has received too much coverage. The biggest partisan gap is on the question of what NBC news should have done with the materials from the shooter. A 53% majority of Republicans disapprove of NBC's decision to broadcast and release the pictures and video. Among Democrats, a 58% majority *approves* of NBC's actions.

Not only are more Republicans more critical of the media's coverage of the shootings, they were also less likely to closely follow the story in the news (40% of Republicans vs. 55% of Democrats followed very closely). Women were somewhat more interested in the story than were men – 50% of women followed it very closely vs. 41% of men. Blacks followed the story more closely than did whites (66% vs. 44%, respectively, followed very closely). The shootings were not a regional story. Those living in the northeast, the south and the north central region paid equally close attention to the story. The one exception is the west where only 30% followed the story very closely.

Iraq, Gonzales and Other News

In other news this week, 28% of the public paid very close attention to the situation in Iraq, while 22% closely followed the debate in Washington about Iraq policy. Interest in the 2008 presidential campaign was unchanged from the previous week – 18% followed news about the candidates very closely, and another 28% followed campaign news fairly closely. Democrats continue to follow the campaign more closely than Republicans.

In spite of Gonzales's long-awaited testimony, fewer than 20% of the public



paid very close attention to the continuing saga surrounding why eight U.S. attorneys were fired by the Justice Department. This is another story Democrats have consistently followed more closely than Republicans. This past week 27% of Democrats vs. 11% of Republicans paid very close attention to the story.

The Supreme Court's decision to uphold the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act was followed very closely by 21% of the public. Though the ruling may have been overshadowed in part by the events at Virginia Tech, public interest was not far below that of other abortion rulings by the Court over the past 10-20 years. When the Court ruled in 2000 that a Nebraska law banning late-term abortion was unconstitutional, only 15% of the public followed the decision very closely. However, 28% of the public paid very close attention to the Court's deliberations on Pennsylvania abortion restrictions in 1992. The Court's ruling in the 1989 *Webster* case attracted much more public interest – 47% followed that decision very closely. Women paid slightly more attention to last week's abortion ruling than did men. Democrats and Republicans followed the story in about equal proportions.

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 Sunday through Friday) PEJ will compile this data to identify the top stories for the week. The News Interest Index survey will collect data from Friday through Monday to gauge public interest in the most covered stories of the week.

Results for the weekly surveys are based on telephone interviews among a nationwide sample of approximately 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older, conducted under the direction of ORC (Opinion Research Corporation). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling 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, and that results based on subgroups will have larger margins of error.

For more information about the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, go to www.journalism.org.

About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of six projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
APRIL 20-23, 2007 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,042

Q.1 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, 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 ITEMS] [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>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
a. News about the current situation and events in Iraq					
Iraq	28	35	22	15	*=100
April 12-16, 2007	34	33	20	13	*=100
April 5-9, 2007	33	39	16	11	1=100
March 30-April 2, 2007	34	37	16	13	*=100
March 23-26, 2007¹	31	38	18	12	1=100
March 16-19, 2007	34	34	17	15	*=100
March 9-12, 2007	34	37	16	13	*=100
March 2-5, 2007	37	37	16	9	1=100
February 23-26, 2007	36	36	15	13	*=100
February 16-19, 2007	30	36	19	14	1=100
February 9-12, 2007	37	34	18	11	*=100
February 2-5, 2007	38	38	17	7	*=100
January 26-29, 2007	36	38	15	11	*=100
January 19-22, 2007	37	34	18	10	1=100
January 12-15, 2007	38	36	17	8	1=100
January, 2007	46	40	8	5	1=100
January 5-8, 2007	40	32	16	12	0=100
December, 2006	42	39	12	7	*=100
November 30-December 3, 2006	40	36	13	11	*=100
Mid-November, 2006	44	38	12	6	*=100
September, 2006	33	43	14	8	2=100
August, 2006	41	39	12	7	1=100
June, 2006	37	43	13	6	1=100
May, 2006	42	35	15	7	1=100
April, 2006	43	36	13	7	1=100
March, 2006	43	38	12	6	1=100
February, 2006	39	42	12	6	1=100
January, 2006	40	40	12	7	1=100
December, 2005	45	38	11	5	1=100
Early November, 2005	41	40	13	6	*=100
Early October, 2005	43	36	15	6	*=100
Early September, 2005	32	40	20	7	1=100
July, 2005	43	37	13	6	1=100
Mid-May, 2005	42	42	11	5	*=100
Mid-March, 2005	40	39	14	5	2=100
February, 2005	38	45	13	4	*=100
January, 2005	48	37	11	4	*=100
December, 2004	34	44	15	6	1=100
Mid-October, 2004	42	38	11	8	1=100
Early September, 2004	47	37	9	6	1=100
August, 2004	39	42	12	6	1=100

¹ From May, 2003 to March 23-26, 2007, the story was listed as “News about the current situation in Iraq.”

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
July, 2004	43	40	11	6	*=100
June, 2004	39	42	12	6	1=100
April, 2004	54	33	8	5	*=100
Mid-March, 2004	47	36	12	4	1=100
Early February, 2004	47	38	10	4	1=100
Mid-January, 2004	48	39	9	4	*=100
December, 2003	44	38	11	6	1=100
November, 2003	52	33	9	5	1=100
September, 2003	50	33	10	6	1=100
Mid-August, 2003	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 ²	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 ³	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 ⁴	48	29	15	6	2=100
b. The debate in Washington over U.S. policy in Iraq					
Iraq	22	29	24	25	*=100
April 12-16, 2007	25	29	22	23	1=100
April 5-9, 2007	31	28	20	21	*=100
March 30-April 2, 2007	26	29	21	23	1=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
January 12-15, 2007: President Bush's proposal to increase the number of U.S. troops in Iraq	40	33	13	13	1=100
c. The shootings at Virginia Tech University that resulted in the death of 33 people					
TREND FOR COMPARISON:	45	37	13	5	*=100
October, 2006: Schools in PA & other states	46	33	12	8	1=100
March, 2001: San Diego high school	39	37	16	7	1=100
March, 2000: MI elementary school	40	38	15	7	*=100
April, 1999: Columbine High School	68	24	6	2	*=100
June, 1998: Springfield, OR high school	46	36	14	4	*=100
March, 1998: Jonesboro, AR middle school	49	33	12	5	1=100

² From March 20-24, 2003 to April 11-16, 2003, the story was listed as "News about the war in Iraq."

³ From Early 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."

⁴ In Early September, 2002, the story was listed as "Debate over the possibility that the U.S. will invade Iraq."

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
d. News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election	18	28	27	27	*=100
April 12-16, 2007	18	28	27	27	*=100
April 5-9, 2007	25	30	26	19	*=100
March 30-April 2, 2007	20	29	27	23	1=100
March 23-26, 2007	20	32	22	26	*=100
March 16-19, 2007	15	28	29	27	1=100
March 9-12, 2007	24	30	23	23	*=100
March 2-5, 2007	19	31	26	23	1=100
February 23-26, 2007	22	33	24	21	*=100
February 16-19, 2007	18	32	22	27	1=100
February 9-12, 2007	24	30	24	21	1=100
February 2-5, 2007	24	36	22	18	*=100
January 26-29, 2007	24	33	23	20	*=100
January 19-22, 2007⁵	24	27	22	26	1=100
2004 Presidential Election					
November, 2004 (RVs)	52	36	8	4	*=100
Mid-October, 2004	46	30	12	11	1=100
August, 2004	32	38	16	14	*=100
July, 2004	29	37	18	15	1=100
April, 2004	31	33	19	16	1=100
Mid-March, 2004	35	34	18	13	*=100
Late February, 2004	24	40	23	12	1=100
Early February, 2004 ⁶	29	37	20	13	1=100
Mid-January, 2004	16	30	27	26	1=100
Early January, 2004	14	32	30	23	1=100
December, 2003	16	26	27	30	1=100
November, 2003	11	26	34	28	1=100
October, 2003	12	27	28	32	1=100
September, 2003	17	25	30	27	1=100
Mid-August, 2003	12	27	27	33	1=100
May, 2003	8	19	31	41	1=100
January, 2003	14	28	29	28	1=100
2000 Presidential Election					
Early November, 2000 (RVs)	39	44	12	5	*=100
Mid-October, 2000 (RVs)	40	37	15	8	8=100
Early October, 2000 (RVs)	42	36	15	6	1=100
September, 2000	22	42	21	15	*=100
July, 2000	21	38	20	20	1=100
June, 2000	23	32	23	21	1=100
May, 2000	18	33	26	23	*=100
April, 2000	18	39	22	20	1=100
March, 2000	26	41	19	13	1=100

⁵ January 19-22, 2007 asked about "Recent announcements by prominent Democrats about plans to run for president in 2008."

⁶ From May 2003 to Early February 2004 and in March 1992, the story was listed as "The race for the Democratic nomination." In January 2003, the story was listed as "Recent announcements by prominent Democrats about plans to run for president in 2004." In September 2000, Early September and July 1996, and May 1992, the question asked about "the presidential election campaign." In January, March and April 1996, the story was listed as "News about the Republican presidential candidates." In August 1992, the story was listed as "News about the presidential election." In July 1992, the story was listed as "News about the presidential campaign." In January 1992, the story was listed as "News about the Democratic candidates for the presidential nomination." In 1988, the story was introduced as being from "this past year" and was listed as "News about the presidential campaign in 1988."

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
February, 2000	26	36	21	17	*=100
January, 2000	19	34	28	18	1=100
December, 1999	16	36	24	23	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
1996 Presidential Election					
November, 1996 (RVs)	34	45	15	6	*=100
October, 1996	31	39	18	12	*=100
Early September, 1996	24	36	23	17	*=100
July, 1996	22	40	23	14	1=100
March, 1996	26	41	20	13	*=100
January, 1996	10	34	31	24	1=100
September, 1995	12	36	30	22	*=100
August, 1995	13	34	28	25	*=100
June, 1995	11	31	31	26	1=100
1992 Presidential Election					
October, 1992 (RVs)	55	36	7	2	0=100
September, 1992 (RVs)	47	36	11	6	*=100
August, 1992 (RVs)	36	51	11	2	0=100
July, 1992	20	45	26	9	*=100
May, 1992	32	44	16	8	*=100
March, 1992	35	40	16	9	*=100
January, 1992	11	25	36	27	1=100
December, 1991	10	28	32	30	*=100
1988 Presidential Election					
October, 1988 (RVs)	43	44	11	2	*=100
August, 1988 (RVs)	39	45	13	3	*=100
May, 1988	22	46	23	6	3=100
November, 1987	15	28	35	21	1=100
September, 1987	14	34	37	14	1=100
e. Questions about how the White House and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales were involved in the firing of eight federal prosecutors					
	18	21	28	32	1=100
April 5-9, 2007	22	26	24	28	*=100
March 30-April 2, 2007	22	25	22	30	1=100
March 23-26, 2007	20	28	24	28	*=100
March 16-19, 2007	19	24	22	35	*=100
March 9-12, 2007⁷	9	17	22	52	*=100
f. The Supreme Court decision to uphold a ban on partial birth abortion					
	21	25	24	29	1=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
July, 2000: Supreme Court ruling that Nebraska law banning late-term abortion was unconstitutional	15	23	18	43	1=100
May, 1992: Supreme Court deliberations on Pennsylvania abortion restrictions	28	34	24	13	1=100

⁷ March 9-12, 2007 asked about "The firing of eight federal prosecutors by the Justice Department."

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
July, 1991: Supreme Court decision allowing laws that bar federally funded agencies from discussing abortion	25	31	24	19	1=100
July, 1989: Supreme Court decision on abortion	47	36	14	3	*=100
May, 1989: Supreme Court hearing arguments in Missouri abortion case	25	29	21	24	1=100

Q.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. IF "IRAQ" UNSPECIFIED, PROBE: "Do you mean events IN Iraq or the debate over Iraq POLICY?"**)

- 56 The shootings at Virginia Tech University that resulted in the death of 33 people
- 13 News about the current situation and events in Iraq
- 4 Questions about how the White House and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales were involved in the firing of eight federal prosecutors
- 4 The debate in Washington over U.S. policy in Iraq
- 4 The Supreme Court decision to uphold a ban on partial birth abortion
- 4 News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election
- 5 Some other story (**SPECIFY**)
- 10 Don't know/Refused
- 100

Now thinking about the shootings at Virginia Tech University...

Q.3 Which would you say has been your MAIN source for news about this story [**READ AND RANDOMIZE ITEMS 1-5**]?

- 9 Newspapers
- 32 Network television news, such as ABC, CBS or NBC
- 36 Cable news channels such as CNN or the Fox News Channel
- 9 Radio
- 11 The internet
- 2 [**DO NOT READ**] Some other
- 1 [**DO NOT READ**] Don't know/Refused
- 100

Q.4 In general, how would you rate the job the press has done in covering the shootings at Virginia Tech University [**READ**]?

- 23 Excellent
- 43 Good
- 20 Only fair
- 10 Poor
- 4 [**VOL. DO NOT READ**] Don't know/Refused
- 100

Q.5 Do you think news organizations are giving too much, too little, or the right amount of coverage to this story?

50	Too much
6	Too little
40	Right amount
<u>4</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

Q.6 As you may know, the shooter sent a package containing pictures and videos of himself to NBC news on the day of the shootings. Did you happen to see any of these pictures or videos, or not?

69	Yes
31	No
<u>*</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

Q.7 Do you approve or disapprove of NBC news's decision to broadcast and release these pictures and videos?

49	Approve
41	Disapprove
<u>10</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	