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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 news stories Americans are following and what they understand about issues covered in the news. Every two months since 1996, Kaiser/Harvard has issued a new index report. This report is based on a survey of 1,003 adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between February 25, 2002 and March 25, 2002. 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**

Among health topics in the news, stories about mammograms were most closely followed by the

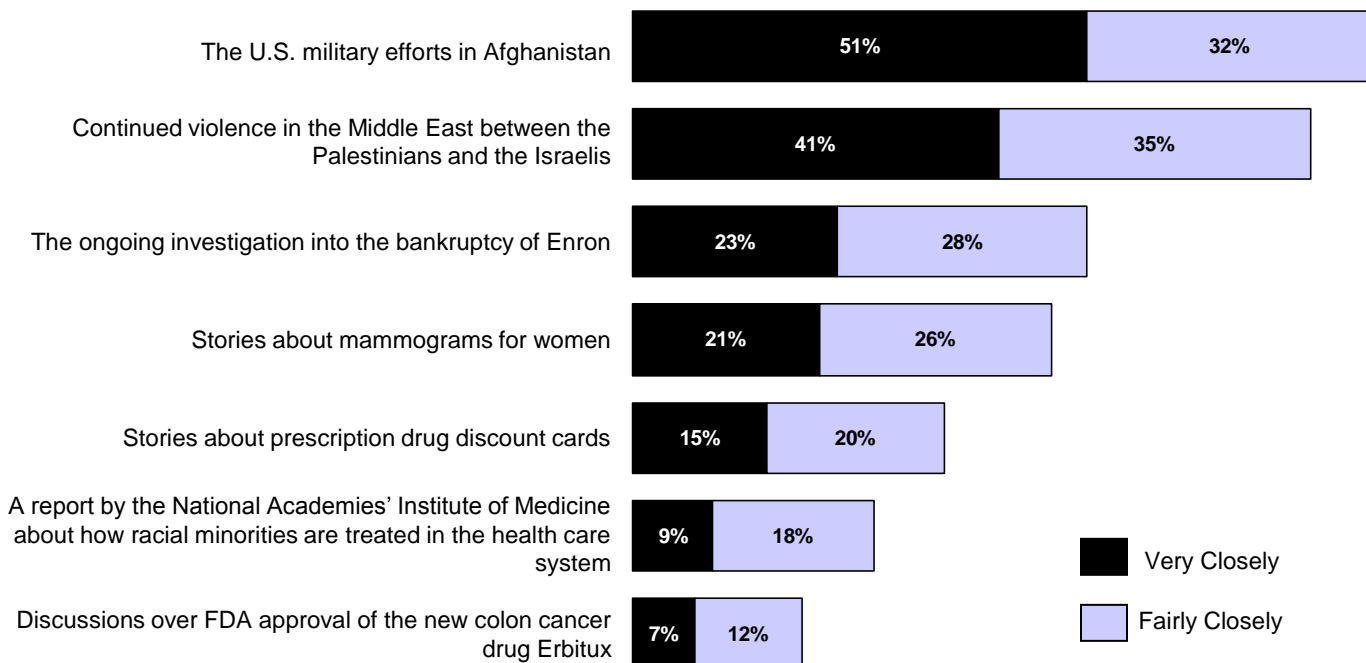
public during this period, with almost half (47%) of Americans saying they closely followed this news coverage.

By comparison, 83% of Americans closely followed the U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan. More than three fourths (76%) of the public reported closely following the continued violence in the Middle East, and about half closely followed stories about the Enron bankruptcy (51%).

Among other health issues in the news, about a third (35%) of the public closely followed news coverage about prescription drug discount cards. Just over one quarter (27%) of Americans reported closely following news stories about the Institute of Medicine's report on the treatment of racial minorities in the health care system.

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HEALTH NEWS INDEX**

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from February 25, 2002 to March 25, 2002

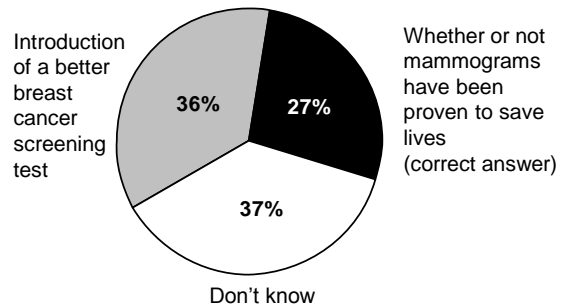


# WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

## Mammograms

Nearly one half (47%) of adults closely followed ongoing stories about mammograms for women. However, a smaller percentage (27%) knew that the recent debate was about whether mammograms have been proven to save lives. More than one third (36%) of the public erroneously thought that the discussions centered around the introduction of a better breast cancer screening test as an alternative to mammograms, and thirty-seven percent said they did not know what the content of the stories were. While women were much more likely to closely follow these stories than were men (64% and 27%, respectively), they were about equally likely to know the content of the discussions (29% and 26%, respectively).

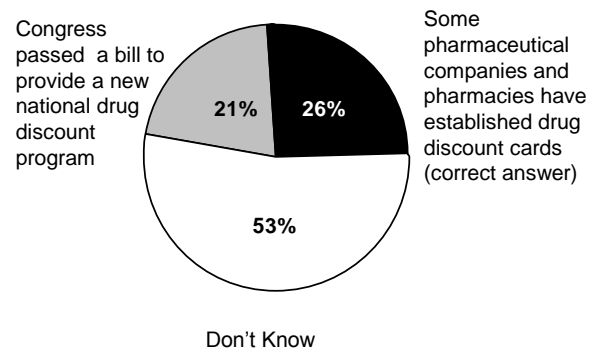
Thinking about what you have seen or heard in the news recently about mammograms, what was the recent debate about?



## Prescription Drug Discount Cards

A little over one third of the public (35%) said they closely followed news coverage of prescription drug discount cards. Just over one fourth (26%) correctly identified that some private pharmaceutical companies and pharmacies are establishing their own drug discount cards. One in five (21%) incorrectly believed that Congress had passed a bill to provide a new discount drug program. More than half (53%) said they did not know of any recent steps taken to help provide some relief from the cost of prescription drugs to the elderly.

What steps have been taken recently to help provide the elderly with some relief from the cost of prescription drugs?



## IOM Report on Racial Disparities in the Health Care System

Twenty-seven percent of Americans reported closely following news coverage about the Institute of Medicine's report on the treatment of racial minorities in the health care system. A slightly higher percentage (34%) answered correctly that the report found people from minority groups are sometimes treated differently, even when their health insurance is the same as whites. Nearly half (45%) of the public said they did not know the content of the IOM report. Fifty-one percent of blacks closely followed the stories about the report, compared to slightly less than a quarter (22%) of whites. Blacks were also much more likely to know the content of the report (50%) than were whites (31%).

Which of the following statements summarizes the findings of the Institute of Medicine's recent report on how racial minorities are treated in the health care system?

