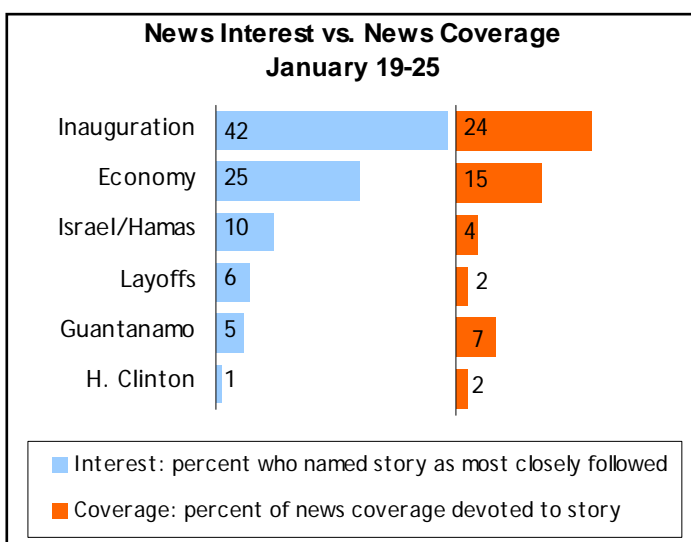


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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
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Public Says Media Fair in Obama Coverage
INAUGURATION OUTDRAWS INTEREST IN ECONOMY

The public paid very close attention to the inauguration of Barack Obama as president last week, while keeping a close eye on the nation’s troubled economy. More than four-in-ten (42%) Americans say the inauguration of the nation’s first black president was the news story they followed most closely. By comparison, 25% say the same of the economy, according to the latest Pew Research Center weekly News Interest Index survey.



The inauguration’s many story lines – from complex logistics to analysis of Obama’s speech – easily made that event the most reported story of the week. According to the weekly content analysis by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, the media devoted 24% of the national newshole to the inauguration. The troubled economy was the second most covered story at 15% of the newshole as several big stories kept people focused on the nation’s financial woes despite the inaugural celebrations.

With a spate of bad economic news and a new president taking office amid huge crowds in Washington, majorities say they followed each story “very closely” (57% for economic news and 52% for the inauguration), according to the News Interest Index survey conducted Jan. 23-26.

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
	%	%	%	%
<i>Followed most closely:</i>				
Obama’s inauguration	42	24	56	39
U.S. economy	25	34	18	27
Conflict between Hamas, Israel	10	17	5	11
Major layoffs by U.S. companies	6	6	6	6
Obama closing Guantanamo	5	9	4	4
Clinton becoming Sec. of State	1	*	1	2
Other/DK	11	10	10	11
	100	100	100	100

Partisans, meanwhile, differed in their interest in the inauguration and the economy. More than half of Democrats (56%) say Obama’s inauguration was the story they followed most closely, compared with about a quarter (24%) of Republicans and close to four-in-ten independents (39%). More Republicans (34%) than Democrats (18%) or independents (27%) say the economy was the story they followed most closely last week.

As the new Democratic president starts his term, close to two-thirds of Americans (64%) say press coverage has been fair, about the same percentage that found coverage of Obama fair in the first days of 2009 (61%) . In early January, 23% said press coverage of Obama had not been critical enough, slightly more than now say the same (18%).

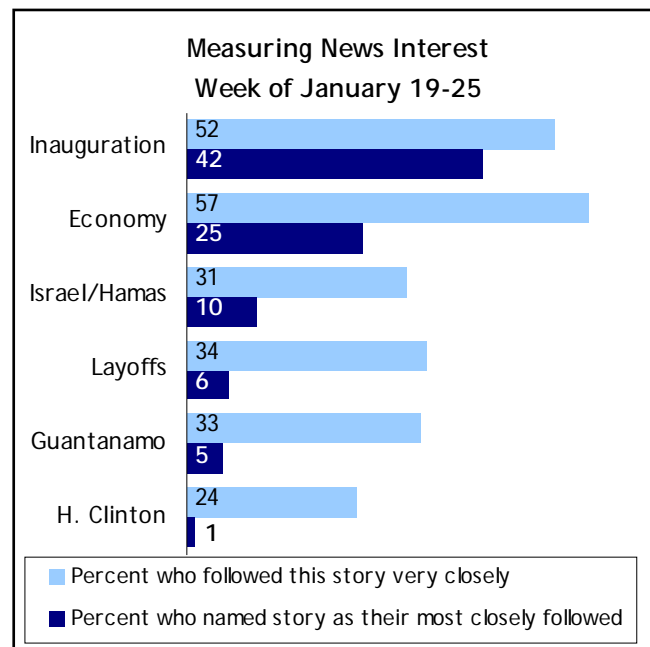
In recent days, Obama has faced more questions about some nominees for top office, such as newly confirmed Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner, as well as about the transparency of operations in his administration. Among independents, 18% now say press coverage has not been critical enough, down from 28% who said the same earlier in the month. The percent of Democrats who say press coverage has not been critical enough dropped from 11% to 5%. Among Republicans, there is no change. More than a third (37%) say the press has not been critical enough of Obama.

Press coverage has been...	Total %	Rep %	Dem %	Ind %
Too critical	12	7	15	13
Not critical enough	18	37	5	18
Fair	64	48	77	62
Don’t know	6	8	3	7
	100	100	100	100

Jan 2-4	Total %	Rep %	Dem %	Ind %
Too critical	11	9	16	7
Not critical enough	23	37	11	28
Fair	61	50	69	61
Don’t know	5	4	4	4
	100	100	100	100

In Other News

The aftermath of the 22-day military conflict between Israel and Hamas drew considerable public interest. Three-in-ten (31%) say they followed news about conditions in the Gaza Strip very closely last week after the announcement of a cease fire. Public interest in this story was roughly equal to interest in the second week in January – following the start of the Israeli military’s ground invasion – when 34% of the public followed the conflict very closely. The inauguration and the financial crisis



overshadowed Gaza in terms of public interest and media coverage. Still, one-in-ten listed the conflict between Israel and Hamas as the story they followed more closely than any other. For its part, the national news media devoted 4% of all coverage to this subject.

In economic news, the announcement of thousands of layoffs at several major American companies, including Microsoft, Intel and United Airlines, was very closely followed by a third (34%) of the American public. Attention to this news was comparable across gender, education levels and party affiliation. Some 6% cite the job cuts as the story they followed most closely last week. According to PEJ, the national media devoted 2% of the overall newshole to stories about unemployment and jobs.

Reports that Hillary Clinton was confirmed by the U.S. Senate and assumed the role of secretary of state attracted the very close attention of one-in-four Americans (24%). Clinton's transition from the Senate to the new administration was the most closely followed story of the week for just 1% of the public.

Despite modest public interest relative to other top stories of the week, Clinton still proved to be a prominent newsmaker for the week of Jan 19-25. With her own confirmation and breaking news in New York on who would succeed her in the Senate, Clinton was the fifth leading headline maker of the week, according to PEJ's analysis. Obama, however, was far and away the top newsmaker, playing a prominent role in 30% of the stories examined.

Obama's executive order to close the controversial Guantanamo Bay military prison for suspected terrorists within a year was very closely followed by a third of the public (33%). A greater share of Democrats (38%) than Republicans (27%) paid very close attention to this decision.

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 January 19-25, 2009 and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected January 23-26, 2009 from a nationally representative sample of 1,001 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.

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:

Andrew Kohut, Director
Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors
Kim Parker, Senior Researcher
Michael Remez, Senior Writer
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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
JANUARY 23-26, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
TOPLINE
N=1001

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] [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. Barack Obama’s inauguration	52	23	11	14	0=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
Jan 16-19, 2009: <i>Obama inauguration prep</i>	24	26	26	24	*=100
Jan 9-12, 2009	16	23	27	33	1=100
b. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy	57	30	8	5	0=100
January 16-19, 2009	43	35	13	9	*=100
January 2-4, 2009	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

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-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
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
c. President Obama's order to close the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba	33	36	18	13	*=100

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. Conflict between the Israeli military and Hamas forces in Gaza	31	31	18	20	*=100
January 16-19, 2009	24	31	22	22	1=100
January 9-12, 2009	34	35	18	13	0=100
January 2-4, 2009	28	32	22	18	*=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:¹					
March 7-10, 2008	20	33	26	21	*=100
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
e. Hillary Clinton becoming secretary of state	24	30	24	22	*=100
f. Recent announcements of layoffs by major American companies, including Microsoft, Intel and United Airlines	34	38	16	12	0=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.**]

- 42 Barack Obama's inauguration
- 25 Reports about the conditions of the U.S. economy
- 10 Conflict between the Israeli military and Hamas forces in Gaza
- Recent announcements of layoffs by major American companies, including Microsoft, Intel and United Airlines
- 6 Intel and United Airlines
- 5 President Obama's order to close the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba
- 1 Hillary Clinton becoming secretary of state
- 5 Some other story (VOL.)
- 6 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
- 100

¹ 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."

On another topic . . .

Q.3 Do you think the press has been too critical, not critical enough or fair in the way it has covered Barack Obama during his first few days in office?

		<u>Jan 2-4, 2009²</u>
12	Too critical	11
18	Not critical enough	23
64	Fair	61
<u>6</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>5</u>
100		100

2

Question was asked about George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Question wording was: "Do you think the press has been too critical, not critical enough or fair in the way it has covered [INSERT ITEM; ROTATE]?"