



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2011

Public Remains Divided Over the Patriot Act

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Public views of the Patriot Act, whose renewal is being debated by Congress, have changed little since the Bush administration. Currently, 42% say the Patriot Act is a necessary tool that helps the government find terrorists, while somewhat fewer (34%) say the Patriot Act goes too far and poses a threat to civil liberties.

In 2006, the public divided evenly over the Patriot Act, with 39% saying it is a necessary tool and 38% saying it goes too far. In 2004, a slight plurality (39%) said it goes too far and threatens civil liberties.

The survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted Feb. 10-13, 2011 among 1,000 adults, finds that while overall opinions about the Patriot Act have changed modestly since 2006, Democrats express more positive views of the law than they did five years ago.

Currently, about as many Democrats say the law is a necessary tool as say it goes too far (35% vs. 40%). In January 2006, 25% said it was a necessary tool while about twice as many (53%) said it goes too far.

Over the same period, the proportion of Republicans who view the Patriot Act as a necessary tool that helps the government find terrorists has declined slightly, from 65% to 57%.

There is less public awareness of the debate over Patriot Act than there was in 2006 or 2004. Today, just 32% say they have heard a lot (12%) or some (20%) about the issue. In January 2006, 51% heard at least some about the Patriot Act; 44% heard at least some about it in December 2004.

Among those who heard a lot or some about the Patriot Act, 49% see it as a necessary tool while 41% say it goes too far. In 2006, opinion was more evenly divided among those

Opinions of the Patriot Act

	Dec 2004	Jan 2006	Feb 2011
<i>Which comes closer to your view of the Patriot Act....</i>	%	%	%
A necessary tool that helps gov't find terrorists	33	39	42
It goes too far and poses threat to civil liberties	39	38	34
Don't know	<u>28</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>23</u>
	100	100	100

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Democrats Now More Supportive of Patriot Act

Views of Patriot Act	Jan 2006		Feb 2011	
	Necessary tool	Goes too far	Necessary tool	Goes too far
Total	39	38	42	34
Republican	65	16	57	22
Democrat	25	53	35	40
Independent	33	44	37	42

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who had heard at least some about the Patriot Act (48% necessary tool, 46% goes too far).

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted February 10-13, 2011 among a national sample of 1,000 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (670 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 330 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 131 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/detailed>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2010 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2010 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Sample Size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1000	4.0 percentage points
Republicans	288	7.0 percentage points
Democrats	287	7.0 percentage points
Independents	343	6.5 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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FINAL TOPLINE
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PEW.1 THROUGH PEW.3 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

PEW.4 How much have you heard or read about the Patriot Act, adopted in 2001, which is now up for renewal in Congress – a lot, some, not much, or nothing at all?

Feb 10-13 2011		January 2006	CBS/NYT	
			December 2004	April 2004
12	A lot	21	15	12
20	Some	30	29	27
31	Not much	23	27	28
35	Nothing at all	24	26	30
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	2	3	2

ASK ALL:

PEW.5 Which comes closer to your view... Is the Patriot Act a necessary tool that helps the government find terrorists or does it go too far and pose a threat to civil liberties?

Feb 10-13 2011		Jan 2006	Dec 2004	Based on those that heard a lot/some...			
				Feb 10-13 2011	Jan 2006	Dec 2004	CBS/NYT Apr 2004 ¹
42	Necessary tool	39	33	49	48	46	52
34	Goes too far	38	39	41	46	48	42
23	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	23	28	10	6	6	6

¹ In April 2004 the CBS/NYT question was proceeded with "Some people say the Patriot Act is a necessary tool that helps the government find terrorists, while others say it goes too far and is a threat to civil liberties."