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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
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Neither Bush nor Democrats Making Their Case
PUBLIC DISSATISFIED WITH IRAQ DEBATE COVERAGE

The debate over future Iraq war policy took center stage in Washington and in the national news last week. However, public interest in the story was modest at best as Americans expressed frustration with the quality of the debate and the clarity of the competing arguments. Only 18% of the public paid very close attention to the debate over U.S. policy in Iraq, and 7% said it was the single news story they followed more closely than any other last week. In contrast, the policy debate was the most heavily covered news story of the week, filling up 15% of the overall newshole. In spite of the media’s focus on the policy debate, the public remains more interested in the events on the ground in Iraq.

The public’s lack of engagement in the policy debate may be related to a sense of frustration about how the debate has been framed. Among those who have been paying at least some attention to news about Iraq policy, less than one-third (32%) think that news organizations are doing an excellent or good job explaining the current debate over the war funding bill. Nearly two-thirds (64%) say news organizations are doing only a fair or poor job explaining the debate.

George Bush and the Democratic leaders in Congress receive equally low marks from the public for framing their respective positions on the war funding bill.

Iraq War Funding Bill: Arguments Fall Flat*				
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>
	%	%	%	%
<i>Job news organizations have done explaining debate:</i>				
Excellent/Good	32	28	43	25
Only fair/Poor	64	69	53	72
Don't know	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>Job Bush has done explaining his position:</i>				
Excellent/Good	34	56	19	33
Only fair/Poor	64	41	80	65
Don't know	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>Job Democratic leaders have done explaining their position:</i>				
Excellent/Good	39	23	59	33
Only fair/Poor	57	71	40	63
Don't know	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>
	100	100	100	100

* Based on those who are following the debate over U.S. policy in Iraq very, fairly, or not too closely.

Only 34% of those who are following the policy debate say Bush has done an excellent or good job explaining his position on the war funding bill, while 64% say he has done a fair or poor job. The Democratic leaders in Congress get only slightly higher ratings: 39% say they've done an excellent or good job explaining their position on the bill, and 57% say they've done a fair or poor job.

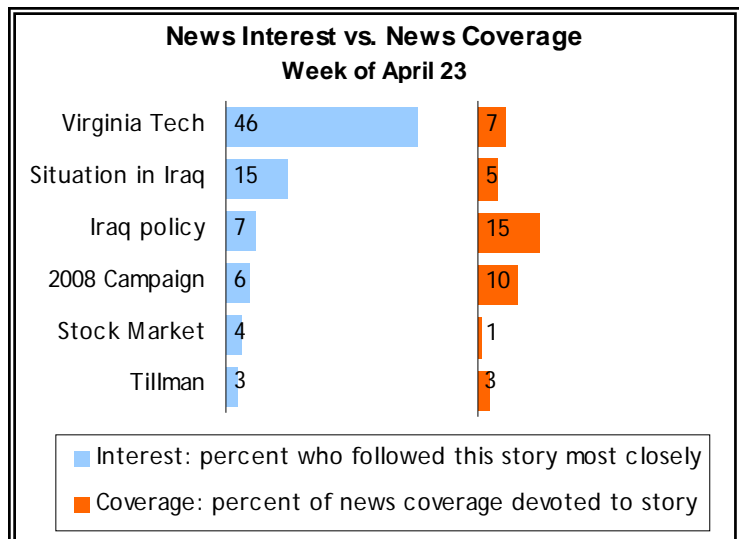
Not surprisingly, there are sharp partisan differences on these ratings, with Republicans more likely to praise Bush and Democrats more supportive of their leadership in Congress. Even given these predictable party gaps, sizeable minorities of Republicans and Democrats fault their own party for its lack of clarity in the debate. More than four-in-ten Republicans (41%) who are paying at least some attention to the Iraq policy debate say Bush has done a fair or poor job explaining his position on the war funding bill, and 40% of Democrats give their party leaders in Congress similarly low marks. Independents are especially critical of both parties: 65% say Bush has done a fair or poor job explaining his position and nearly as many (63%) say the Democratic leaders have done a fair or poor job.

Democrats have the most positive view of how the media has done in explaining the war funding debate. Among those who are following the issue, 43% of Democrats say the media has done an excellent or good job, compared to 28% of Republicans and 25% of Independents.

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.

Interest in Virginia Tech Story Still High

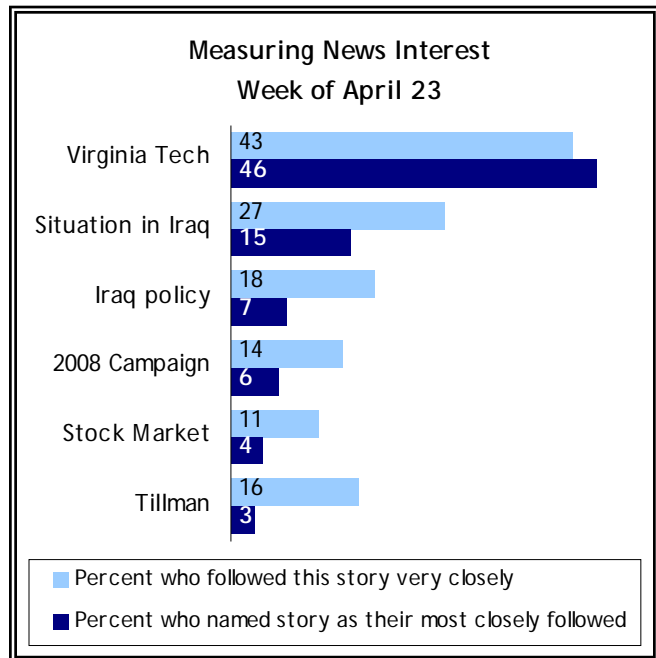
While the media's top story last week was the Iraq policy debate, the public remained focused on the aftermath of the shootings at Virginia Tech University. Fully 43% of Americans followed news about the shootings very closely, and 46% said this was the single news story they followed more closely than any other



last week. News coverage of the Virginia Tech shootings fell off dramatically from the previous week: 7% of the news coverage across all media sectors was devoted to the story last week, compared to 51% the week the shootings took place.

The second most closely followed news story, far behind the shootings, was the situation in Iraq – 27% of the public followed events in Iraq very closely and 15% said this was the news story they followed more closely than any other last week. Over the past month, the public has consistently expressed greater interest in the war itself than in the policy debate

Interest in the 2008 presidential campaign has fallen off somewhat in recent weeks. In spite of two significant campaign-related events – John McCain’s official announcement that he is a candidate for the Republican nomination and the Democratic candidates’ debate in South Carolina – only 14% of the public paid very close attention last week to news about the campaign. Throughout much of this year, close to one-quarter of the public has been following the campaign very closely. Media coverage of the campaign was substantial last week making up 10% of the overall newshole.



A record-setting week on Wall Street didn’t attract a great deal of public attention. Only 11% of the public followed news about the stock market very closely, 4% said this was the news story they followed most closely. The public paid closer attention two months ago when stocks tumbled over 400 points (21% followed the story very closely during the last week of February). This past week the story was of greater interest to higher income Americans – fully 43% of those with annual household incomes of \$75,000 or higher followed the story very or fairly closely.

The congressional hearing into the circumstances surrounding the death of Pat Tillman in Afghanistan and the capture of Jessica Lynch in Iraq attracted modest public interest: 16% of the public followed this story very closely and another 25% paid fairly close attention. Democrats followed the story somewhat closer than Republicans. This story received relatively little newspaper or radio coverage. However, it was a top five story among online sources and network and cable TV news shows.

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 27-30, 2007 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,040

Q.1 There are already many candidates for the 2008 presidential election. Can you tell me the name of the candidate you've heard the MOST about in the news lately? [OPEN-END. RECORD FIRST MENTION ONLY]

<u>March 16-19, 2007</u>		
41	Hillary Clinton	37
23	Barack Obama	24
3	John Edwards	1
4	John McCain	3
3	Rudy Giuliani	3
1	Mitt Romney	1
1	George W. Bush	2
*	Fred Thompson	0
1	Other	4
<u>23</u>	<u>Don't know/Refused</u>	<u>25</u>
100		100

Q.2 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	27	35	21	16	1=100
April 20-23, 2007	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

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

Q.2 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
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
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	18	31	21	29	1=100
April 20-23, 2007	22	29	24	25	*=100
April 12-16, 2007	25	29	22	23	1=100
April 5-9, 2007	31	28	20	21	*=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.2 CONTINUED...

	Very <u>Closely</u>	Fairly <u>Closely</u>	Not too <u>Closely</u>	Not at all <u>Closely</u>	DK/ <u>Refused</u>
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. Reports about the shootings at Virginia Tech University that resulted in the death of 33 people	43	36	13	7	1=100
April 20-23, 2007⁵	45	37	13	5	*=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
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
May, 1999: Columbine High School ⁶	59	31	7	2	1=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
d. News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election	14	30	29	26	1=100
April 20-23, 2007	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, 2007⁷	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 ⁸	29	37	20	13	1=100

⁵ April 27-30, 2007 asked about "The shootings at Virginia Tech University that resulted in the death of 33 people."

⁶ May, 1999 asked about "The events following the shooting of students and teachers at a Colorado high school."

⁷ January 19-22, 2007 asked about "Recent announcements by prominent Democrats about plans to run for president in 2008."

⁸ 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

Q.2 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
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	*=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
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

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.2 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
September, 1987	14	34	37	14	1=100
e. Recent major up and downs in the U.S. Stock Market	11	19	22	46	2=100
March 16-19, 2007	18	21	25	35	1=100
March 2-5, 2007⁹	21	28	25	26	*=100
Early September, 2002	27	30	20	22	1=100
Late July, 2002	33	33	15	18	1=100
March, 2001	27	27	18	27	1=100
Mid-October, 2000	20	26	23	31	1=100
April, 2000	18	28	23	31	*=100
Early April, 2000	19	29	20	32	*=100
March, 2000	23	29	21	26	1=100
March, 1999	18	29	22	31	*=100
January, 1999	24	28	19	28	1=100
Early September, 1998	32	31	20	17	*=100
Mid-August, 1998	17	23	21	39	*=100
January, 1998	21	25	23	31	*=100
Early November, 1997 ¹⁰	16	29	22	33	*=100
Mid-November, 1997	25	36	18	20	1=100
September, 1997	14	22	23	40	1=100
April, 1997	17	21	22	40	*=100
February, 1996	12	20	25	42	1=100
f. Evidence that the military lied in reports about Pat Tillman's death in Afghanistan and Jessica Lynch's capture in Iraq	16	25	26	31	2=100

Q.3 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?"**)

46	The shootings at Virginia Tech University that resulted in the death of 33 people
15	News about the current situation and events in Iraq
7	The debate in Washington over U.S. policy in Iraq
6	News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election
4	Recent major up and downs in the U.S. Stock Market
3	Evidence that the military lied in reports about Pat Tillman's death in Afghanistan and Jessica Lynch's capture in Iraq
7	Some other story (SPECIFY)
<u>12</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

⁹ March 2-5 asked about "The recent drop in the U.S. stock market."

¹⁰ In Early November, 1997, the story was listed as "Thinking about last Monday when the stock market dropped..."

ASK Q.4 THROUGH Q.6 IF FOLLOWED IRAQ DEBATE (1 THROUGH 3 IN Q.2B):

Q.4 As you may know, Congress and the president are currently debating a new funding bill for Iraq. From what you've seen and heard, are news organizations doing an excellent, good, only fair, or poor job of explaining what this debate is all about?

4 Excellent
28 Good
36 Only Fair
28 Poor
4 (VOL. DO NOT READ) Don't know/Refused
100

ROTATE Q.5 AND Q.6

Q.5 How well has George W. Bush done in explaining HIS position on the current Iraq War funding bill? **[READ]**

10 Excellent
24 Good
26 Only Fair
38 Poor
2 (VOL. DO NOT READ) Don't know/Refused
100

Q.6 How well have Democratic leaders in Congress done in explaining THEIR position on the current Iraq War funding bill? **[READ]**

8 Excellent
31 Good
34 Only Fair
23 Poor
4 (VOL. DO NOT READ) Don't know/Refused
100