



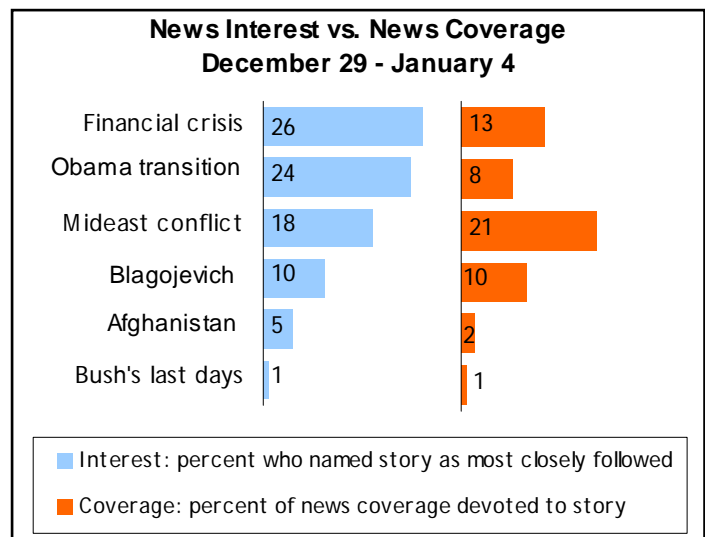
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**Press Viewed as 'Fair' to Bush and Obama**

**MIDEAST COMPETES WITH ECONOMY AND OBAMA FOR PUBLIC INTEREST**

News reports last week about the escalating conflict between Israel and Hamas competed for public attention with stories about the U.S. financial crisis and the Obama presidential transition. Roughly three-in-ten (28%) paid very close attention to news about renewed fighting in the Gaza Strip, while 18% say this was the single news story they followed most closely. Still, in a week in which the media devoted more newshole to Middle East coverage than any other story, Americans remained most focused on the continuing economic crisis.



Public interest in the first days of the latest Middle East conflict is on par with other recent foreign news stories, but is lower than interest in the Israel-Hezbollah war in August 2006: 40% followed news of that conflict very closely. It is important to note that the current survey was already in the field when Israel launched its ground invasion on Jan. 3, ratcheting up the intensity of the conflict and the media coverage. According to the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, reports from the Middle East led all news coverage last week, accounting for 21% of the newshole. [For a ranking of recent foreign news stories See ["Strong Advance Interest in Democratic Convention"](#) released August 21, 2008.]

In terms of the balance of reporting, nearly equal pluralities say that the media have been fair in coverage of actions by Israel (43%) and actions by Hamas (42%). But a slightly greater percentage say that the media have *not* been critical enough of Hamas than say the same about

coverage of Israel (30% vs 25%, respectively). Fewer say that the press has been too critical of Israel (16%) or too critical of Hamas (8%).

While many Republicans and Democrats see the coverage as fair to both sides in the conflict, the groups differ somewhat in their views on how news coverage portrays the actions of Israel. More Democrats (28%) than Republicans (15%) say that the media have not been critical enough in how they have covered Israel's actions. By contrast, Republicans (21%) are more likely than Democrats (12%) to see the coverage as too critical of Israel. Notably, partisans hold largely the same views on coverage of Hamas' actions in the current conflict.

<i>Press coverage of _____ has been...</i>	<u>Total</u> %	<u>Rep</u> %	<u>Dem</u> %	<u>Ind</u> %
<b>The actions of Israel</b>				
Too critical	16	21	12	20
Not critical enough	25	15	28	29
Fair	43	45	44	40
Don't know	<u>16</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>11</u>
	100	100	100	100
<b>The actions of Hamas</b>				
Too critical	8	4	8	10
Not critical enough	30	31	28	32
Fair	42	46	45	40
Don't know	<u>20</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>18</u>
	100	100	100	100

### Coverage of the Transition

The American public is more likely to say the press has been too critical of President George W. Bush in his last days in office than to say the same about coverage of President-elect Barack Obama. About three-in-ten (29%) see coverage of Bush as too critical, while just 11% see coverage of Obama that way. Still, a plurality (41%) says press coverage of Bush has been fair, while a substantial majority (61%) says the same about coverage of Obama. About one-in-four find coverage of both not critical enough.

<i>Press coverage of _____ has been...</i>	<u>Total</u> %	<u>Rep</u> %	<u>Dem</u> %	<u>Ind</u> %
<b>Barack Obama</b>				
Too critical	11	9	16	7
Not critical enough	23	37	11	28
Fair	61	50	69	61
Don't know	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>
	100	100	100	100
<b>George W. Bush</b>				
Too critical	29	62	12	30
Not critical enough	26	10	34	26
Fair	41	27	50	41
Don't know	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>
	100	100	100	100

These findings are largely driven by partisan views of how the media portrays Bush and Obama. Fully 62% of Republicans say the press has been too critical of Bush. About one-in-four (27%) Republicans say the press has been fair and just 10% say the press has not been critical enough of him. Democrats and independents are less disparaging of Bush's press coverage. Half of Democrats view coverage of Bush as fair and a plurality (41%) of independents share this view.

When asked about coverage of Obama, half of Republicans say that the press has been fair, while a substantial minority (37%) say the press coverage has not been critical enough. Very few Republicans (9%) say that the press has been too critical of the president-elect.

Democrats (69%), meanwhile, overwhelmingly say that the press has been fair in the way it has covered Obama. Some 16% of Democrats say the press has been too critical of Obama and 11% say it has not been critical enough.

Not surprisingly, the public has been following news about Obama’s transition to power more closely than President Bush’s final days in the White House. Plans for the new administration received considerably more attention from the media, ranking fourth among the top ten stories according to Pew’s Project for Excellence in Journalism and accounting for 8% of the newshole. Stories about Bush’s final days in office did not make the project’s top ten for the week.

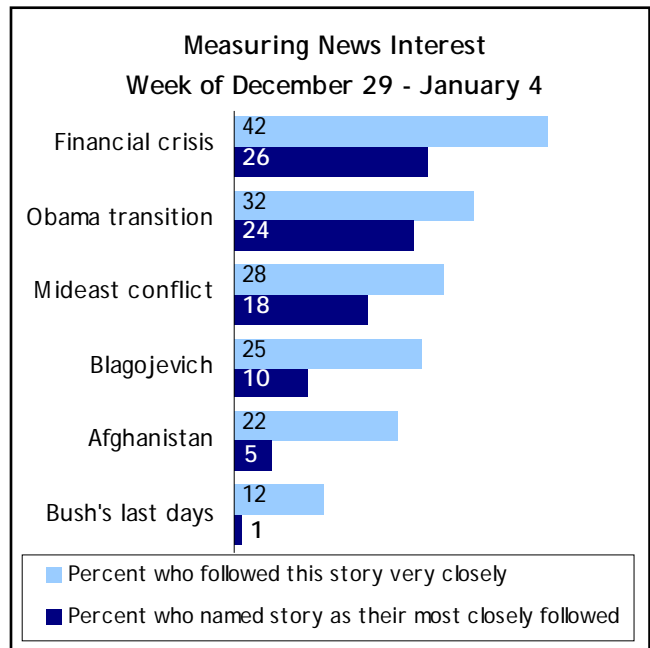
Among the public, three-in-ten (32%) followed Obama’s appointments and plans very closely, making it among the most closely followed stories of the week. One-in-four (24%) say that the transition was the story they followed most closely. Reports about President Bush’s last days in the White House were followed very closely by 12% of the public; this was the top story for 1% of Americans. These stories accounted for 1% of total news.

### Top Stories of the Week

News about U.S. economic conditions shared the public’s attention with the Obama transition and the conflict in the Middle East last week. Four-in-ten (42%) Americans followed the economy very closely; 26% said this was the new story they followed more closely than all other reporting. The media devoted 13% of the newshole to reports about the economy.

In other findings from Pew’s Weekly News Interest Index, one-in-four Americans say they followed news about Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich appointing Roland Burris to replace Obama in the

Senate, despite an ongoing corruption investigation alleging Blagojevich attempted to sell the seat for personal gain. The Blagojevich saga was the most closely followed story of the week for 10% of the public. Two-in-ten (22%) paid very close attention to news about the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan; 5% cited this as their top story.



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 coverage. 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. In the most recent week, data relating to news coverage were collected from December 29, 2008-January 4, 2009 and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected January 2-4, 2009 from a nationally representative sample of 1,017 adults.

## 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 compiles this data to identify the top stories for the week. The News Interest Index survey collects 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](http://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 seven 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**  
**JANUARY 2-4, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY**  
**TOPLINE**  
**N=1,017**

Q.1 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please 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. Conflict between the Israeli military and Hamas forces in Gaza	<b>28</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:<sup>1</sup></b>					
<b>March 7-10, 2008</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>*=100</b>
August, 2006	40	34	14	10	2=100
September, 2003	31	36	20	13	*=100
Early June, 2003	26	40	20	13	1=100
December, 2002	29	36	22	12	1=100
Early October, 2002	32	39	20	8	1=100
June, 2002	38	33	18	10	1=100
April, 2002	38	37	14	10	1=100
Early April, 2002	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	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
b. Reports about President Bush’s last days in the White House	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>December 5-8, 2008</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>1=100</b>
c. The Governor of Illinois appointing someone to fill Obama’s Senate seat while under investigation for corruption	<b>25</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:<sup>2</sup></b>					
<b>December 12-15, 2008</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>1=100</b>
d. Barack Obama’s appointments and plans for his administration	<b>32</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>December 12-15, 2008</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>December 5-8, 2008</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>*=100</b>

<sup>1</sup> In Early September 2001 through September, 2003 and for Mid-October 2000 and March 7-10, 2008 the item was listed as “Continued violence in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis.” In August 2006 the item was listed as “The military conflict between Israel and Hezbollah forces in Lebanon.” In April 2001 the item was listed as “Continued violence in the Middle East.” In Early October 2000 the item was listed as “Renewed violence in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis.” In January 1997 the item was listed as “Renewed tensions between Israelis and Palestinians over Hebron.” In October 1996 the item was listed as “Renewed violence between Israelis & Palestinians on the West Bank and in Jerusalem.” In May 1988 the item was listed as “The conflict in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis in the occupied territories.”

<sup>2</sup> For December 12-15, 2008 the item was listed as “The arrest of the Illinois Governor on corruption charges associated with Barack Obama’s vacant Senate seat.”

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	Very <u>Closely</u>	Fairly <u>Closely</u>	Not too <u>Closely</u>	Not at all <u>Closely</u>	DK/ <u>Refused</u>
November 21-24, 2008 <sup>3</sup>	49	24	15	12	*=100
November 14-17, 2008	32	37	16	15	*=100
November 7-10, 2008	39	30	17	14	*=100
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:<sup>4</sup></b>					
January, 2001: <i>G.W. Bush's appointments</i>	26	32	24	17	1=100
January, 1993: <i>Clinton's appointments</i>	24	42	22	11	1=100
e. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy	42	36	15	7	*=100
December 12-15, 2008	51	33	9	7	*=100
December 5-8, 2008	42	38	13	7	*=100
November 21-24, 2008	59	24	9	8	*=100
November 14-17, 2008	56	29	9	6	*=100
November 7-10, 2008	54	31	8	7	*=100
October 31-November 3, 2008	63	27	6	4	*=100
October 24-27, 2008	52	35	7	5	1=100
October 17-20, 2008	62	29	6	3	*=100
October 10-13, 2008	65	25	7	3	*=100
October 3-6, 2008	69	23	5	3	*=100
September 26-29, 2008	70	22	5	3	*=100
September 19-22, 2008	56	27	12	5	*=100
September 5-8, 2008	44	33	16	7	*=100
August 29-31, 2008	41	34	13	11	1=100
August 15-18, 2008	39	36	15	10	*=100
August 8-11, 2008	39	35	16	10	*=100
August 1-4, 2008	47	34	11	8	0=100
July 25-28, 2008	46	32	10	12	*=100
July 18-21, 2008	45	33	13	9	*=100
July 11-14, 2008	44	33	12	10	1=100
June 27-30, 2008	49	31	12	7	1=100
June 13-16, 2008	42	33	14	11	*=100
May 9-12, 2008	45	31	13	11	*=100
May 2-5, 2008	43	31	15	10	1=100
April 18-21, 2008	41	35	13	10	1=100
April 4-7, 2008	39	37	12	12	*=100
March 28-31, 2008	42	36	14	8	*=100
March 20-24, 2008	45	33	13	9	*=100
February 29-March 3, 2008	38	35	15	11	1=100
February 15-18, 2008	37	36	11	16	8=100
February 1-4, 2008	40	37	14	8	1=100
January 18-21, 2008	42	31	16	11	*=100
January 11-14, 2008	36	32	15	16	1=100
November 2-5, 2007	27	37	16	19	1=100
October 19-22, 2007	25	34	20	21	*=100
August 10-13, 2007	28	36	18	18	*=100
Mid-November, 2006	31	40	17	11	1=100
December, 2005	35	35	18	11	1=100
Early November, 2005	35	39	17	9	*=100
Mid-May, 2005	30	39	19	11	1=100
January, 2005	35	41	17	7	*=100

<sup>3</sup> For November 7-10, 2008 through November 21-24, 2008 the item was listed as: "Plans for the new Obama administration."

<sup>4</sup> January, 2001 asked about: "George W. Bush's cabinet choices and other high level appointments." January, 1993 asked about "Bill Clinton's cabinet choices and other high level appointments."

**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>
Mid-October, 2004	30	43	16	10	1=100
Early September, 2004	39	34	15	11	1=100
Mid-January, 2004	37	41	15	7	*=100
December, 2003	35	38	14	11	2=100
November, 2003	40	34	15	10	1=100
October, 2003	32	39	16	12	1=100
September, 2003	39	30	18	12	1=100
March, 2003	40	35	16	8	1=100
February, 2003	42	33	15	10	*=100
January, 2003	40	35	13	11	1=100
December, 2002	38	34	17	10	1=100
February, 2002	35	40	15	9	1=100
January, 2002	30	44	16	9	1=100
December, 2001	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
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	1=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
<b>f. The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>October 24-27, 2008</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>October 10-13, 2008<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>19</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>September 12-15, 2008</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>1=100</b>
<b>August 29-31, 2008</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>July 18-21, 2008</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>July 11-14, 2008</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>1=100</b>

<sup>5</sup> From June 20-23, 2008 to October 10-13, 2008 the story was listed as “The military effort in Afghanistan against Taliban fighters.”



**Q.1 CONTINUED...**

	Very <u>Closely</u>	Fairly <u>Closely</u>	Not too <u>Closely</u>	Not at all <u>Closely</u>	DK/ <u>Refused</u>
<b>July 3-7, 2008</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>June 20-23, 2008</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>*=100</b>
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
Late July, 2002	41	38	13	7	1=100
June, 2002	38	32	20	9	1=100
April, 2002	39	39	13	8	1=100
Early April, 2002	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

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.]**

- 26 Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
- 24 Barack Obama's appointments and plans for his administration
- 18 Conflict between the Israeli military and Hamas forces in Gaza
- The Governor of Illinois appointing someone to fill Obama's Senate seat while under investigation for corruption
- 5 The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan
- 1 Reports about President Bush's last days in the White House
- 6 Some other story (VOL. SPECIFY)
- 10 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
- 100

Q.3 Do you think the press has been too critical, not critical enough or fair in the way it has covered **[INSERT ITEM; ROTATE]?**

	Too <u>critical</u>	Not critical <u>enough</u>	Fair	Don't know/ <u>Refused</u>
a. Barack Obama	11	23	61	5=100
b. George W. Bush	29	26	41	4=100

Q.4 Thinking about the current Middle East conflict, do you think the press has been too critical, not critical enough or fair in the way it has covered **[INSERT ITEM; ROTATE]?**

	Too <u>critical</u>	Not critical <u>enough</u>	Fair	Don't know/ <u>Refused</u>
a. The actions of Israel	16	25	43	16=100
b. The actions of Hamas	8	30	42	20=100