



**THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
For The People & The Press

**NEWS Release**  
1615 L Street, N.W., Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Tel (202) 419-4350  
Fax (202) 419-4399

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**Wednesday, September 15, 2010**

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**  
**Andrew Kohut, Director**  
**Michael Remez, Senior Writer**

## Perceptions of Obama Press Coverage Hold Steady Koran Burning Plans Grab Media, Public Attention

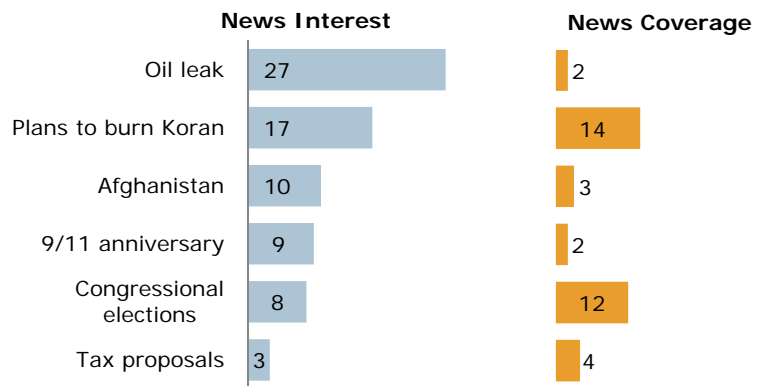
As the nation marked the ninth anniversary of the Sept. 11 terror attacks last week, many in the public and the media focused more on current tensions over Islam in America – most notably plans by a Florida pastor to burn copies of the Koran.

Nearly two-in-ten (17%) say they followed the controversy over the pastor’s announcement that he would burn Korans on Sept. 11 more closely than any other

major story. The burning did not happen, but the story ranked second on the list of stories followed most closely, according to the latest News Interest Index survey of 1001 adults by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. Another 9% say they followed news about the Sept. 11 anniversary most closely.

The media devoted 15% of the newshole last week to news dealing with anti-Muslim sentiments. Most of that (14%) focused on Pastor Terry Jones’ plans and the push to get him to cancel the Koran burning, according to the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ). An additional 4% of coverage focused on the continuing debate over a planned Muslim community center and mosque near the site of the World Trade Center towers in downtown Manhattan.

### News Interest vs. Coverage



News interest shows the percentage of people who say they followed this story most closely, Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, September 9-12, 2010. News coverage shows the percentage of news coverage devoted to each story, Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, September 6-12, 2010.

Despite the attention to religious controversies, Americans say they followed news about the major oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico – now stopped – more closely than other major news stories (27%). News about the spill, however, was limited (2% of the newshole). With coverage now focused on blame for the spill and its uncertain environmental impact, the public’s continued interest likely also reflects the story’s perceived importance.

### A Mix of Good and Bad News About the Gulf Oil Spill

Following the April 20 oil rig explosion in the gulf that left 11 dead, interest in the story grew and stayed high as the massive scale of the spill became clear and repeated efforts to stem the flow of oil failed. The story dominated the public’s interest for weeks.

By mid-July, BP was able to put a temporary cap in place. At that point, 48% said they were hearing a mix of good and bad news about the spill, 31% said they were hearing mostly bad news and 18% said they were hearing mostly good news.

Two months later, most Americans (58%) say they have been hearing a mix of good and bad news about the oil spill, up from 47% when the question was last asked Aug. 5-8. Fewer say they are hearing mostly bad news (19%) than in early August (25%), though the proportion hearing mostly good news is also down (from 25% to 17%).

---

#### Most Now Hearing Mix of Good and Bad News about Gulf Oil Spill

	July 15-18	July 22-25	Aug 5-8	Sept 9-12
	%	%	%	%
Mostly good news	18	11	25	17
Mostly bad news	31	18	25	19
Mix of good and bad news	48	59	47	58
Don't know	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>
	100	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER September 9-12, 2010.  
 Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

---

## Partisans Divide Over Media Coverage of Obama

More Americans (37%) say that press coverage of Barack Obama has been fair than say it has been too easy (27%) or too tough (23%). Those numbers are largely unchanged from July or April.

Not surprisingly, partisans have starkly different views on this question. About four-in-ten Democrats (41%) say coverage has been too tough, about the same as the 42% that said this in July, but up from 31% in April. Just 6% of Republicans say coverage of the Democratic president has been too tough.

Half of Republicans say coverage has been too easy, not much different from the 55% that said this in July or the 57% that did so in April. Just 12% of Democrats say press coverage of Obama has been too easy.

Independents largely mirror the general public. Four-in-ten say coverage of Obama has been fair, 28% say it has been too easy and 19% say it has been too tough.

Opinions about coverage of Democratic and Republican leaders in Congress also are little changed since mid-July. Currently, 40% say the press has been fair in coverage of GOP leaders, 24% say it has been too easy and 16% say it has been too tough.

Just more than four-in-ten (43%) say press coverage of Democratic leaders has been fair, 26% say too easy and 12% say too tough. Partisan views of coverage of party leaders are also little changed.

Nearly half of Republicans (47%) say coverage of Democratic leaders is too easy, 6% say too tough and 34% say fair. Most Democrats see coverage of Democratic leaders as fair (55%); 7% see it as too easy and 22% see it as too tough.

More than four-in-ten Democrats (44%) see coverage of Republican leaders in Congress as fair, 29% see it as too easy and 9% see it as too tough. Among Republicans, 35% see coverage as fair, a comparable 33% see it as too tough and 15% see it as too easy. Independents largely reflect the public as a whole.

---

### Perceptions of Obama Press Coverage Change Little

*Press coverage of Obama has been...*

	<b>Apr</b>	<b>Jul</b>	<b>Sept</b>
	%	%	%
Too easy	29	27	27
Too tough	21	24	23
Fair	42	39	37
Don't know	8	10	13
	100	100	100

*% of Democrats saying press too tough...*

	31	42	41
--	----	----	----

*% of Republicans saying press too easy...*

	57	55	50
--	----	----	----

PEW RESEARCH CENTER September 9-12, 2010.  
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

---

## The Week's Other News

Americans paid close attention last week to three story lines with links to the events of Sept. 11, 2001. In addition to interest in the possible Koran burning (33% very closely), the public also very closely tracked news about developments in Afghanistan (30%) and Sept. 11 anniversary commemorations (33%).

One-in-ten say they followed news about the current situation and events in Afghanistan most closely last week, while news about the war there accounted for 3% of coverage, according to PEJ.

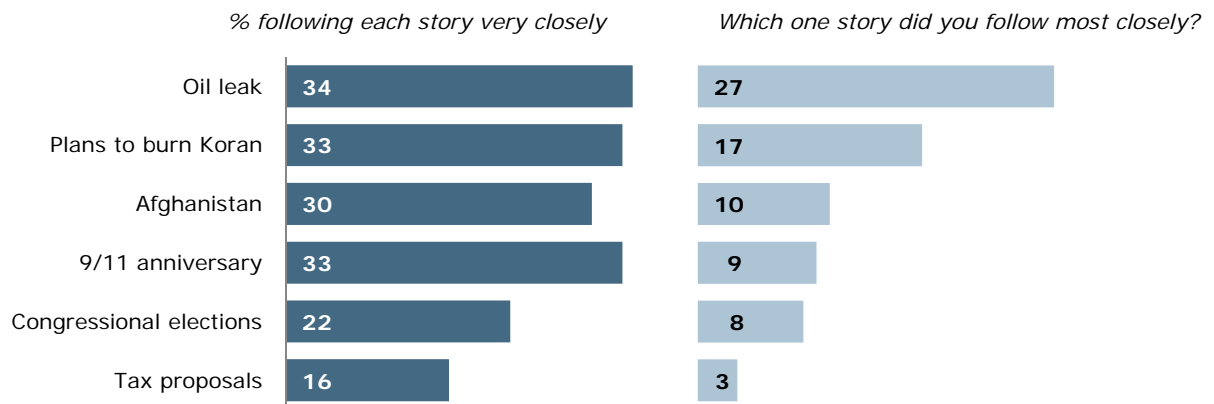
Nearly as many (9%) say they followed news about the ninth anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks most closely. News about commemorations made up 2% of coverage.

More than two-in-ten (22%) say they followed news about this year's congressional elections very closely. This was the most closely followed news for 8% and accounted for 12% of coverage.

Some 16% say they followed the debate in Washington over competing Democratic and Republican tax plans very closely; 3% say this was the news they followed most closely. News about the tax plans made up 4% of coverage. In its overall analysis, PEJ included news about the tax debate with news about the economic crisis in general, a topic that accounted for 17% of coverage last week.

---

## Measuring News Interest



PEW RESEARCH CENTER September 9-12, 2010.

---

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 September 6-12, and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected September 9-12, 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 Monday through Sunday) PEJ compiles this data to identify the top stories for the week. (For more information about the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, go to [www.journalism.org](http://www.journalism.org).) The News Interest Index survey collects data from Thursday through Sunday to gauge public interest in the most covered stories of the week.

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a national sample of 1,001 adults living in the continental United States, 18 years of age or older, from September 9-12, 2010 (671 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 330 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 130 who had no landline telephone). Both the landline and cell phone samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2009 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample is also weighted to match current patterns of telephone status based on extrapolations from the 2009 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Sample Size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,001	4.0 percentage points
Republicans	253	7.5 percentage points
Democrats	303	7.0 percentage points
Independents	368	6.5 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.

## **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

Michael Remez, Senior Writer

Leah Christian and Jocelyn Kiley, Senior Researchers

Robert Suls, Shawn Neidorf, and Alec Tyson, Research Associates

Jacob Poushter, Research Analyst

Mattie Ressler and Danielle Gewurz, Research Assistants

For more information about the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press' weekly News Interest Index, go to [www.people-press.org](http://www.people-press.org).

© Pew Research Center, 2010

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER NEWS INTEREST INDEX**  
**SEPTEMBER 9-12, 2010 OMNIBUS**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**N=1001**

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.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 a THROUGH c FOLLOWED BY RANDOMIZED ITEMS d THROUGH f] [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>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
a. The debate in Washington over competing Democratic and Republican tax plans September 9-12, 2010	16	19	22	42	1
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
May 8-11, 2009: <i>The debate in Washington over the federal budget</i>	22	28	19	31	*
March 27-30, 2009: <i>Debate over Barack Obama's budget proposal</i>	28	34	18	19	1
February 27-March 2, 2009: <i>Barack Obama's budget proposal for next year that raises taxes on wealthy Americans and increases spending on health care, education and other programs</i>	47	34	9	10	*
February, 2002: <i>Debate in Congress over G.W. Bush's budget and tax cut plan</i>	17	31	28	23	1
April, 2001	24	38	20	18	*
February, 2001: <i>G.W. Bush's tax cut plan</i>	31	35	19	14	1
b. The major oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico September 9-12, 2010	34	34	18	13	1
August 19-22, 2010	41	34	15	9	1
August 12-15, 2010	39	34	17	9	1
August 5-8, 2010	42	36	12	9	1
July 29-August 1, 2010	57	31	10	2	0
July 22-25, 2010	59	29	8	3	*
July 15-18, 2010	50	32	10	7	*
July 8-11, 2010	43	40	10	6	1
July 1-5, 2010	57	29	9	5	*
June 24-27, 2010	56	31	8	5	*
June 17-20, 2010	55	32	6	6	*
June 10-13, 2010	55	31	9	5	*
June 3-6, 2010	57	27	9	6	*
May 27-30, 2010	55	26	11	7	*
May 20-23, 2010: <i>An oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico threatening the coast of several states</i>	47	35	11	7	*
May 13-16, 2010	58	29	9	4	*
May 7-10, 2010	46	33	11	10	*
April 30-May 3, 2010: <i>Oil leaking into the ocean near the Louisiana coast after an off-shore oil rig explosion</i>	44	35	11	10	*
April 23-26, 2010: <i>An explosion on an off-shore oil rig near the coast of Louisiana</i>	21	35	22	23	*



## PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
April 1-5, 2010: <i>President Obama's proposal to allow offshore oil and gas drilling</i>	20	24	21	33	1
July 25-28, 2008: <i>A major oil spill into the Mississippi River</i>	14	19	25	41	1
December 4-8, 2002: <i>The large oil spill polluting the coast of Spain</i>	15	29	28	27	1
May 4-7, 1989: <i>The Alaska oil spill</i>	52	37	7	4	--
c. The ninth anniversary of the September 11 <sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks					
September 9-12, 2010	33	29	19	19	1
September 11-14, 2009: <i>Eighth anniversary</i>	31	30	22	17	0
September, 2006: <i>Upcoming fifth anniversary</i>	27	35	25	12	1
September, 2002: <i>Coverage of the upcoming anniversary</i>	39	35	18	7	1
d. News about this year's congressional elections					
September 9-12, 2010	22	23	21	34	1
September 2-6, 2010	26	24	23	26	1
August 26-29, 2010	20	27	23	28	1
August 19-22, 2010	19	23	24	33	1
August 12-15, 2010	20	22	19	38	1
July 29-August 1, 2010	29	34	22	14	*
July 15-18, 2010	17	23	26	33	1
June 10-13, 2010	20	29	24	27	1
May 20-23, 2010	23	25	24	27	*
April 23-26, 2010	20	25	19	35	*
March 5-8, 2010	25	27	21	26	1
January 8-11, 2010	20	24	26	29	1
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
October 24-27, 2008: <i>News about candidates for local and statewide elections</i>	20	35	24	20	1
Early November, 2006: <i>News about candidates and election campaigns in your state and district</i>	27	37	18	17	1
Late October, 2006 (RVs)	27	45	17	11	*
Early October, 2006	21	38	25	15	1
Early September, 2006	16	32	28	23	1
August, 2006	20	29	28	22	1
June, 2006	18	30	29	21	2
May, 2006	18	28	30	23	1
Early November, 2002 (RVs)	27	46	18	9	*
Late October, 2002 (RVs)	28	34	24	13	1
Early October, 2002 (RVs)	21	46	22	10	1
Early September, 2002	17	29	29	24	1
Late October, 1998 (RVs)	26	45	20	9	*
Early October, 1998 (RVs)	21	43	24	11	1
Early September, 1998	17	32	28	23	*
Early August, 1998	13	30	28	23	1
June, 1998	9	27	33	30	1

## PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	Very <u>closely</u>	Fairly <u>closely</u>	Not too <u>closely</u>	Not at all <u>closely</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
November, 1994	18	42	25	15	*
Late October, 1994	14	38	31	16	1
Early October, 1994	23	34	23	19	1
September, 1994	19	34	29	18	*
November, 1990	38	34	17	11	*
October, 1990	18	32	28	22	*
e. Controversy over a Florida pastor's plan, later cancelled, to burn copies of the Koran on September 11th <sup>1</sup>					
September 9-12, 2010	33	25	15	25	1
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
June, 2005: <i>Newsweek's retraction of a story about flushing the Koran down a toilet as part of prisoner interrogation</i>	20	29	21	29	1
f. The current situation and events in Afghanistan					
September 9-12, 2010	30	33	20	17	*
July 29-August 1, 2010	34	35	22	9	*
July 15-18, 2010	22	33	23	22	*
July 8-11, 2010	23	32	24	20	1
July 1-5, 2010	29	34	23	14	1
June 17-20, 2010	21	30	27	22	*
May 20-23, 2010	22	33	25	20	*
April 9-12, 2010	21	29	27	22	1
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
June 24-27, 2010: <i>General Stanley McChrystal resigning as head of U.S. forces in Afghanistan after being quoted criticizing President Obama and his Afghanistan strategy</i>	28	31	19	21	1
February 19-22, 2010: <i>The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</i>	24	36	21	19	*
January 8-11, 2010: <i>Suicide bombing that killed seven Americans at a CIA base in Afghanistan</i>	24	31	27	17	1
December 11-14, 2009: <i>The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</i>	35	33	18	13	*
December 4-7, 2009: <i>President Obama's decision to send more U.S. troops to Afghanistan</i>	43	33	14	8	1
November 20-23, 2009: <i>The debate over whether to send more troops to Afghanistan</i>	29	31	17	22	1
November 13-16, 2009	29	28	20	22	1
November 6-9, 2009: <i>The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</i>	22	35	24	18	*
October 30-November 2, 2009	24	32	21	22	*
October 23-26, 2009	32	29	21	18	*
October 16-19, 2009	25	31	20	24	*
October 9-12, 2009	31	31	21	17	0

<sup>1</sup> On the first night of the field period (September 9) the item was worded: "Plans by a Florida pastor to burn copies of the Koran on September 11<sup>th</sup>".

## PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
September 25-28, 2009: <i>The debate over whether to send more troops to Afghanistan</i>	27	40	17	16	*
September 18-21, 2009: <i>The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</i>	26	33	25	16	*
September 11-14, 2009	25	35	22	18	1
September 3-6, 2009	23	33	23	21	0
August 7-10, 2009	24	32	23	21	1
March 20-23, 2009	24	32	22	22	*
February 20-23, 2009: <i>The Obama administration's decision to send 17,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan</i>	27	29	24	19	1
January 30-February 2, 2009: <i>The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</i>	26	34	24	16	*
January 2-4, 2009	22	33	23	21	1
October 24-27, 2008	28	32	22	17	1
October 10-13, 2008: <i>The military effort in Afghanistan against Taliban fighters</i>	19	34	29	18	*
September 12-15, 2008	21	34	25	19	1
August 29-31, 2008	18	27	32	23	*
July 18-21, 2008	27	33	24	16	*
July 11-14, 2008	19	28	29	23	1
July 3-7, 2008	19	28	32	21	*
June 20-23, 2008	20	30	30	20	*
Late July, 2002: <i>The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan</i>	41	38	13	7	1
June, 2002	38	32	20	9	1
April, 2002	39	39	13	8	1
Early April, 2002	45	37	12	5	1
February, 2002	47	39	8	5	1
January, 2002	51	35	9	4	1
December, 2001	44	38	12	5	1
Mid-November, 2001	49	36	11	3	1
Early November, 2001	45	36	12	6	1
Mid-October, 2001	51	35	10	3	1

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.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.]**

27	The major oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico Controversy over a Florida pastor's plan, later cancelled, to burn copies of the Koran on
17	September 11th
10	The current situation and events in Afghanistan
9	The ninth anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks
8	News about this year's Congressional elections
3	The debate in Washington over competing Democratic and Republican tax plans
13	Some other story <b>(VOL.)</b>
13	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.3 Thinking about recent news coverage of some people and groups, would you say the press has been too easy, too tough or fair in the way it has covered **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**?

		<u>Too easy</u>	<u>Too tough</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>(VOL.) DK/Ref</u>
a.	Barack Obama				
	September 9-12, 2010	27	23	37	13
	July 15-18, 2010	27	24	39	10
	April 9-12, 2010	29	21	42	8
	October 3-6, 2008	31	7	60	2
	April 25-28, 2008	26	17	52	5
	March 20-24, 2008	23	15	55	7
	February 29-March 3, 2008	28	8	58	6
	February 1-4, 2008	23	8	61	8
b.	Republican leaders in Congress				
	September 9-12, 2010	24	16	40	20
	July 15-18, 2010	22	15	45	18
c.	Democratic leaders in Congress				
	September 9-12, 2010	26	12	43	18
	July 15-18, 2010	27	12	44	17

**PEW.4 AND PEW.5 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****ASK ALL:**

PEW.6 Now thinking about the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, are you hearing mostly good news, mostly bad news or a mix of good and bad news about the situation in the Gulf of Mexico?

<u>Sep 9-12 2010</u>		<u>Aug 5-8<sup>2</sup> 2010</u>	<u>Jul 22-25 2010</u>	<u>Jul 15-18 2010</u>
17	Mostly good news	25	11	18
19	Mostly bad news <b>[OR]</b>	25	28	31
58	A mix of good and bad	47	59	48
5	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>	3	2	3

**PEW.7-PEW.11 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

<sup>2</sup> In August 5-8, this was asked as a list item and was worded: "...and how about the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico? are you hearing mostly good news, mostly bad news, or a mix of good and bad news about the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico?"