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The Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health's *Health News Index* is designed to help the news media and people in the health field gain a better understanding of which health stories in the news Americans are following and what they understand about those issues. Every two months since August of 1996, Kaiser/Harvard has issued a new index report. This report is based on a survey of 1,012 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between February 28 and March 28, 2000. For comparison purposes, respondents were also asked about other leading issues in the news during the same period.

Health News Stories Followed by the Public

Six in ten Americans (60%) closely followed March news reports of President Clinton's recent gun control initiatives. By comparison, 85% of Americans closely followed news of rising gasoline prices. About two-thirds (66%) closely followed news coverage about

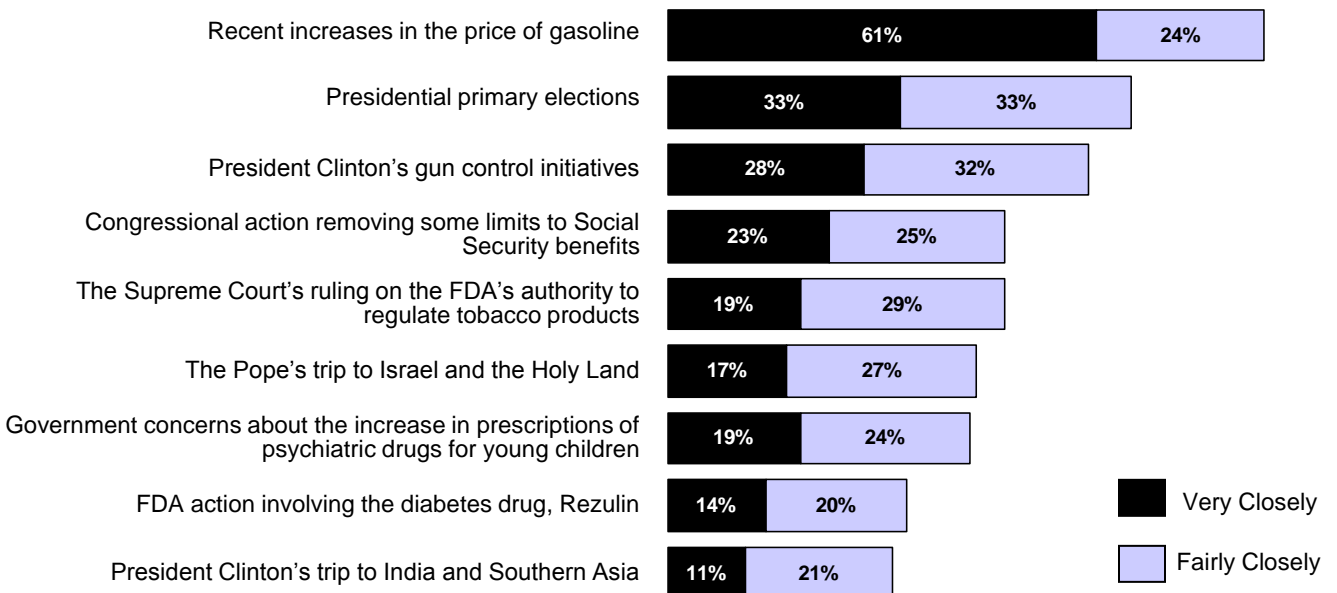
the primary elections and the race for the Republican and Democratic nominations. News coverage of the Pope's visit to the Holy Land and President Clinton's trip to Southern Asia were followed closely by 44% and 32% of Americans, respectively.

Among other health issues in the news, about half of Americans (48%) closely followed news of Congressional action to remove limits on how much working seniors can collect in Social Security benefits. Forty-eight percent also closely followed news about the Supreme Court decision concerning the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) authority to regulate tobacco products.

News coverage of White House and government agencies' concerns over the increase in the number of psychiatric drug prescriptions for young children was closely followed by 43% of the public. About one-third of the public (34%) closely followed reports of the FDA's decision to remove the diabetes drug Rezulin from the market.

**KAISER/HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
HEALTH NEWS INDEX**

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from February 28 to March 28, 2000

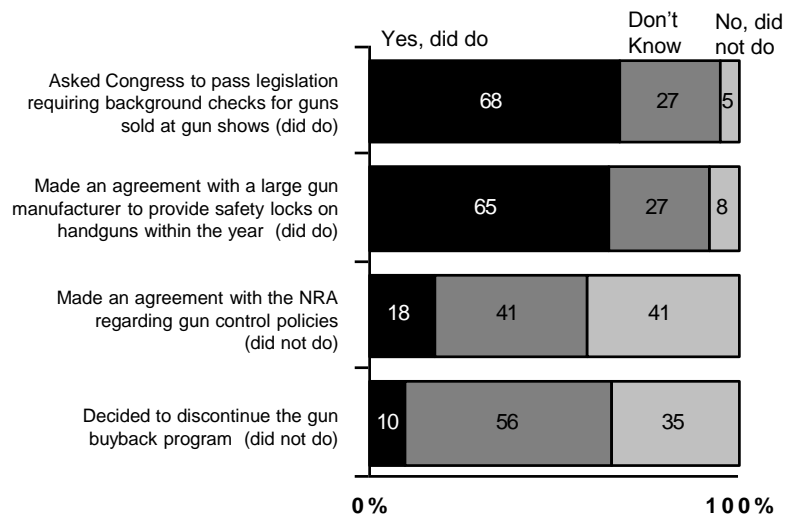


WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

Gun Control

Six in ten Americans (60%) closely followed news coverage of President Clinton's gun control initiatives, and many Americans knew of specific actions President Clinton had taken. About two-thirds knew that the President had asked Congress to pass legislation requiring background checks for guns sold at gun shows (68%), and that he had made an agreement with a large gun manufacturer to provide handguns with safety locks within the year (65%). Forty-one percent correctly said the President had not made an agreement with the NRA, but the same percentage did not know what he had done, and 18% mistakenly thought he had made such an agreement. About one-third (35%) knew the President had decided to continue his gun buyback program, while over half (56%) said they did not know, and 10% mistakenly thought he had discontinued the program.

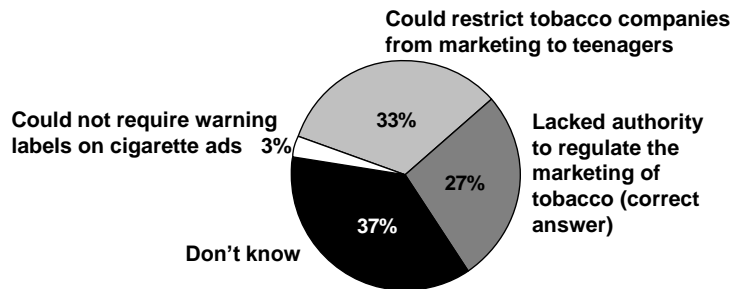
Thinking about gun control policy, which of the following did President Clinton do over the past month . . .



Regulating Tobacco Products

Almost one-half of Americans (48%) closely followed news reports of the Supreme Court's recent ruling on the FDA's authority to regulate the marketing of tobacco products. About a quarter of the public (27%) knew that the Court had ruled that the FDA lacked authority. One-third (33%) erroneously thought the Court had ruled that the FDA could restrict companies from marketing to teenagers, and three percent wrongly thought the ruling restricted the FDA from requiring warning labels on cigarette ads. Slightly over a third (37%) of Americans said they did not know what the Supreme Court had ruled.

Did the Supreme Court rule that the FDA . . . ?



Social Security

About half (48%) of Americans also closely followed news stories of Congressional action to remove limits on the amount people can collect in Social Security benefits. Four in ten (41%) knew that this change would apply only to some seniors who work and earn more than a certain amount in income. About one-fifth (22%) mistakenly thought the change would affect all seniors and four percent wrongly thought it would only apply to seniors with disabilities. About one third (32%) said they did not know.

Who will be affected by the recent Congressional action to remove limits on Social Security benefits?

