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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 1996, Kaiser/Harvard has issued a new index report. This report is based on a survey of 580 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between April 24 and May 24, 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

Slightly over half of Americans (54%) closely followed May news reports of the Mother's Day Million Mom March in support of gun control laws, and 45% also closely followed news of the discussions in Congress about adding prescription drug benefits to the

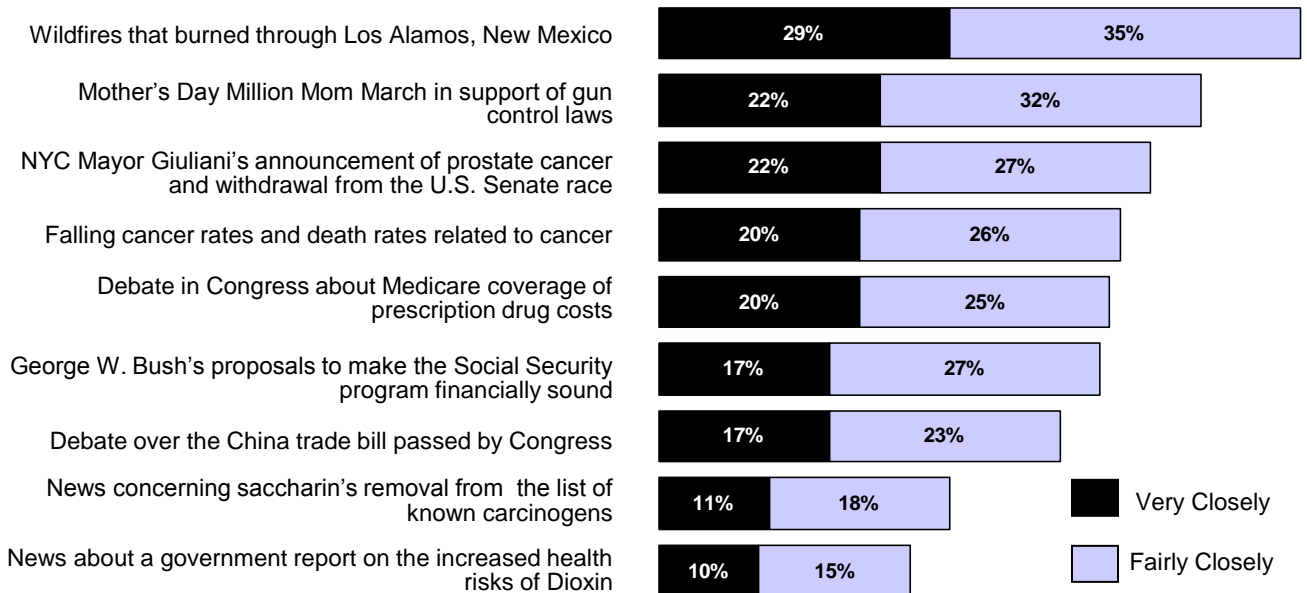
Medicare program. By comparison, 64% of Americans closely followed news of the wildfires in Los Alamos, New Mexico.

About half (49%) closely followed New York City Mayor Giuliani's announcement that he has prostate cancer and his withdrawal from the U.S. Senate race. A similar percentage of Americans (44%) followed closely Presidential candidate George W. Bush's proposals for making the Social Security program financially sound. News coverage of the debate in Congress and the subsequent passing of the China trade bill was followed closely by four in ten (40%) Americans.

Among other health issues in the news, about half of Americans (46%) closely followed news of changing rates of cancer in the U.S. News coverage of the artificial sweetener saccharin as a possible carcinogen was closely followed by 29% of the public. One-fourth of the public (25%) closely followed news of a government agency report about the toxic chemical Dioxin's increased risks to human health.

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

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from April 24 to May 24, 2000

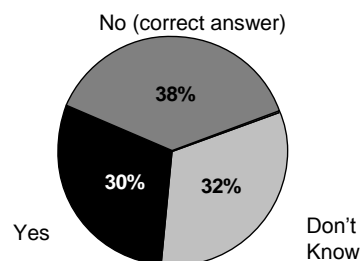


WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

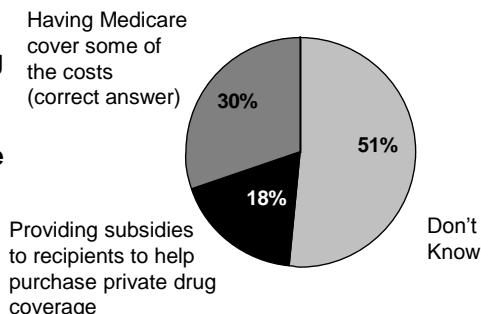
Medicare and Prescription Drug Benefits

Forty-five percent of Americans closely followed news of discussions in Congress about the Medicare program covering prescription drug costs. However, many Americans did not know that the Medicare program does not already pay for prescription drugs. About one in four (38%) knew that the program does not currently cover prescription drug costs. Three in ten incorrectly thought that it did, while 32% said they did not know. When asked specifically about proposals made by Congressional Democrats in the past month, 30% of Americans knew that the Democrats had proposed making the Medicare program cover some of the costs for prescription drugs. Just over half (51%) of Americans said they did not know. About one in five persons (18%) incorrectly said Democrats proposed providing subsidies to help Medicare recipients buy private insurance to help cover the costs of prescription drugs. (The Republican drug coverage plan was made public in June)

Does the Medicare program now pay for prescription drugs for the elderly? . . .



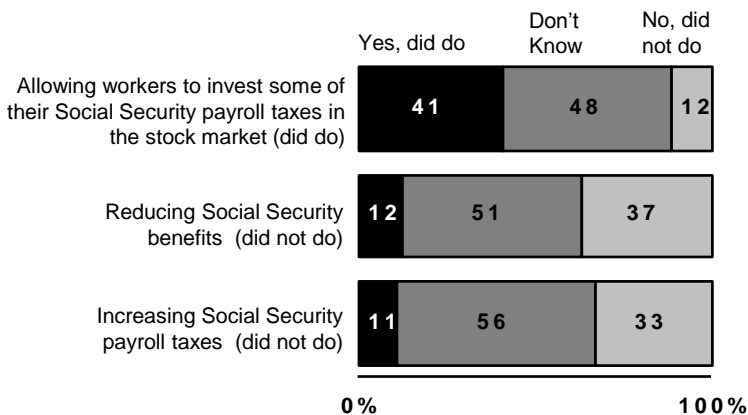
What did Congressional Democrats propose regarding coverage of prescription drug costs for Medicare recipients?



Bush's Social Security Plan

About four in ten Americans (44%) closely followed news reports of Presidential candidate George W. Bush's proposals to make the Social Security program financially sound. A similar percentage of Americans (41%) correctly said that Bush proposed allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security payroll taxes in the stock market. About one third of Americans correctly said that Bush had not proposed reducing benefits (37%) or increasing Social Security payroll taxes (33%).

Did George W. Bush propose to make Social Security financially sound by . . .



Cancer Rates in the U.S.

Forty-six percent of Americans also closely followed news stories of changes in the U.S. cancer rate over the past 10 years. About one in four (26%) correctly said that cancer rates were lower. Slightly more than four in ten (44%) incorrectly said that the cancer rate was higher, while 14% said rates were about the same and 16% said they did not know.

Over the past 10 years, are cancer rates in the U.S. . . . ?

