



University of Connecticut
Center for Survey Research & Analysis

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PRESS RELEASE

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University of Connecticut Releases Poll on Privacy Invasions

A new national survey conducted by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut shows that recent revelations of government surveillance – from the Patriot Act to NSA wiretapping – seemingly fuel Americans’ opposition to infringements on their private information but do not appear to extend to longstanding policy proposals and initiatives that invade Americans’ physical privacy or inhibit their ability to make private decisions about their lives.

Privacy in Theory

Scholars distinguish between three types of privacy: information, physical, and decision-making. Information privacy is control over how information about you is collected and used. Decision-making privacy is control over the ability to make important decisions about yourself and your family. Physical privacy is control over what physical and psychological tests are administered to you.

When asked about these three types of privacy in the abstract, majorities of Americans rate each as “extremely important.” Seven-in-ten Americans (72%) believe it’s “extremely” important to have control over their ability to make important decisions about themselves and family members.

Priority Placed on Personal Control over Private Issues	% Extremely Important
Control over the ability to make important decisions about yourself and family	72
Control over how information about you is collected and used	59
Control over what physical and psychological tests are administered to you	57

Fifty-seven percent of Americans feel it is “extremely” important to have control over their physical privacy, and 59% say the same about their information privacy.

Infringements on Private Information

Americans oppose monitoring of their private information. Fully three-quarters of Americans – 75% – oppose “government agencies monitoring telephone calls and e-mail of ordinary Americans, including a substantial 59% majority who “strongly” oppose the action.

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Infringements on Private Information	% Oppose
Government monitoring phone calls and e-mail of ordinary Americans	75%
Internet websites using cookies to track web behavior	71%

In addition, 71% of adults oppose Internet websites placing “cookies” on visitors’ computers in order to track their future Internet behavior, including 57% who “strongly” oppose the action.

Infringements on Private Decision-Making

Americans are much more willing to compromise their ability to make private choices about their lives than they are their personal information. When asked whether they support or oppose the government requiring background checks of those who wish to purchase guns, 91% express support, compared to only 9% that oppose.

Infringements on Private Decision-Making	% Oppose
Requiring women to notify their husbands before they can have an abortion	31%
Requiring background checks for people buying guns	9%

Additionally, a large majority of Americans (67%) support requiring married women to notify their husbands before they can have an abortion, with 53% “strongly” supporting the idea. Men are more likely to support this requirement than are women – who may see the issue as more of an intrusion into their private decision-making – 76% to 58% respectively.

Infringements on Physical Privacy

Americans are also willing to accept invasions of their physical privacy. An overwhelming 85% of Americans support allowing employers to require drug tests of their employees, including 65% who “strongly” support it. Sixty-one percent support schools conducting intelligence tests to determine student placement.

Infringements on Physical Privacy	% Oppose
Schools conducting IQ tests to determine the placement of students	33%
Employers requiring employees to undergo drug tests	14%

CSRA’s Director, Professor Samuel Best explains: “This new NSA revelation is unlikely to have broader implications for Americans’ views toward privacy. While the Patriot Act and NSA wiretapping measures seem to have diminished support for information monitoring, most Americans remain comfortable with longstanding policy proposals and initiatives that infringe on private decision-making and physical privacy.”

These results are based on a national survey of American adults, conducted by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut. The survey was conducted by telephone with a scientific sample of 1,154 Americans from across the nation. Interviews were conducted from March 27 through May 7, 2006. Sampling error is ±3 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence for results based on all adults. Error for subgroups is higher. Attached to this release are the survey questions used.

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Results rounded to nearest whole number

Q1. Do you support or oppose the government requiring background checks for people buying guns? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

Strongly Support.....	78%
Somewhat Support.....	13%
Somewhat Oppose	2%
Strongly Oppose	7%
Don't Know.....	1%
Refused.....	0%

Q2. Do you support or oppose government agencies monitoring telephone calls and e-mail of ordinary Americans? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

Strongly Support.....	11%
Somewhat Support.....	11%
Somewhat Oppose	16%
Strongly Oppose	59%
Don't Know.....	3%
Refused.....	0%

Q3. Do you support or oppose requiring married women to notify their husbands before they can have an abortion? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

Strongly Support.....	53%
Somewhat Support.....	14%
Somewhat Oppose	9%
Strongly Oppose	22%
Don't Know.....	2%
Refused.....	1%

Q4. Do you support or oppose employers requiring employees to undergo drug tests that would determine whether they had used illegal drugs recently? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

Strongly Support.....	65%
Somewhat Support.....	20%
Somewhat Oppose	5%
Strongly Oppose	9%
Don't Know.....	1%
Refused.....	0%

Q5. Do you support or oppose Internet websites placing small files - called "cookies" - on the computers of people who visit their site in order to keep track of their future web activity? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

Strongly Support.....	7%
Somewhat Support.....	11%
Somewhat Oppose	14%
Strongly Oppose	57%
Don't Know.....	9%
Refused.....	1%

Q6. Do you support or oppose schools conducting IQ or intelligence tests to determine the placement of students in classes? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

Strongly Support.....	36%
Somewhat Support.....	29%
Somewhat Oppose.....	12%
Strongly Oppose.....	21%
Don't Know.....	2%
Refused.....	0%

Q7. Control over your ability to make important decisions about yourself and your family members. (PROBE: Is this extremely important, very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all?)

Extremely Important.....	72%
Very Important.....	24%
Somewhat Important.....	3%
Not very Important.....	0%
Not Important at all.....	1%
Don't Know.....	0%
Refused.....	0%

Q8. Control over what physical and psychological tests are administered to you (PROBE: Is this extremely important, very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all?)

Extremely Important.....	57%
Very Important.....	25%
Somewhat Important.....	13%
Not very Important.....	2%
Not Important at all.....	2%
Don't Know.....	1%
Refused.....	0%

Q9. Control over how information about you is collected and used. (PROBE: Is this extremely important, very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all?)

Extremely Important.....	59%
Very Important.....	27%
Somewhat Important.....	10%
Not very Important.....	2%
Not Important at all.....	2%
Don't Know.....	0%
Refused.....	0%