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Center for Survey Research & Analysis

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University of Connecticut Releases New National Poll on the USA PATRIOT ACT

Many surveys have demonstrated that the public generally supports the USA PATRIOT Act, but little is known about public knowledge and support for the Patriot Act's specific provisions. Results from a new survey by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut demonstrate that while the public does support the Patriot Act in the abstract, they are also uninformed about its details and wary of its consequences.

Highlights of the poll include:

- 57% say they are “familiar” with the Patriot Act, however only 42% can identify its primary intent and only 31% can pass a quiz on its specifics.
- 64% of Americans overall support the Patriot Act; 85% of Republicans, 50% of Democrats.
- The more the public knows about the Patriot Act, the less they support it – 57% of those who know the intent of the legislation support it, compared to 70% of those who do not know the intent of it.
- When asked about specific provisions of the Patriot Act, support varies considerably:
 - Majorities support permitting information sharing between intelligence agents and criminal investigators, monitoring of the routing of Internet messages, and the use of roving wiretaps.
 - Substantial opposition exists for permitting federal agents to access bank records without judicial approval, and for conducting secret searches of Americans' homes.
- Americans are wary that the Patriot Act will be abused – Majorities think that law enforcement will frequently or occasionally investigate crimes other than terrorism (76%) and investigate legitimate political and social groups (72%).
- Americans believe that some groups have more cause than others to fear investigation under the Patriot Act – 50% think Muslim Americans will be investigative targets, 49% think Arab Americans, and 40% think Iraqi war protestors will be investigative targets as compared to 13% of ordinary Americans.

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Full Summary of the Data, Methodology and Comments from the Pollster

Knowledge of the Patriot Act

Americans know less about the Patriot Act than they think. Knowledge of the Patriot Act was assessed in three different ways: self-reported knowledge, general understanding, and familiarity with specific features of the legislation.

Fifty-seven percent of Americans report being at least “somewhat” familiar with the Patriot Act, with 15% claiming that they are “very” or “extremely” familiar.

However, when it comes to identifying the primary intent of the Patriot Act from among four options – one correct and three incorrect – less than half can do so. Forty-two percent of Americans correctly identify the Patriot Act as primarily dealing with “enhanced surveillance procedures for federal law enforcement agencies,” as opposed to the incorrect objectives of “supplying body armor and higher combat pay for soldiers serving in Iraq,” “the procedures for interrogating suspected terrorists in foreign countries,” or “the security of airlines and other forms of transportation.”

Three Levels of Public Knowledge on the Patriot Act

Self-reported familiarity with the Patriot Act	57%
Correctly identify the Patriot Act’s primary intent	42%
Pass a quiz on the Patriot Act’s specific safeguards	31%

Knowledge of specific aspects of the Patriot Act is even lower. While many Americans can identify one or two of its actual safeguards, few can correctly identify more. Respondents were provided with ten safeguards against terrorism and for each were asked whether it was covered by the Patriot Act. To diminish the impact of guessing, half of the safeguards administered were actually established by the Patriot Act and half were not.

Overall, the majority of Americans can only classify four out of ten given safeguards correctly. If the questions are considered together and treated like a quiz assessing the public’s knowledge of the Patriot Act, most Americans perform quite poorly. Less than a third of Americans receive a passing grade, correctly answering six or more questions. A mere 1% get all the answers right.

According to Professor Samuel Best, Director of the Center for Survey Research and Analysis : “There’s a contradiction in knowledge of the Patriot Act, Americans think they’re familiar with it, but when you actually ask them about the specifics, it’s clear that most of the public doesn’t understand what the Patriot Act actually does.”

Support for the Patriot Act

More than six out of ten Americans support the Patriot Act. Of those who do, more than half (or 35% overall) support the legislation strongly. Not surprisingly, there are large partisan differences in public attitudes. Eighty-five percent of Republicans support the Patriot Act, while only half of Democrats do.

There are also clear differences in support among the least and most informed – the more the public knows about the Patriot Act, the less they support it. Among those who do not know the intent of the Patriot Act, 70% support the legislation. Among those who are actually aware of the Patriot Act’s intent fewer – 57% -- support the legislation.

Support for the Patriot Act among Different Groups

	Support
All Americans	64%
Republicans	85%
Democrats	50%
Less informed about the Patriot Act	70%
More informed about the Patriot Act	57%

In addition to being more supportive, Republicans are more informed about the Patriot Act than are Democrats. Forty-four percent of Republicans know the primary intent of the Patriot Act compared to only 36% of Democrats. On more specific details, however, Republicans do not do much better than Democrats – only 13% of Republicans answered more than two-thirds of the specific questions about the legislation correctly as did 9% of Democrats.

Support for the Patriot Act is more varied when Americans are asked about specific features. The public was asked their support for six different provisions of the legislation. Large majorities support permitting information sharing between intelligence agents and criminal investigators, as well as monitoring the routing of Internet messages, and the use of roving wiretaps. Americans are on the fence about libraries having to turn over records, with half approving of the provision. And substantial opposition exists for permitting federal agents to access bank records without judicial approval, and for conducting secret searches of Americans homes.

Support for Various Provisions of the Patriot Act

	% Support
Permit federal agents to use information collected in foreign intelligence investigations for domestic crime investigations	81%
Permit federal agents to monitor the names, dates, and addresses of Internet communications in criminal investigations	69%
Permit federal agents to tap any telephone line a terrorist suspect might use rather specifying particular phone lines	62%
Permit federal agents to require libraries to turn over records in terrorism investigations unbeknownst to the patrons	53%
Permit federal agents to require banks to turn over records to the government without judicial approval	43%
Permit federal agents to conduct secret searches of Americans’ homes without informing the occupants for an unspecified period of time	23%

Compiling individual responses to these questions reveals lower support for the Patriot Act than the general question suggests. Half of Americans support a majority of the provisions assessed, lower than the 64% of Americans who report supporting the Patriot Act overall. Only 14% of respondents support all the provisions of the Patriot Act that were offered. “These results demonstrate that Americans are more divided over the Patriot Act than they appear at first glance,” said Professor Best.

The public’s reservations about some specific aspects of the Patriot Act are further borne out by attitudes toward renewing the legislation. One-fifth of Americans think the government should renew the Patriot Act in its current form. A majority – 57% -- think the Patriot Act should be renewed, but with some modifications. Only 17% think the Patriot Act should be left to expire.

“Even though Congress is in the midst of renewing the Patriot Act in its current form, it’s evident that Americans are wary of a number of its key provisions, and the more they know about them, the less they support the Act,” says Professor Best.

Perceived Consequences of the Patriot Act

Three-quarters of Americans believe that law enforcement officials will use the surveillance powers granted under the Patriot Act to investigate crimes other than terrorism – 46% feel this will happen frequently, and 30% feel it will happen occasionally. Majorities also feel that the Patriot Act’s powers will be at least occasionally abused by investigating legitimate groups, requiring banks to turn over patrons’ general financial records, and obtaining search warrants to investigate a crime even if none is suspected. Half of Americans feel that ordinary citizens will have their mail, telephone, e-mail, or cell phone calls checked.

Frequency of Abuses of Power Under the Patriot Act

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely/Never
Law enforcement will use their surveillance powers to investigate crimes other than terrorism	46%	30%	20%
Law enforcement will investigate legitimate political and social groups	37%	35%	24%
Banks will be required to turn over the general financial records of their customers	27%	35%	34%
Law enforcement will request search warrants to see if they could uncover a crime, even if none had been committed or suspected	27%	30%	40%
Ordinary citizens will have their mail, telephone, emails, or cell phone calls checked	21%	29%	48%

Americans believe that some groups have more cause than others to fear investigation under the Patriot Act. Eighty-five percent say it is extremely or very likely that suspected terrorists – the actual target of the act – will be investigated. But many also believe that groups not actually targeted by the act will end up being investigated – such as Muslim Americans (50%) and Arab Americans (49%). Four out of ten believe that Iraq war protesters will be investigative targets. In contrast, only 13% feel that “ordinary Americans” will be investigated.

Likelihood of Certain Groups being Investigated Under the Patriot Act

	Extremely or Very Likely
Suspected Terrorists	85%
Americans who send money to a charitable organization that has ties to a terrorist group	78%
Americans who visit terrorist web sites	69%
Americans who check out bombing making books from the library	69%
Muslim Americans	50%
Arab Americans	49%
Americans who protest the Iraq war	40%
Ordinary Americans	13%

When asked about the effectiveness of the Patriot Act so far, Americans are divided. Forty-three percent of Americans feel that the Act has been successful so far in preventing terrorist attacks, but an equal 44% feel that the Act has not prevented terrorist attacks.

Professor Best notes: "Fears of abuse under the Patriot Act and uncertainty about its effectiveness are clearly fueling Americans' reservations about the legislation."

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 800 Americans from across the nation. Interviews were conducted from Thursday August 4 through Tuesday August 22, 2005. Sampling error is 3.5% at the 95% level of confidence for results based on all adults. Error for subgroups is higher. Attached to this release is the questionnaire used for the survey.

Patriot Act Survey

(Note: Marginals rounded to nearest whole number)

Q1. As you may know, shortly after September 11, 2001, a law called the USA Patriot Act was passed by the federal government. How familiar are you with the Patriot Act-extremely familiar, very familiar, somewhat familiar, not too familiar, or not at all familiar?"

Extremely familiar.....	3%
Very Familiar.....	12%
Somewhat Familiar.....	43%
Not Too Familiar.....	21%
Not At All Familiar.....	21%
Don't Know (vol).....	1%
Refused (vol).....	0%

Q2. To the best of your knowledge, which of the following does the Patriot Act primarily deal with, is it:

Enhanced surveillance procedures for federal law enforcement agencies.....	42%
Supplying body armor and higher combat pay for soldiers serving in Iraq.....	6%
The procedures for interrogating suspected terrorists in other countries.....	13%
The security of airlines and other forms of public transportation.....	16%
Don't Know (vol).....	22%
Refused (vol).....	1%

Q3. The Patriot Act makes it easier for the federal government to collect information on suspicious Americans. Based on what you have read or heard, do you support or oppose the Patriot Act? (Probe: Support/Oppose - Strongly/Somewhat)

Strongly Support.....	35%
Somewhat Support.....	29%
Somewhat Oppose.....	12%
Strongly Oppose.....	13%
Neither Support nor Oppose (vol).....	7%
Don't Know (vol).....	3%
Refused (vol).....	0%

Q4. Do you think the Patriot Act has prevented terrorist attacks in the United States?

Yes.....	43%
No.....	44%
Don't Know.....	13%
Refused.....	0%

Q5. Many of the provisions of the Patriot act are in fact scheduled to expire at the end of the year. Do you think the government should renew the Patriot Act in its current form, renew it with some modifications, or let it expire?

Renew in its current form.....	20%
Renew it with some modifications.....	57%
Let it expire.....	17%
Don't Know.....	5%
Refused.....	0%

Next, I'm going to read you a list of safeguards which federal law enforcement agencies could possibly use to combat terrorism. For each safeguard, please tell me whether it was established by the Patriot Act, or not? (Q6 – Q15 Randomized)

Q6. Greater government authority to monitor records of telephone calls?

Yes this safeguard was established by the Patriot Act.....	62%
No this safeguard was not established by the Patriot Act.....	24%
Don't Know (vol).....	13%
Refused (vol).....	0%

Q7. Greater government authority to conduct secret searches of homes and property?

Yes this safeguard was established by the Patriot Act..... 48%
No this safeguard was not established by the Patriot Act..... 37%
Don't Know (vol)..... 15%
Refused (vol) 0%

Q8. Greater government authority to search library records?

Yes this safeguard was established by the Patriot Act..... 59%
No this safeguard was not established by the Patriot Act..... 25%
Don't Know (vol)..... 17%
Refused (vol) 0%

Q9. Greater government authority to intercept communications on the Internet?

Yes this safeguard was established by the Patriot Act..... 70%
No this safeguard was not established by the Patriot Act..... 16%
Don't Know (vol)..... 14%
Refused (vol) 0%

Q10. Greater government authority to monitor banking transactions?

Yes this safeguard was established by the Patriot Act..... 57%
No this safeguard was not established by the Patriot Act..... 28%
Don't Know (vol)..... 15%
Refused (vol) 0%

Q11. Greater government authority to attach electronic tracking devices to a vehicle?

Yes this safeguard was established by the Patriot Act..... 42%
No this safeguard was not established by the Patriot Act..... 36%
Don't Know (vol)..... 23%
Refused (vol) 0%

Q12. Greater government authority to conduct searches of airline passengers and their luggage?

Yes this safeguard was established by the Patriot Act..... 77%
No this safeguard was not established by the Patriot Act..... 14%
Don't Know (vol)..... 10%
Refused (vol) 0%

Q13. Greater government authority to install surveillance cameras in public places.

Yes this safeguard was established by the Patriot Act..... 64%
No this safeguard was not established by the Patriot Act..... 21%
Don't Know (vol)..... 16%
Refused (vol) 0%

Q14. Greater government authority to search through the trash left in front of American homes?

Yes this safeguard was established by the Patriot Act..... 33%
No this safeguard was not established by the Patriot Act..... 48%
Don't Know (vol)..... 19%
Refused (vol) 0%

Q15. Greater government authority to track guns sold in the United States?

Yes this safeguard was established by the Patriot Act..... 51%
No this safeguard was not established by the Patriot Act..... 35%
Don't Know (vol)..... 14%
Refused (vol) 0%

As you may know, many provisions of the original Patriot Act are up for renewal. I'm going to read you a list of proposed measures that are being debated in Congress. For each, please tell me whether you support or oppose it. (Q16 – Q21 Randomized)

Q16. A proposal being debated would enable courts to authorize federal law enforcement agents to tap any telephone a terrorist suspect might use rather than specifying particular phone lines. Do you support or oppose this proposal?

Support this proposal	62%
Oppose this proposal	35%
Don't Know (vol).....	3%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q17. A proposal being debated would enable courts to authorize federal law enforcement agents to conduct secret searches of Americans' homes without informing the occupants for an unspecified period of time, if they argue that immediate notification might have adverse results on the criminal investigation. Do you support or oppose this proposal?

Support this proposal	23%
Oppose this proposal	74%
Don't Know (vol).....	3%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q18. A proposal being debated would enable courts to authorize federal law enforcement agents to require libraries to turn over records in terrorism investigations and prevents the libraries from revealing to the patrons that these records have been turned over to the government. Do you support or oppose this proposal?

Support this proposal	53%
Oppose this proposal	45%
Don't Know (vol).....	3%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q19. A proposal being debated enables federal law enforcement agents in terrorism investigations to require banks to turn over records to the government without a judge's prior approval. Do you support or oppose this proposal?

Support this proposal	43%
Oppose this proposal	55%
Don't Know (vol).....	2%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q20. A proposal being debated would enable courts to authorize federal law enforcement agents in criminal investigations to monitor the names, dates, and addresses of Internet communications, but not the content of these communications. Do you support or oppose this proposal?

Support this proposal	69%
Oppose this proposal	26%
Don't Know (vol).....	5%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q21. A proposal being debated would allow federal law enforcement agents to use information collected in foreign intelligence investigations for domestic crime investigations. Do you support or oppose this proposal?

Support this proposal	81%
Oppose this proposal	15%
Don't Know (vol).....	5%
Refused (vol)	0%

Next, I am going to read you some ways in which the Patriot Act might be used. Please tell me how often you think each activity will occur - frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? (Q22 – Q26 Randomized)

Q22. How often do you think law enforcement will investigate legitimate political and social groups

Frequently	37%
Occasionally	35%
Rarely	18%
Never	6%
Don't Know (vol).....	4%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q23. How often do think ordinary citizens will have their mail, telephone, emails, or cell phone calls checked?

Frequently	21%
Occasionally	29%
Rarely	38%
Never	10%
Don't Know (vol).....	2%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q24. How often do you think law enforcement will use their surveillance powers to investigate crimes other than terrorism?

Frequently	46%
Occasionally	30%
Rarely	17%
Never	4%
Don't Know (vol).....	4%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q25. How often do you think law enforcement will request search warrants to see if they could uncover a crime, even if none had been committed or suspected?

Frequently	27%
Occasionally	30%
Rarely	29%
Never	11%
Don't Know (vol).....	3%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q26. How often do you think banks will be required to turn over the general financial records of their customers?

Frequently	27%
Occasionally	35%
Rarely	26%
Never	8%
Don't Know (vol).....	4%
Refused (vol)	0%

Next, I am going to read you descriptions of different types of people. I would like you to tell me how likely it is that provisions of the Patriot Act will be used to investigate them.

Q27. Ordinary Americans

Extremely likely	4%
Very likely	10%
Somewhat likely	35%
Not Too likely.....	36%
Not At All likely.....	14%
Don't Know (vol).....	2%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q28. Suspected Terrorists

Extremely likely	55%
Very likely	30%
Somewhat likely	12%
Not Too likely.....	1%
Not At All likely.....	1%
Don't Know (vol).....	1%
Refused (vol)	0%

*** SPLIT SAMPLE (Q29A-Q29B)***

Q29A. Muslim Americans

Extremely likely	19%
Very likely	30%
Somewhat likely	36%
Not Too likely.....	9%
Not At All likely.....	4%
Don't Know (vol).....	1%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q29B. Christian Americans

Extremely likely	4%
Very likely	7%
Somewhat likely	25%
Not Too likely.....	39%
Not At All likely.....	22%
Don't Know (vol).....	3%
Refused (vol)	1%

*** SPLIT SAMPLE (Q30A-Q30D)***

Q30A. Arab Americans

Extremely likely	19%
Very likely	31%
Somewhat likely	33%
Not Too likely.....	9%
Not At All likely.....	6%
Don't Know (vol).....	2%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q30B. Hispanic Americans

Extremely likely	5%
Very likely	17%
Somewhat likely	32%
Not Too likely.....	37%
Not At All likely.....	9%
Don't Know (vol).....	2%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q30C. White Americans

Extremely likely	2%
Very likely	12%
Somewhat likely	33%
Not Too likely.....	38%
Not At All likely.....	11%
Don't Know (vol).....	5%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q30D. African Americans

Extremely likely	7%
Very likely	11%
Somewhat likely	33%
Not Too likely.....	28%
Not At All likely.....	18%
Don't Know (vol).....	2%
Refused (vol)	0%

*** SPLIT SAMPLE (Q31A-Q31D)***

Q31A. Americans who protest the Iraq War

Extremely likely	13%
Very likely	27%
Somewhat likely	34%
Not Too likely.....	12%
Not At All likely.....	12%
Don't Know (vol).....	2%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q31B. Americans who check out bomb-making books from the library

Extremely likely	33%
Very likely	36%
Somewhat likely	19%
Not Too likely.....	3%
Not At All likely.....	5%
Don't Know (vol).....	4%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q31C. Americans who visit terrorist web sites

Extremely likely	31%
Very likely	38%
Somewhat likely	24%
Not Too likely.....	6%
Not At All likely.....	1%
Don't Know (vol).....	1%
Refused (vol)	0%

Q31D. Americans who send money to a charitable organization that has ties to a terrorist group

Extremely likely	36%
Very likely	41%
Somewhat likely	17%
Not Too likely.....	3%
Not At All likely.....	3%
Don't Know (vol).....	0%
Refused (vol)	0%

	<u>Unweighted</u>	<u>Weighted</u>
Total respondents	802	802
Republican respondents	248	231
Democratic respondents	246	241
Independent respondents	308	330