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Chapter 16: U.S. Opinion on Human Rights

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CHAPTER 16: U.S. OPINION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The Role of the United Nations in Human Rights

Americans express support for the United Nations playing an active role in promoting human rights and reject the argument that this would be improper interference in the internal affairs of a country. A large majority favors the UN playing a larger role than it presently does to promote human rights and favor giving it greater power to go into countries to investigate human rights abuses. A substantial majority of Americans believe that the UN should try to further women’s rights even when presented with the argument that this would conflict with the principle of national sovereignty. When asked which entity should make decisions on matters related to human rights, more Americans prefer giving this role to the UN or regional organizations than to national governments.

In a 2008 WorldPublicOpinion.org (WPO) poll, respondents were told that “the members of the UN General Assembly have agreed on a set of principles called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” They were then presented with the debate about whether the United Nations should actively promote such rights: “Some people say the United Nations should actively promote such human rights principles in member states. Others say this is improper interference in a country’s internal affairs and human rights should be left to each country.”

They were then asked, “Do you think the UN should or should not actively promote human rights in member states?” Seventy percent of U.S. respondents favored the UN actively promoting human rights while 25 percent were opposed to such efforts. The dominant view in all twenty-four nations polled—by majorities in twenty-two, pluralities in two—was to favor an active UN role. Overall, the global average was identical to the U.S. average: 70 percent.¹

The General Social Survey in 2004 asked Americans to choose between two positions on UN intervention to protect human rights. Three-quarters endorsed the view, “If a country seriously violates human rights, the United Nations should intervene,” while just 18 percent endorsed the view that, “Even if human rights are seriously violated, the country’s sovereignty must be respected, and the United Nations should not intervene.”²

A WPO poll in 2008 asked respondents: “Would you like to see the UN do more, do less, or do about the same as it has been doing to promote human rights principles?” A substantial majority of Americans (59 percent) said they would like to see the UN do more; 28 percent said it should do the same; and 7 percent said it should do less. Across all twenty-four nations polled, comparable figures were 65 percent, 17 percent, and 8 percent (WPO 2008), suggesting global as well as U.S. support for a vigorous UN role in promoting human rights.³

Giving the UN New Investigative Powers

When the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA) asked about possible steps for strengthening the United Nations in 2010, 72 percent of Americans endorsed “giving the UN the authority to go into countries in order to investigate violations of human rights,” while 26 percent of respondents were opposed. Views were essentially the same in a 2008 WPO/CCGA poll that included twenty-one other countries. In the earlier poll, on average, out of the twenty-two countries polled, about two-thirds of all respondents (65 percent) were in favor, with just 22 percent opposed.⁴

The UN Promoting Women’s Rights

A 2008 WPO poll asked, “Do you think the UN should make efforts to further the rights of women or do you think this is improper interference in a country’s internal affairs?”

In the United States, 59 percent of respondents thought the United Nations should make such efforts while 38 percent said this would be improper interference. Across the twenty countries polled, an even higher average of 66 percent approved of UN initiatives to further the rights of women, while 26 percent said this would be improper interference.⁵

The Role of the UN, Regional Organizations and National Governments

The World Values Survey from 2005 to 2008 asked respondents who should decide policies in the area of human rights, posing the following question: “Some people believe that certain kinds of problems could be better handled by the United Nations or regional organizations rather than by each national government separately. Others think that these problems should be left entirely to the national governments. I’m going to mention some problems. For each one, would you tell me whether you think that policies in this area should be decided by the national governments, by regional organizations, or by the United Nations?”

In the United States, 44 percent of respondents said they favored giving this human rights role to national governments, while 51 percent favored a multilateral approach, with 33 percent favoring the UN and 18 percent favoring a regional organization. Similarly, across forty-two countries polled, on average, 40 percent favored national governments, 37 percent favored the UN, and 13 percent a regional organization.⁶

Freedom of Expression

Americans nearly unanimously support the principle that individuals have a right to freedom of expression, including the right to criticize government and religious leaders. An overwhelming majority of Americans also believe that the government should not have the right to prohibit discussion of certain political or religious views and that people should have the right to demonstrate peacefully against their government.

A 2008 WPO poll asked respondents how important it is for “people to have the right to express any opinion, including criticisms of the government or religious leaders.” Asked in the United States, an overwhelming majority (98 percent) said that it is important to have freedom of expression, with 76 percent saying it is very important; just 2 percent said it is not important. On average across twenty-three nations polled, 88 percent judged this right to be important with 66 percent saying it is “very important.” Only 7 percent saw it as either not very important (5 percent) or not important at all (2 percent).⁷

Right of Governments to Prohibit Expression

The right to free expression can also be examined from the perspective of whether the government should have the right to prohibit discussion of particular beliefs or attitudes. A 2008 WPO poll asked whether the government should “have the right to prohibit certain political or religious views from being discussed”. In the United States, only 13 percent of respondents said that the government should have the right to prohibit certain views from being discussed, while an overwhelming majority (85 percent) said that the government should not have the right. On average across the twenty-two nations polled, only 36 percent of people said the government should have such a right, while 57 percent said that the government should not.⁸

Right to Demonstrate Peacefully

A 2008 WPO poll asked respondents if they favored the people’s right to peacefully demonstrate against the government or if “the government should have the right to ban peaceful demonstrations that it thinks would be politically destabilizing.” U.S. respondents overwhelmingly (94 percent) supported the right to peacefully demonstrate against the government, while only 5 percent accepted that the government could ban peaceful demonstrations on the grounds of political stability. On average across all twenty-two publics polled, average support for unqualified right to demonstrate peacefully was somewhat lower but still overwhelming (75 percent); only one-fifth of respondents (20 percent) believed the government should have the right to ban peaceful demonstrations it thinks would be politically destabilizing.⁹

Media Freedom

There is robust support in the United States for the principle that the media should be free of government control and that citizens should even have access to material from hostile countries. A majority of U.S. respondents also say that the government should not have the right to limit access to the internet and believe that the government should not have the right to prohibit publishing material it thinks will be politically destabilizing.

The broad principle of media freedom gets robust support in the United States. In 2008, a WPO poll asked how important it is “for the media to be free to publish news and ideas without government control.” Among Americans polled, 88 percent of respondents said it is important for the media to be free to provide the public with news and ideas without government control, while 11 percent said it was not important. Comparatively, on average across twenty-two nations polled, 81 percent said it is important, while only 11 percent considered it not important.¹⁰

Both Americans and publics around the globe also believe that citizens have the right to read publications from hostile countries. WPO in 2008 asked whether people in their country should “have the right to read publications from all other countries including those that might be considered enemies.” In the United States, 92 percent of respondents affirmed this right, while only 7 percent said this right was not important. Comparatively, on average across twenty-one publics, 80 percent of respondents endorsed this right, while just 13 percent disagreed.¹¹

In 2008, WPO asked respondents whether people in their country should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet, or if instead they thought the government should have the right to prevent people from having access to some things on the Internet. A large majority of U.S. respondents (75 percent) said that people should have a right to read whatever is on the Internet, while 24 percent said the government could prevent access to some things. Globally, an average of 62 percent of respondents in twenty-one nations agreed that people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet and 30 percent favored the government having the right to prevent access to some things.¹²

Controlling Potentially Destabilizing Information

In 2007, a British Broadcasting Company (BBC)/GlobeScan poll asked publics to choose between the following statements: “Freedom of the press to report the news truthfully is very important to ensure we live in a fair society, even if it sometimes leads to unpleasant debates or social unrest” and “While freedom of the press to report news truthfully is important, social harmony and peace are more important, which sometimes means controlling what is reported for the greater good.”

A large majority (70 percent) of U.S. respondents support freedom of the press, while 28 percent believe that social harmony and peace are more important. On average across the fourteen countries surveyed, 56 percent said that freedom of the press is most important, while 40 percent said that controlling the press for the greater good is more important.¹³

Religious Freedom

Americans believe it is important for people of different religions to be treated equally and majorities affirm that followers of any religion should be allowed to assemble and practice in the United States. Additionally, a substantial majority of U.S. respondents believe that people of any religion should be allowed to try to actively to convert others to their religion, which differs from the global average.

Support for the norm of equal treatment of adherents of different religions is quite robust. WPO in 2008 asked respondents, “How important do you think it is for people of different religions to be treated equally?” A large majority of U.S. respondents (77 percent) said that treating people of different religions is very important, 18 percent said it was important, 3 percent said it was not very important, and just 1 percent said it was not important at all. On average across the twenty-four nations polled, 89 percent said that it is important. Just 7 percent said it was “not very important” or “not important at all.”¹⁴

When respondents were asked to consider the right of *any* religion to be practiced, support in the United States and globally was still high, but there were some countries where a majority backed away from endorsing such a right. WPO asked respondents to choose between two statements: “Followers of any religion should be allowed to assemble and practice in [our country],” or “there are some religions that people should not be allowed to practice in [our country].” The wording of the question intentionally offered a test, by evoking in respondents’ minds “some religion” that they might find specifically objectionable.

In the United States, 67 percent of respondents said that followers of any religion should have the right to assemble and practice, while 28 percent said that some religions should be excluded. Comparatively, on average across all publics in the twenty-three countries surveyed, 61 percent endorsed the right to assemble and practice any religion, while 32 percent said some religions should be excluded.¹⁵

Trying to Convert Others

The right to try to convert others to one's religion remains a controversial issue. Indeed, more publics oppose such a right than favor it. It should be noted that the Universal Declaration on Human Rights does not explicitly establish such a right, though it does provide for the right to change one's religion.

WPO asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "In [our country], people of any religion should be free to try to convert members of other religions to join theirs." In the United States, 58 percent of respondents agree that people of any religion should be free to try to convert members of other religions to join theirs, while 38 percent of respondents disagree. Opinion is even more divided globally. On average across all publics in twenty-three populations, a majority disagree, 51 percent to 41 percent.¹⁶

Women's Rights

A large majority in the United States supports the principle that women should have "full equality of rights," and believe their government has the responsibility to seek to prevent discrimination against women.

Asked in the United States whether women should "have full equality of rights compared to men," 77 percent of respondents believe that this right is very important, 20 percent said that it is somewhat important, 2 percent said it is not very important, and only 1 percent said women's rights are not important at all. Comparatively, on average across the twenty-one publics polled, 59 percent said it is very and 27 percent somewhat important. Ten percent responded that they were "not very important" or "not important at all."¹⁷

Between 2005 and 2008, World Values Survey asked whether women's equality was an essential characteristic of democracy. On a scale of one to ten, with one implying it is not an essential characteristic and ten implying it is, U.S. respondents had a mean score of nine, which is equal to the global average across forty-two nations.¹⁸

Government Intervention

The U.S. public, like publics around the world, strongly supports the government taking an active role to further women's rights. A WPO poll in 2008 about whether the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination against women found that U.S. respondents overwhelmingly supported government efforts to prevent discrimination (82 percent) while only 17 percent said the government should not intervene. An average across the twenty-two publics polled globally found that 81 percent of those answering felt that the government should be involved, whereas only 15 percent felt that it should not.¹⁹

Racial and Ethnic Equality

Large majorities in the United States say people of different races and ethnicities should be treated equally, and an overwhelming majority says that employers should not be allowed to discriminate based on race or ethnicity and that it is the government's responsibility to stop this from happening. In general, large majorities in the United States agree that governments should take action to prevent racial discrimination.

A 2008 WPO poll asked whether respondents considered it important for "people of different races and ethnicities to be treated equally." In the United States, 96 percent said it is important, with 79 percent saying it is very important. On average across twenty-two publics globally, 91 percent said this principle is important, with 69 percent saying it is very important.²⁰

Workplace Discrimination

Asked whether employers should be allowed to “refuse to hire a qualified person because of the person’s race or ethnicity,” on average 86 percent of U.S. respondents said that employers should not be able to base hiring decisions on race, while just 13 percent said they should. In polling across twenty nations, an average of 72 percent said employers should not be able to base hiring decisions on race, while just 21 percent believed they should.²¹

Additionally, a large majority of Americans (69 percent) said that the government has the responsibility to take action against employer discrimination, while 17 percent said it should not be involved. On average across twenty publics, 58 percent of people polled globally believed that the government has the responsibility to take action against such practices, while just 14 percent believed it does not.²²

Wide Support for Government Action

Respondents in the United States agree that governments should act to ensure that racial and ethnic minorities are treated equally. Eighty-three percent believe that the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination based on race while just 17 percent believe the government should not be involved. On average, 80 percent of global respondents agreed that the government “should make an effort to prevent discrimination based on a person’s race or ethnicity,” while just 11 percent felt that the government should not be involved.²³

Norms on Torture and Detention

A large majority of Americans support having international rules against torture, threatening torture, or treating detainees in a humiliating or degrading manner. However, a significant minority favors making an exception in the case of terrorists who have information that could save innocent lives. A large majority rejects the idea of making an exception to rules on detention for terrorism-related suspects. Commanders are generally seen as responsible if their subordinates carry out torture.

Three-quarters of Americans support the general principle of having “treaties establishing international laws governing how a country, in the context of armed conflict, must treat an individual it has detained” (WPO 2009).²⁴

The same number of Americans (75 percent) also approved of having a rule against physical torture, while just 21 percent of respondents said the rule was too restrictive. In the average of all five countries polled, 61 percent approved a rule against physical torture and 31 percent said this rule was too restrictive (WPO 2006).²⁵

In another U.S.-only poll, 59 percent supported the principle that “governments should never use physical torture.” Though 39 percent said at first this was too restrictive, when asked if they meant the international convention on the subject should be changed, only 21 percent of the full sample thought it should (WPO 2009).²⁶

A large majority (60 percent) in the 2006 WPO poll also favored a rule against *threatening* physical torture, while 37 percent thought the rule was too restrictive. In the average of all five countries polled, 52 percent favored a rule against threatening physical torture and 39 percent were opposed.

Similarly, on treating detainees in a way that is humiliating or degrading, 61 percent of U.S. respondents approved a rule against humiliating or degrading treatment of detainees, while 36 percent said this rule was too restrictive. In the average of all five countries, 53 percent approved a rule against such treatment and 38 percent said this was too restrictive.²⁷

Making an Exception on Torture to Gain Information about Terrorist Attacks

Since the 9/11 attacks there has been substantial discussion of the possibility of using torture when terrorists have information, representing a challenge to the norm against the use of torture established in various international treaties.

“Ticking Bomb”

One mode of testing the limits for the public's rejection of torture is to ask questions that pose a "ticking bomb scenario." In such a scenario, it is assumed that a new terrorist attack is imminent, and that a suspect in custody has knowledge about the attack that could help authorities prevent the attack and save innocent lives. It should be noted that, in terms of the methodology of polling, most of these questions are unbalanced in that they give a compelling reason to engage in torture but not a balancing argument that would remind respondents of the legal or humanitarian considerations or the potential consequences to America's reputation or to U.S. soldiers should the norm against torture be eroded. Thus they are tests to see if it is possible to persuade Americans to accept torture rather than being a reflection on whether there should be a norm against torture.

CNN/*USA Today* asked: "If the government thought it were necessary to combat terrorism," would respondents "be willing ... to have the U.S. government ... torture known terrorists if they know details about future terrorist attacks in the United States?" Between 2001 and 2005, support for torture in this ticking-bomb scenario declined from 45 percent (2001) to 39 percent (2005). Those opposed rose from 53 percent to 59 percent. It should be noted that this question even made the strong assertion that "the government thought it would be necessary."²⁸

WPO posed such a scenario in 2009, but did not ask about torture abstractly. Instead, WPO asked about specific coercive techniques. Respondents were told that a detainee is likely to have "information about a possible terrorist attack on the United States that may prove critical to stopping the attack," and asked to consider using a number of techniques. Majorities opposed forcing the detainee to take stressful positions (50 percent), using threatening dogs (60 percent), exposing the detainee to extreme heat and cold (61 percent), making the detainee go naked (70 percent), holding the detainee's head under water (77 percent), punching or kicking the detainee (82 percent), and applying electric shocks (79 percent). However, views were divided on bombarding the detainee with loud music and two methods—sleep deprivation and keeping a hood over detainee's head for long periods of time—received modest majority support (53 percent and 54 percent, respectively).²⁹

In another survey, Fox News asked in 2003, "Do you favor or oppose allowing the government to use any means necessary, including physical torture, or obtain information from prisoners that might protect the United States from terrorist attacks?" Forty-four percent favored and 42 percent opposed this proposition. Those opposed were then asked the question: "If there were a possibility that a member of your own family could be saved, then would you favor or oppose allowing the government to use physical torture to obtain information from terrorist prisoners?" Ten percent of the full sample switched their position, netting 54 percent in support of torture if it would save a family member. Fox ran a similar first question again in January 2009, with the same family-member follow-up; the first question found 48 percent opposed and 43 percent in favor; then 5 percent of the full sample switched position, giving 43 percent opposed and 48 percent in favor.³⁰

The ticking bomb scenario that was found most persuasive by respondents was put forward by *Newsweek* in 2005. It asked, "Would you support the use of torture by U.S. (United States) military or intelligence personnel if it might lead to the prevention of a major terrorist attack, or not?" An unusually high 58 percent said yes and 35 percent said no."³¹ But respondents were then asked a subsequent question: "What if the use of torture by the United States makes it more likely that Americans will be tortured by our enemies?" In this case support then reversed, with 36 percent saying yes and 57 percent saying no.³²

In another poll presenting the arguments for and against torture, ABC/*Washington Post* in 2004 offered opposing arguments on the subject, as follows: "Some people say it's acceptable to torture people suspected of terrorism, in cases where other methods have failed and the authorities believe the suspect has information that could prevent terrorist attacks and save lives," whereas "Other people say the use of torture is never acceptable because it's cruel, it may violate international law, it may not work, and it could be used unnecessarily or by mistake on innocent people." Respondents were then asked, "What's your view—do you think it's acceptable to torture people suspected of terrorism in some cases, or do you think the use of torture is never acceptable?" In this case a much larger majority (63 percent) said torture was never acceptable while 35 percent said it was in some cases.³³

In a 2008 WPO poll, respondents were presented with an argument in favor of allowing the torture of potential terrorists who threaten civilians: “Terrorists pose such an extreme threat that governments should now be allowed to use some degree of torture if it may gain information that would save innocent lives.” They were also presented with the counterargument: “Clear rules against torture should be maintained because any use of torture is immoral and will weaken international human rights standards against torture.” In this case, a modest majority (53 percent) of U.S. respondents indicated a preference that clear rules against torture should be maintained, but 44 percent said that an exception is acceptable when innocent lives are at risk. On average across all twenty-two nations polled, 57 percent opted for unequivocal rules against torture. Thirty-five percent favored an exception when innocent lives are at risk.³⁴

A June-July 2006 BBC/GlobeScan/PIPA poll asked the same question about making an exception to rules against torture in the case of terrorist. In this case, a somewhat higher proportion (58 percent) of U.S. respondents said they supported an unequivocal rule against torture while 36 percent favored an exception in the case of terrorists. On average across all twenty-five nations polled, support for an exception was 29 percent, while support for an unequivocal rule was 59 percent.³⁵

Justifiability of Torture

Another mode of testing the limits for the public’s rejection of torture is to ask whether torture *can be justified*—as in this question, asked at least eight times by Pew between July 2004 and June 2009: “Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?”

This wording is problematic, however, since it conflates the question of whether torture is justified under some circumstances with the quite different question of whether a credible argument can be made for it—that it “*can be justified*” in the sense of adducing reasons for it. This makes it difficult to ascertain whether respondents are voicing one view or the other if they respond affirmatively to this question. Between July 2004 and June 2009, the “rarely/never justified” response fluctuated between 47 percent and 60 percent, and the “often/sometimes” response fluctuated between 38 percent and 49 percent (the fluctuations are seemingly random and defy efforts to discern a trend over time). On average, 52 percent said torture can rarely or never be justified while 45 percent have said it can often or sometimes be justified.³⁶

A November 2005 Associated Press-Ipsos poll used essentially the same question, asking whether torture of “suspected terrorists to obtain information about terrorism activities” *can be justified*. An even larger population (59 percent) said torture can rarely or never be justified while 38 percent said it can often or sometime be justified. In the average of all nine countries polled, 63 percent said torture could not be justified and 32 percent said it could be justified.³⁷

However, the response to this question among Americans has shifted since 2009 as torture has been debated in the political sphere, with the Obama administration identified with trying to change existing policies and the opposition identified with the status quo. In a May 2009 AP/Gfk poll, 52 percent said torture could be justified often or sometimes and 47 percent said rarely or never. A January 2010 AP/Gfk poll found a similar result. In a poll conducted by AP/Gfk in the immediate aftermath of the killing of Osama bin Laden by the U.S. military in May 2011, the majority who said torture could be justified at least sometimes was up to 60 percent. Again, these responses are to a question in which some are only answering *whether* a credible argument can be made for torture or not.³⁸

An apparently similar CBS/*New York Times* question from 2006 serves as a useful test. It asked [*italics added*]: “Do you think it *is* sometimes justified to use torture to get information from a suspected terrorist, or *is* torture never justified?” The difference between “*is justified*” and “*can be justified*” turns out to be significant: only 35 percent said torture is sometimes justified while 56 percent said it is never justified. Note too that this 56 percent took an unambiguous position that torture is “never” justified and rejected the equivocal position that it is “sometimes” justified.³⁹

Another wording found a mixed result among Americans. Presented with the statement “Using torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can never be justified,” by the Public Religion Research Institute in November 2010, 50 percent agreed and 48 percent disagreed.⁴⁰

Making Exceptions to Rules on Detention for Terrorism Suspects

A large majority of Americans reject the argument that treaties preventing secret holding of detainees are too restrictive in the context of dealing with the threat of terrorism. In a 2006 WPO poll, respondents were told that their government had signed “treaties that prohibit governments from holding people in secret and require that the International Committee of the Red Cross have access to them.” They were then presented the argument that such treaties are “too restrictive because our government needs to have all options available when dealing with threats like terrorism” as well as the counterargument that such treaties are “important for making sure governments treat people humanely.”

Within the United States, only 23 percent of respondents took the position that the treaties were too restrictive, while a large majority (73 percent) took the position that the treaties are important to ensure governments treat people humanely. Comparatively, across the five countries, an average 62 percent believed the treaties are “important for making sure governments treat people humanely” while 25 percent believed them “too restrictive.” (WPO 2006)⁴¹

When asked whether prisoners who are “suspected terrorists ... should receive all the same legal rights as prisoners of war” (NBC/*Wall Street Journal* 2006)—a position that neither the Bush administration nor the Obama administration has endorsed—a majority said suspected terrorists should be treated under the same rules as prisoners of war, 52 percent to 42 percent.⁴² A much larger majority (81 percent) approved one aspect of prisoner-of-war rules, which says “detainees have a right to a hearing in which the government makes its case for why the detainee should be held and the detainee can challenge the government’s right to hold him or her” (WPO 2009).⁴³

However, in questions that ask whether it is acceptable to detain terrorism-related suspects in ways that are contrary to existing norms, but without clarification that those norms exist, slight majorities may say that it is acceptable. But even in this context, Americans pull back when it seems that such measures are being taken to an extreme.

A 2006 *Time* poll found that 53 percent of Americans favored “allow[ing] the federal government to jail anyone, without a hearing, who is not a U.S. citizen and is suspected of aiding terrorists,” with 43 percent opposed.⁴⁴

However, in the same poll, 59 percent opposed “allow[ing] law enforcement officials to hold people suspected of links to terrorist organizations in jail without bail for an unlimited amount of time” (37 percent in favor).⁴⁵

A bare 51 percent approved a “special trial system ... for suspected terrorists” who “would get a military judge and jury” but “not have the right to hear classified evidence against them” (43 percent opposed).⁴⁶

On the other hand, 51 percent opposed this system in another question (NBC/*Wall Street Journal* 2006), which said that “[terrorist suspects] and their lawyers would not be allowed to view any evidence that has been classified for security reasons that is brought against them, and in some cases the suspects would not be allowed to be present at their court hearings.” In this case, only 41 percent of Americans endorsed this approach.⁴⁷

Responsibility of Commanders

The July 2006 WPO poll also asked respondents whether commanders of military personnel should be held responsible for torture by subordinates, even when the commanders claim not to have been aware of it. A substantial majority (58 percent) of U.S. respondents said commanders of military personnel should be held responsible for torture by subordinates while 37 percent said commanders should not be held responsible. On average across the five countries surveyed, 61 percent favored holding commanders responsible in such a case and 28 percent said commanders should not be held responsible.⁴⁸

Social and Economic Rights

Large majorities in the United States say their government should be responsible for taking care of the poor and for ensuring that citizens can meet their basic needs for food, healthcare, and education.

An October 2007 Pew Global Attitudes Project survey asked whether the government should be responsible for taking care of very poor people who cannot care of themselves. A large majority (70 percent) of U.S. respondents said this is the responsibility of the state, while 28 percent said the government is not responsible for taking care of the poor. In the global average of forty-seven publics, 86 percent of respondents agreed and 12 percent disagreed.⁴⁹

In 2008, WPO explored perceptions of government responsibility for ensuring citizens can meet their needs for food, healthcare, and education.

When asked whether their “government should be responsible for ensuring that its citizens can meet their basic need for food,” or whether “that is not the government’s responsibility,” a very large majority (74 percent) of U.S. respondents supported this proposition, while 25 percent said the government should not be responsible. The average across twenty-four publics was 87 percent in support of this proposition and just 8 percent opposed.⁵⁰

When asked about government responsibility in regard to “the basic need for healthcare,” a very large majority of Americans (77 percent) said the government should be responsible, while 21 percent said the government should not be responsible. On average across twenty-four publics polled globally, 92 percent supported this proposition, while just 5 percent disagreed.⁵¹

On education, an overwhelming majority (83 percent) of respondents in the United States saw the government as responsible for ensuring that people can meet their basic needs, while 16 percent said the government was not responsible. The average percentage of global respondents in support of the government providing education was ninety-one across the twenty-four publics polled, with only 5 percent of respondents disagreeing.⁵²

¹ WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

As you may know, the members of the UN General Assembly have agreed on a set of principles called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Some people say the United Nations should actively promote such human rights principles in member states. Others say this is improper interference in a country's internal affairs and human rights should be left to each country. Do you think the UN SHOULD or SHOULD NOT actively promote human rights in member states?

	Should	Should not	DK / NS
Argentina	91	4	5
Mexico	85	12	3
United States	70	25	5
France	76	20	4
Germany	91	8	2
Great Britain	68	24	8
Italy	81	14	5
Russia	55	29	16
Ukraine	73	9	18
Azerbaijan	89	8	4
Egypt	64	33	3
Jordan	50	33	17
Palestinian Territories	54	41	5
Turkey	60	19	20
Kenya	94	4	2
Nigeria	87	12	1
China	62	16	22
Hong Kong	73	16	12
Macau	68	15	17
India	55	26	19
Indonesia	70	13	17
South Korea	62	35	4
Taiwan	78	12	10
Thailand	44	25	31
Average	70	19	10

² General Social Survey 2004 August 2004

Which of these two statements comes closer to your view?...If a country seriously violates human rights, the United Nations should intervene. Even if human rights are seriously violated, the country's sovereignty must be respected, and the United Nations should not intervene.

75% If a country seriously violates human rights, the United Nations should intervene

18 Even if human rights are seriously violated, the country's sovereignty must be respected, and the United Nations should not intervene

4 Don't know what the United Nations is (Vol.)

3 Can't choose

³ WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

Would you like to see the UN do more, do less, or do about the same as it has been doing to promote human rights principles?

	Do more	Do less	Do about the same as it has been doing	DK / NS
Argentina	85	2	8	5
Mexico	88	2	8	2
United States	59	7	28	5
France	64	6	26	4
Germany	58	7	34	2
Great Britain	64	6	22	8
Italy	83	6	8	3
Russia	45	8	23	24
Ukraine	57	4	18	22
Azerbaijan	58	9	29	4
Egypt	55	22	22	1
Jordan	62	17	8	13
Palestinian Territories	48	23	26	3
Turkey	69	7	8	16
Kenya	91	5	3	1
Nigeria	88	7	4	1
China	51	5	15	29
Hong Kong	65	2	26	7
Macau	65	1	22	12
India	54	14	16	17
Indonesia	66	6	12	17
South Korea	69	3	25	3
Taiwan	62	2	25	11
Thailand	60	7	13	20
Average	65	8	17	10

⁴ **Chicago Council on Global Affairs**

Thinking about specific steps that could be taken to strengthen the UN (United Nations), here are some options that have been proposed. For each one, select if you would favor or oppose this step.

Giving the UN the authority to go into countries in order to investigate violations of human rights

	Favor	Oppose	Not sure/ Decline
2006	75	22	3
2008	73	26	1
2010	72	26	1

WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

Thinking about specific steps that could be taken to strengthen the United Nations, would favor or oppose...giving the UN the authority to go into countries in order to investigate violations of human rights?

	Favor	Oppose	DK/NS
Argentina	46	29	24
Peru	75	23	3
United States	75	22	3
Armenia	67	16	18
France	92	8	1
Great Britain	86	11	3

Poland	58	14	28
Russia	64	17	19
Ukraine	66	13	21
Azerbaijan	77	11	12
Egypt	51	49	0
Iran	54	22	25
Israel	64	31	5
Turkey	47	25	28
Kenya	81	17	2
Nigeria	83	15	3
China	57	28	16
India	54	29	17
Indonesia	71	14	15
Philippines	46	46	9
South Korea	74	25	2
Thailand	52	26	22
Average	65	22	13

⁵ WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

Do you think the UN should make efforts to further the rights of women or do you think this is improper interference in a country's internal affairs?

	Make efforts to further the rights of women	Improper interference in a country's internal affairs	DK / NS
Argentina	78	18	4
Mexico	88	9	3
United States	59	38	2
France	74	19	7
Great Britain	70	26	5
Russia	52	30	18
Ukraine	69	16	16
Azerbaijan	66	23	11
Egypt	30	70	
Iran	52	36	12
Palestinian Territories	49	48	3
Turkey	70	20	11
Kenya	91	8	1
Nigeria	66	32	2
China	86	10	4
Hong Kong	67	23	10
India	48	28	24

Indonesia	74	16	10
South Korea	78	21	1
Thailand	64	21	15
Average	66	26	8

⁶ World Values Survey 2005-2008

Some people believe that certain kinds of problems could be better handled by the United Nations or regional organizations rather than by each national government separately. Others think that these problems should be left entirely to the national governments. I'm going to mention some problems. For each one, would you tell me whether you think that policies in this area should be decided by the national governments, by regional organizations, or by the United Nations?

Human Rights

	National governments	Regional Organization	United Nations	DK/NR
Italy	27	15	51	8
Spain	16	14	56	13
United States	44	18	33	5
Japan	27	11	47	16
Mexico	41	9	41	8
South Africa	58	15	23	4
Australia	29	9	57	5
Sweden	16	9	73	2
Argentina	39	4	39	18
Finland	33	8	56	3
South Korea	49	10	40	0
Poland	49	7	41	3
Switzerland	25	8	62	4
Brazil	44	11	39	7
Chile	52	7	34	8
India	36	10	13	41
Slovenia	39	30	20	10
Bulgaria	34	26	30	11
Romania	43	10	30	17
China	32	4	17	48
Taiwan	54	10	32	4
Turkey	41	12	39	8
Ukraine	57	14	19	10
Ghana	67	9	22	3
Moldova	55	17	24	4
Thailand	50	24	26	0
Indonesia	55	3	35	8
Vietnam	59	5	27	8
Serbia	50	8	34	9
Egypt	45	15	37	3
Morocco	34	6	42	18
Jordan	21	15	50	13
Cyprus	33	29	37	1
Trinidad & Tobago	45	11	40	3

Andorra	27	8	62	3
Malaysia	38	29	34	0
Burkina Faso	33	6	46	15
Ethiopia	20	12	55	13
Mali	36	8	45	12
Rwanda	29	37	32	3
Zambia	54	13	26	6
Germany	21	19	55	5
Average	40	13	37	10

⁷ WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

How important is it for people to have the right to express any opinion, including criticisms of the government or religious leaders? Is that very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not important at all	Depends (vol.)	DK / NS
Argentina	84	10	3	1	0	1
Mexico	87	8	2	1	0	1
United States	76	22	1	1	0	1
France	68	28	3	1	0	0
Germany	75	20	3	0	1	0
Great Britain	79	18	2	0	1	1
Italy	80	15	3	1	1	1
Russia	34	42	13	2	4	4
Ukraine	52	35	6	1	3	3
Azerbaijan	50	25	10	3	8	5
Egypt	43	37	18	2	2	0
Jordan	65	21	6	3	0	5
Palestinian Territories	67	27	3	2	0	2
Turkey	67	18	6	3	2	5
Kenya	74	20	4	2	1	0
Nigeria	86	9	2	3	0	0
Hong Kong	44	45	7	1	2	2
Macau	47	35	7	1	3	8
India	48	21	5	13	9	4
Indonesia	82	12	1	0	0	4
South Korea	56	38	5	0	1	1
Taiwan	53	38	5	1	1	2
Thailand	58	18	2	3	15	5
Average	66	22	5	2	2	2

⁸ WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

Do you think the government should or should not have the right to prohibit certain political or religious views from being discussed?

	Should have the right	Should not have the right	DK / NS
Argentina	29	69	2
Mexico	20	76	3
United States	13	85	2
France	27	71	2
Germany	41	56	3
Great Britain	39	53	7
Italy	30	63	7
Russia	29	55	16
Ukraine	29	63	9
Azerbaijan	32	64	4
Egypt	49	49	3
Jordan	41	47	12
Palestinian Territories	33	64	3
Turkey	25	64	11
Kenya	67	33	0
Nigeria	47	51	1
Hong Kong	16	78	6
India	38	44	18
Indonesia	55	32	12
South Korea	14	85	2
Taiwan*	15	81	5
Thailand	63	16	21
Average	36	57	7

⁹ WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

Do you think that:

	A. People should have the right to demonstrate peacefully to protest against the government	B. The government should have the right to ban peaceful demonstrations that it thinks would be politically destabilizing	DK / NS
Mexico	84	11	4
United States	94	5	2
France	91	7	2
Germany	84	15	1
Great Britain	87	11	2
Italy	87	10	3
Russia	76	17	7
Ukraine	82	11	7

Azerbaijan	72	28	1
Egypt	55	42	3
Jordan	53	35	12
Palestinian Territories	65	33	2
Turkey	67	21	12
Kenya	72	28	0
Nigeria	83	17	1
Hong Kong	82	11	8
Macau	72	16	12
India	68	20	12
Indonesia	83	10	8
South Korea	66	32	3
Taiwan	78	13	9
Thailand	55	29	17
Average	75	20	5

¹⁰ WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

How important is it for the media to be free to publish news and ideas without government control?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not important at all	Depends (vol)	DK / NS
Argentina	70	24	4	1	0	0
Mexico	79	15	4	0	1	1
Peru	65	31	3	0	0	1
United States	56	32	10	1	0	1
France	54	26	11	5	3	1
Britain	65	23	7	4	1	1
Russia	23	41	21	5	5	6
Ukraine	39	35	13	5	3	6
Azerbaijan	52	34	5	5	3	1
Egypt	64	33	2	0	0	0
Iran	29	36	9	8	3	16
Jordan	50	28	12	7	0	4
Palestinian Territories	52	30	12	5	0	1
Turkey	56	18	9	9	3	5
Kenya	70	21	7	2	0	0
Nigeria	54	37	6	1	1	1
China	58	27	10	1	2	2
Hong Kong*	56	29	4	0	8	3
India	34	18	8	6	33	2
Indonesia	42	31	13	3	2	8

South Korea	64	29	6	1	0	0
Thailand	45	28	6	1	16	5
Average	53	28	8	3	4	3

¹¹ WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

Do you think people in [country] should or should not have the right to read publications from all other countries, including those that might be considered enemies?

	Should	Should not	DK / NS
Argentina	92	7	1
Mexico	95	3	2
United States	92	7	1
France	82	15	4
Great Britain	89	7	4
Poland	84	7	9
Russia	71	15	14
Ukraine	82	8	10
Azerbaijan	73	14	13
Egypt	74	26	
Iran	79	6	16
Palestine	72	23	5
Turkey	74	18	9
Kenya	84	15	0
Nigeria	91	8	1
China	78	17	5
Hong Kong*	86	8	6
India	56	33	11
Indonesia	84	7	9
South Korea	73	26	1
Thailand	79	7	13
Average	80	13	6

¹² WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

Do you think people in [country] should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet or do you think the government should have the right to prevent people from having access to some things on the internet?

People should have the right to read whatever is on the internet	Government should have the right to prevent people from having access to some things on the Internet	DK / NS
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Argentina	84	13	3
Mexico	67	28	5
United States	75	24	1
France	52	44	4
Great Britain	61	35	5
Russia	57	27	17
Ukraine	64	21	16
Azerbaijan	79	12	10
Egypt	65	35	
Iran	32	44	24
Jordan	29	63	9
Palestinian Territories	52	44	4
Turkey	60	30	10
Kenya	59	38	2
Nigeria	72	23	5
China	71	21	8
Hong Kong	80	9	12
India	52	36	12
Indonesia	65	24	12
South Korea	69	31	0
Thailand	75	11	13
Average	62	30	8

¹³ BBC November 2007

Which of the following statements on the freedom of the press is closest to your own view?

	Freedom of the press to report the news truthfully is very important to ensure we live in a fair society, even if it sometimes leads to unpleasant debates or social unrest.	While freedom of the press to report news truthfully is important, social harmony and peace are more important which sometimes means controlling what is reported for the greater good.	DK/NA
United States	70	28	2
Venezuela	64	36	
Brazil	52	48	
Mexico	51	46	3
Great Britain	67	29	4
Germany	67	26	7
Russia	39	47	14
Egypt	55	45	
United Arab Emirates	51	48	1
South Africa	63	34	3

Kenya	62	37	1
Nigeria	56	43	1
Singapore	43	48	9
India	41	48	11

¹⁴ **WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008**

How important do you think it is for people of different religions to be treated equally? Would you say it is very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not important at all	Depends (vol.)	DK / NS
Argentina	90	7	1	0	0	1
Mexico	83	11	3	1	0	1
United States	77	18	3	1		1
France	66	28	3	2	1	0
Germany	67	26	4	1	2	0
Great Britain	70	22	2	3	2	1
Italy	66	25	4	2	2	1
Poland	40	46	8	3		4
Russia	34	44	8	3	6	5
Ukraine	44	40	6	2	4	4
Azerbaijan	57	31	4	3	3	1
Egypt	29	45	18	6	2	1
Jordan	59	26	6	5		5
Palestinian Territories	52	36	10	1		2
Turkey	75	15	4	2	2	2
Kenya	83	16	1	0		
Nigeria	83	11	4	1	0	0
Hong Kong	54	38	4	1	1	1
Macau	56	29	5	1	2	7
India	56	20	2	13	6	4
Indonesia	82	13	2	0	1	2
South Korea	67	26	6	0	0	1
Taiwan	67	23	5	1	1	3
Thailand	61	16	6	3	8	6
Average	64	25	5	2	2	2

¹⁵ **WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008**

Do you think:

	A. Followers of any religion should be allowed to assemble and practice in [country].	There are some religions that people should not be allowed to practice in [country].	DK / NS
Mexico	76	19	5
United States	67	28	5
France	72	26	2
Germany	61	36	3
Great Britain	59	33	9
Italy	64	30	6
Poland	77	16	7
Russia	50	38	12
Ukraine	30	54	16
Azerbaijan	71	26	3
Egypt	31	67	3
Jordan	39	51	9
Palestinian Territories	56	43	2
Turkey	80	12	8
Kenya	75	25	0
Nigeria	77	22	1
Hong Kong	65	25	10
Macau	51	33	16
India	63	18	18
Indonesia	65	28	7
South Korea	48	50	2
Taiwan	75	14	12
Thailand	63	13	24
Average	61	32	7

¹⁶ WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: “In [country], people of any religion should be free to try to convert members of other religions to join theirs.”

	Agree	Disagree	DK/NS
Mexico	56	40	4
United States	58	38	4
France	33	64	3
Germany	49	46	6
Great Britain	37	57	7
Italy	44	53	3
Poland	27	60	14
Russia	23	62	15

Ukraine	30	48	22
Azerbaijan	32	63	5
Egypt	30	67	3
Jordan	34	60	7
Palestinian Territories	18	78	4
Turkey	34	55	10
Kenya	74	25	0
Nigeria	78	20	2
Hong Kong	63	30	8
Macau	58	31	11
India	33	52	15
Indonesia	17	72	12
South Korea	79	20	1
Taiwan	83	11	6
Thailand	36	45	18
Average	41	51	8

¹⁷ WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

How important do you think it is for women to have full equality of rights compared to men? Would you say that is very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not important at all	Depends (vol.)	DK / NS
Argentina	71	24	3	0	1	1
Mexico	89	9	2	0	0	0
United States	77	20	2	1	0	1
France	75	22	2	2	0	0
Great Britain	89	9	1	0	1	0
Russia	35	41	17	3	1	3
Ukraine	44	35	15	3	1	2
Azerbaijan	55	30	11	3	1	1
Egypt	31	59	9	1	0	0
Iran	44	34	5	3	2	12
Jordan	55	28	10	5	0	2
Palestinian Territories	54	29	9	7	0	1
Turkey	80	11	3	3	2	1
Kenya	66	24	8	1	0	0
Nigeria	44	32	15	9	1	0
China	76	19	2	1	0	1
Hong Kong	41	42	5	1	9	1

India	41	19	6	6	26	1
Indonesia	71	20	4	1	1	3
South Korea	43	43	13	2	0	0
Thailand	49	35	3	1	10	3
Average	59	27	7	3	2	2

¹⁸ **World Values Survey 2005-2008**

Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy.”

Women have the same rights as men.

Spain	8.91
United States	8.58
Japan	8.27
Mexico	8.23
South Africa	8.09
Australia	9.21
Sweden	9.84
Argentina	9.47
Finland	9.17
South Korea	8.27
Poland	9.02
Switzerland	9.27
Brazil	8.44
Chile	8.54
India	8.21
Slovenia	8.89
Bulgaria	8.69
Romania	9.35
China	9.04
Taiwan	9.05
Turkey	8.77
Ukraine	8.35
Peru	8.93
Ghana	8.49
Moldova	8.7
Thailand	7.58
Indonesia	8.09
Vietnam	9.32
Serbia	8.61
Egypt	7.85
Morocco	7.61
Jordan	7.71
Cyprus	8.82
Trinidad and Tobago	8.85
Andorra	9.6

Malaysia	6.73
Burkina Faso	8.34
Ethiopia	9.05
Mali	7.88
Rwanda	7.8
Zambia	7.72
Germany	9.13
Average	8.53

¹⁹ **WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008**

Do you think the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination against women, or do you think the government should not be involved in this kind of thing?

	Should make an effort	Should not be involved	DK / NR
Argentina	74	24	2
Mexico	96	3	1
United States	82	17	1
France	88	11	2
Great Britain	88	11	1
Russia	74	14	12
Spain	89	9	3
Ukraine	77	14	9
Azerbaijan	77	15	9
Egypt	77	23	0
Iran	70	18	12
Jordan	71	22	7
Palestinian Territories	77	17	6
Turkey	85	11	4
Kenya	97	3	
Nigeria	76	23	1
China	86	11	3
Hong Kong	70	24	6
India	53	38	9
Indonesia	93	6	2
South Korea	87	12	1
Thailand	83	9	8
Average	81	15	4

²⁰ **WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008**

How important is it for people of different races and ethnicities to be treated equally?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not important at all	Depends (vol)	DK / NS
Argentina	72	24	3	1	1	0
Mexico	94	5	1	0	0	0
Peru	70	28	2	0	0	1
United States	79	17	2	1	0	1
France	69	25	2	2	1	1
Great Britain	87	10	1	0	0	1
Russia	37	46	10	3	1	3
Ukraine	50	37	8	2	1	3
Azerbaijan	68	21	8	2	1	1
Egypt	71	26	3	0	0	0
Iran	62	20	2	1	0	14
Jordan	73	17	5	2	0	2
Palestinian Territories	70	23	5	2	0	1
Turkey	73	15	5	3	2	2
Kenya	80	17	3	0	0	0
Nigeria	71	25	3	1	1	0
China	90	8	1	0	0	1
Hong Kong	47	41	4	1	6	1
India	44	15	5	5	30	2
Indonesia	75	14	5	1	2	3
South Korea	71	23	5	1	0	0
Thailand	39	36	6	2	13	4
Average	69	22	4	1	2	2

²¹ WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

Do you think that employers should or should not be allowed to refuse to hire a qualified person because of the person's race or ethnicity?

	Should	Should not	DK / NS
Argentina	23	73	4
Mexico	24	72	3
United States	13	86	1
France	6	94	1
Great Britain	16	83	1
Russia	18	72	10
Ukraine	15	77	9
Azerbaijan	8	82	10
Egypt	25	75	0

Iran	12	72	16
Palestinian Territories	23	74	3
Turkey	18	72	10
Kenya	28	72	1
Nigeria	34	64	1
China	10	88	3
Hong Kong	6	88	6
India	30	43	27
Indonesia	13	84	3
South Korea	41	58	1
Thailand	37	38	25
Average	21	72	7

²² WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

Do you think the government has the responsibility to try to prevent employers from refusing to hire someone because of a person's race or ethnicity or do you think the government should not be involved in this kind of thing?

	Has responsibility	Should not be involved	Should be allowed not to hire	DK / NS
Argentina	60	16	23	2
Mexico	64	9	24	2
United States	69	17	13	1
France	69	23	6	3
Great Britain	69	13	16	2
Russia	58	13	18	11
Ukraine	65	10	15	10
Azerbaijan	72	9	8	10
Egypt	56	19	25	0
Iran	61	5	12	22
Palestinian Territories	53	19	23	4
Turkey	23	43	18	16
Kenya	63	9	28	0
Nigeria	56	8	35	1
China	77	11	10	3
Hong Kong	66	22	6	6
India	27	20	30	24
Indonesia	80	3	13	4
South Korea	53	6	41	0
Thailand	36	9	37	18
Average	58	14	21	7

²³ **WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008**

Do you think the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination based on a person's race or ethnicity, or do you think the government should not be involved in this kind of thing?

	Should make an effort	Should not be involved	Government does too much (vol.)	DK / NS
Argentina	82	14	2	3
Mexico	94	5	1	1
United States	83	17	0	0
France	85	12	1	3
Great Britain	85	13	0	2
Russia	71	11	4	14
Spain	89	8	0	3
Ukraine	71	16	3	10
Azerbaijan	70	11	12	7
Egypt	73	27	1	0
Iran	76	10	0	14
Palestinian Territories	64	15	17	4
Turkey	79	8	4	9
Kenya	95	5	0	0
Nigeria	90	8	2	0
China	90	8	0	2
Hong Kong	78	17	1	5
India	46	17	6	31
Indonesia	88	8	2	2
South Korea	96	4	0	0
Thailand	64	10	10	16
Average	80	11	3	6

²⁴ **WorldPublicOpinion.org 2009**

The United States has signed a number of treaties establishing international laws governing how a country, in the context of armed conflict, must treat an individual it has detained—that is, has captured and is holding. These rules limit what the United States can do to detainees and what other countries can do when they detain Americans. Do you favor or oppose having such laws?

75% Favor
22 Oppose
3 Refused/Don't know

²⁵ **WorldPublicOpinion.org July 2006**

As you may know, the [COUNTRY] has signed treaties that limit what a government can do to pressure detainees to give information. Here are some methods that are not allowed. For each one please say whether you approve of having a rule against it or if you think such a rule is too restrictive.

Using physical torture

	Approve rule against	Rule too restrictive	DK/NA
United States	75	21	4
Great Britain	53	45	2
Germany	76	21	3
Poland	67	27	6
India	35	39	27

Threatening physical torture

	Approve rule against	Rule too restrictive	DK/NA
United States	60	37	3
Great Britain	43	53	4
Germany	69	28	3
Poland	54	38	8
India	33	39	28

Treating detainees in a way that is humiliating or degrading

	Approve rule against	Rule too restrictive	DK/NA
United States	61	36	4
Great Britain	43	53	4
Germany	72	25	3
Poland	59	32	8
India	32	42	25

²⁶ **WorldPublicOpinion.org 2009**

STATEMENT: The United States and most countries in the world have signed a number of conventions—that is, treaties that create international laws—that prohibit certain methods for trying to get information from detainees. Here are some of these prohibitions. For each one please select whether you favor having it or if you think it is too restrictive.

Governments should never use physical torture

59% Favor
39 Too restrictive
2 Refused/Don't know

[IF "TOO RESTRICTIVE"]

Do you think the international conventions on the treatment of detainees should be changed to allow governments to use physical torture?

21% Yes
17 No
1 Refused/Don't know

²⁷ **WorldPublicOpinion.org July 2006**

As you may know, the [COUNTRY] has signed treaties that limit what a government can do to pressure detainees to give information. Here are some methods that are not allowed. For each one please say whether you approve of having a rule against it or if you think such a rule is too restrictive.

Using physical torture

	Approve rule against	Rule too restrictive	DK/NA
United States	75	21	4
Great Britain	53	45	2
Germany	76	21	3
Poland	67	27	6
India	35	39	27

Threatening physical torture

	Approve rule against	Rule too restrictive	DK/NA
United States	60	37	3
Great Britain	43	53	4
Germany	69	28	3
Poland	54	38	8
India	33	39	28

Treating detainees in a way that is humiliating or degrading

	Approve rule against	Rule too restrictive	DK/NA
United States	61	36	4
Great Britain	43	53	4
Germany	72	25	3
Poland	59	32	8
India	32	42	25

²⁸ Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll October 2001

(I'd like to ask you a few questions about the events (terrorist attacks) that occurred on September 11th (2001) in New York City and Washington, DC.)... (Would you be willing--or not willing--to have the United States government do each of the following, if the government thought it were necessary to combat terrorism?) How about... torture known terrorists if they know details about future terrorist attacks in the United States?

45% Willing
53 Not willing
2 No opinion

Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll January 2005

(Would you be willing--or not willing--to have the U.S. (United States) government do each of the following, if the government thought it were necessary to combat terrorism?) How about...torture known terrorists if they know details about future terrorist attacks in the U.S.?

39% Willing
59 Not willing
2 No opinion

²⁹ **WorldPublicOpinion.org 2009**

Let's say that the United States is holding someone prisoner and intelligence sources say that there is a modest chance that this person has some information about a possible terrorist attack on the United States that may prove critical to stopping the attack, but this person denies having such information. Please select whether you would favor or oppose using each of the following methods as a way of trying to get the prisoner to reveal the information he may have.

Not allowing the detainee to sleep

53% Favor
45 Oppose
2 Refused/Don't know

Keeping a hood over the detainee's head for long periods of time

54% Favor
44 Oppose
2 Refused/Don't know

Bombarding the detainee with loud noise for long periods of time

47% Favor
51 Oppose
3 Refused/Don't know

Exposing the detainee to extreme heat or cold

36% Favor
61 Oppose
3 Refused/Don't know

Punching or kicking the detainee

16% Favor
82 Oppose
2 Refused/Don't know

Making the detainee go naked

28% Favor
70 Oppose
2 Refused/Don't know

Holding the detainee's head under water

20% Favor
77 Oppose
4 Refused/Don't know

Applying electric shocks to the detainee

18%	Favor
79	Oppose
3	Refused/Don't know

Using threatening dogs to frighten detainees

37%	Favor
60	Oppose
3	Refused/Don't know

Forcing detainees to remain in a physically stressful position for an extended period

47%	Favor
50	Oppose
3	Refused/Don't know

87%	Favor
11	Oppose
1	Refused/Don't know

³⁰ **Fox News/Opinion Dynamics Poll March 2003**

Do you favor or oppose allowing the government to use any means necessary, including physical torture, or obtain information from prisoners that might protect the United States from terrorist attacks?

44%	Favor
42	Oppose
5	Depends (vol.)
9	Not sure

If there were a possibility that a member of your own family could be saved, then would you favor or oppose allowing the government to use physical torture to obtain information from terrorist prisoners?

Question Note: Asked of those who oppose using physical torture to obtain information from terrorist prisoners

24%	Favor
60	Oppose
5	Depends
11	Not sure

FOX News/Opinion Dynamics Poll January 2009

Do you favor or oppose allowing the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), in extreme circumstances, to use enhanced interrogation techniques, even torture to obtain information from prisoners that might protect the United States from terrorist attacks?

43%	Favor
48	Oppose
7	Depends (Vol.)
3	Don't know

If there were a possibility that a member of your own family could be saved, then would you favor or oppose allowing the government to use physical torture, to obtain information from terrorist prisoners?

Subpopulation: Asked of those who oppose allowing the government to use enhanced interrogation techniques, even torture to obtain information from prisoners that might protect the United States from terrorist attacks (48 percent)

11%	Favor
79	Oppose
6	Depends (Vol.)
3	Don't know

³¹ **Newsweek Poll November 2005**

Would you support the use of torture by U.S. (United States) military or intelligence personnel if it might lead to the prevention of a major terrorist attack, or not?

58%	Yes, support
35	No, would not
7	Don't know

³² **Newsweek Poll November 2005**

What if the use of torture by the United States makes it more likely that Americans will be tortured by our enemies? Would you support the use of torture under these circumstances, or not?

36%	Yes, support
57	No, would not
7	Don't know

³³ **ABC News/Washington Post Poll May 2004**

Some people say it's acceptable to torture people suspected of terrorism, in cases where other methods have failed and the authorities believe the suspect has information that could prevent terrorist attacks and save lives. Other people say the use of torture is never acceptable because it's cruel, it may violate international law, it may not work, and it could be used unnecessarily or by mistake on innocent people. What's your view--do you think it's acceptable to torture people suspected of terrorism in some cases, or do you think the use of torture is never acceptable?

35%	Torture is acceptable in some cases
63	Torture is never acceptable
1	No opinion

³⁴ **WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008**

Most countries have agreed to rules that prohibit torturing prisoners. Which position is closer to yours?

	Terrorists pose such an extreme threat that governments should now be allowed to use some degree of torture if it may gain information that saves innocent lives	Clear rules against torture should be maintained because any use of torture is immoral and will weaken international human rights standards against torture	DK / NS
Argentina	18	76	6
Mexico	24	73	3
United States	44	53	3
France	16	82	2
Great Britain	16	82	3
Poland	27	62	11
Russia	36	49	15
Spain	11	82	7
Ukraine	26	59	15
Azerbaijan	33	54	12
Egypt	46	54	0
Iran	35	43	22
			32

Palestinian Territories	28	66	6
Turkey	51	36	13
Kenya	58	41	2
Nigeria	54	41	5
China	28	66	6
Hong Kong	22	67	12
India	59	28	13
Indonesia	34	61	5
South Korea	51	48	1
Thailand	44	36	19
Average	35	57	8

	Clear rules should be maintained	Should be rules prohibiting torture in all other cases - Depends - DK	Governments should be allowed to use torture	DK/NS
Argentina	76	13	5	6
Mexico	73	17	7	3
United States	53	31	13	3
France	82	12	4	2
Great Britain	82	11	4	3
Poland	62	20	7	11
Russia	49	29	7	15
Spain	82	6	6	7
Ukraine	59	18	8	15
Azerbaijan	54	26	8	12
Egypt	54	40	6	0
Iran	43	28	8	22
Palestinian Territories	66	23	5	6
Turkey	36	34	18	13
Kenya	41	44	14	2
Nigeria	41	39	15	5
China	66	10	18	6
Hong Kong	67	9	13	12
India	28	47	12	13
Indonesia	61	29	6	5
South Korea	48	38	13	1
Thailand	36	34	10	19
Average	57	26	9	8

³⁵ BBC July 2006

Most countries have agreed to rules that prohibit torturing prisoners. Which position is closer to yours?

	Terrorists pose such an extreme threat that governments should now be allowed to use some degree of torture if it may gain information that saves innocent lives	Clear rules against torture should be maintained because any use of torture is immoral and will weaken international human rights standards against torture	Neither / Depends	DK / NA
Australia	22	75	2	1
Brazil	32	61	4	4
Canada	22	74	3	1

Chile	22	62	6	10
China	37	49	8	6
Egypt	25	65	6	3
France	19	75	4	2
Germany	21	71	6	1
India	32	23	28	17
Indonesia	40	51	4	4
Iraq	42	55	-	3
Israel	43	48	1	8
Italy	14	81	5	1
Kenya	38	53	3	6
Mexico	24	50	10	17
Nigeria	39	49	5	7
Philippines	40	56	2	3
Poland	27	62	5	7
South Korea	31	66	2	1
Russia	37	43	10	10
Spain	16	65	8	11
Turkey	24	62	7	7
Ukraine	29	54	11	7
Great Britain	24	72	2	2
United States	36	58	4	3
Average	29	59	6	6

³⁶ **Pew Research Center for the People & the Press March 2009**

Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?

	Often justified	Sometimes justified	Rarely justified	Never justified	Don't know/Refused
July 2004	15	28	21	32	4
March 2005	15	30	24	27	4
October 2005	15	31	17	32	5
September 2006	18	28	19	32	3
December 2006	12	31	25	29	3
November 2007	13	25	25	35	2
February 2008	17	31	20	30	2
March 2009	15	34	22	25	4

³⁷ **Associated Press-Ipsos Poll November 2005**

How do you feel about the use of torture against suspected terrorists to obtain information about terrorism activities? Can that...?

	Often be Justified	Sometimes be Justified	Rarely be Justified	Never be Justified	Not Sure
United States	11	27	23	36	3
Canada	9	19	21	49	2
Mexico	9	22	18	40	11
South Korea	6	47	33	10	4
France	12	20	25	40	3
Germany	8	22	20	48	2
Italy	9	14	14	50	3
Spain	7	14	16	54	9
United Kingdom	9	21	21	48	1

³⁸ **Pew Research Center for the People & the Press/AP Turnout Poll, September 2006**

Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?

18%	Often justified
28	Sometimes justified
19	Rarely justified
32	Never justified
3	Don't know/Refused

Associated Press/Gfk Poll, May 2009

How do you feel about the use of torture against suspected terrorists to obtain information about terrorism activities? Can that...often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?

20%	Often be justified
32	Sometimes be justified
18	Rarely be justified
29	Never be justified
1	Don't know
*	Refused

Associated Press/Gfk Poll, January 2010

How do you feel about the use of torture against suspected terrorists to obtain information about terrorism activities? Can that...often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?

23%	Often be justified
29	Sometimes be justified
19	Rarely be justified
27	Never be justified
2	Don't know
1	Refused

Associated Press/Gfk Poll, May 2011

How do you feel about the use of torture against suspected terrorists to obtain information about terrorism activities? Can that often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified or never be justified?

25%	Often be justified
35	Sometimes be justified
14	Rarely be justified
25	Never be justified
2	Don't know
*	Refused

³⁹ **CBS News/New York Times Poll September 2006**

Do you think it is sometimes justified to use torture to get information from a suspected terrorist, or is torture never justified?

35%	Sometimes justified
56	Never justified
5	Depends (Vol.)
4	Don't know/No answer

⁴⁰ **Public Religion Research Institute Post-election American Values Survey, November 2010**

(Now I am going to read you a few short statements about a few things. For each statement please tell me if you completely agree with it, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with it)...Using torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can never be justified.

23%	Completely agree
27	Mostly agree
28	Mostly disagree
20	Completely disagree
2	Don't know/Refused

⁴¹ **WorldPublicOpinion.org 2006**

As you may know, the [COUNTRY] has signed treaties that prohibit governments from holding people in secret and that require that the International Committee of the Red Cross to have access to them. Do you think that these treaties are:

	Important for making sure governments treat people humanely	Too restrictive because our government needs to have all options available when dealing with threats like terrorism	DK/No Answer
United States	73	23	4
United Kingdom	64	32	4
Germany	72	22	6
Poland	60	24	16
India	42	26	32

⁴² **NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll July 2006**

Do you think that when the United States captures suspected terrorists these prisoners should receive all the same legal rights as prisoners of war, or not?

52%	Yes, should receive same legal rights
42	No, should not receive same legal rights
2	Depends (Vol.)

4 Not sure

⁴³ **WorldPublicOpinion.org 2009**

Here is a legal requirement for the treatment of detainees that are part of international laws the United States has agreed to. Please say whether you favor or oppose having this legal requirement: Detainees have a right to a hearing in which the government makes its case for why the detainee should be held and the detainee can challenge the government's right to hold him or her.

81% Favor
16 Oppose
3 Refused/Don't know

⁴⁴ **Time/SRBI Poll August 2006**

(Please tell me if you would favor or oppose the government doing each of the following as a way to prevent terrorist attacks in the United States.)...Allow the federal government to jail anyone, without a hearing, who is not a U.S. citizen and is suspected of aiding terrorists

53% Favor
43 Oppose
3 No answer/Don't know

⁴⁵ **Time/SRBI Poll August 2006**

(Please tell me if you would favor or oppose the government doing each of the following as a way to prevent terrorist attacks in the United States.)...Allow law enforcement officials to hold people suspected of links to terrorist organizations in jail without bail for an unlimited amount of time

37% Favor
59 Oppose
4 No answer/Don't know

⁴⁶ **Third Way September 2006**

Please tell me if you support or oppose the following proposal President (George W.) Bush and the Republicans in Congress may offer....President (George W. Bush has proposed setting up a special trial system at Guantanamo Bay for suspected terrorists. While they would get a military judge and jury they would not have the right to hear classified evidence against them. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this proposal?

25% Strongly support
26 Somewhat support
17 Somewhat oppose
26 Strongly oppose
6 Don't know

⁴⁷ **NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll September 2006**

The Bush administration has announced a new policy in bringing suspected foreign terrorists to trial. The suspects would be tried by military tribunals, and they and their lawyers would not be allowed to view any evidence that has been classified for security reasons that is brought against them, and in some cases the suspects would not be allowed to be present at their court hearings. Do you favor or oppose this new policy? (If Favor/Oppose, ask:) And do you strongly favor/oppose it or somewhat favor/oppose it?

26% Strongly favor
15 Somewhat favor
21 Somewhat oppose

30 Strongly oppose
8 Not sure

⁴⁸ **WorldPublicOpinion.org July 2006**

When acts of torture have been committed by military personnel, but their commander says that he or she did not order it and was not aware of it, should the commander be held responsible or not held responsible?

	Held responsible	Not held responsible	DK/NA
United States	58	37	5
Great Britain	73	23	4
Germany	72	21	6
Poland	59	31	10
India	41	27	32

⁴⁹ **Pew Global Attitudes Project October 2007**

As I read another list of statements, for each one, please tell me whether you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with it:

It is the responsibility of the (state or government) to take care of very poor people who can't take care of themselves

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not too important	Not important at all	DK/ Refused
United States	28	42	17	11	3
Canada	40	41	14	3	1
Argentina	55	34	7	3	2
Bolivia	34	44	17	4	2
Brazil	60	30	8	2	0
Chile	54	36	8	1	1
Mexico	31	50	14	2	2
Peru	49	37	9	3	2
Venezuela	44	42	11	2	0
Great Britain	53	38	5	3	1
France	49	34	14	3	0
Germany	52	40	4	3	1
Italy	46	40	7	2	4
Spain	53	43	3	0	1
Sweden	56	30	8	4	1
Bulgaria	67	26	1	0	5
Czech Republic	58	30	9	2	1
Poland	54	35	9	2	0
Russia	57	29	9	2	2
Slovakia	44	42	12	2	0
Ukraine	64	23	8	4	1
Turkey	62	24	10	1	3
Egypt	38	29	26	6	1
Jordan	34	33	29	3	1
Kuwait	70	23	3	3	1

Lebanon	60	32	4	1	1
Morocco	67	25	2	0	5
Palestinian Territories	68	21	5	4	3
Israel	60	30	9	1	1
Pakistan	58	26	8	2	6
Bangladesh	65	28	5	1	0
Indonesia	48	45	5	1	0
Malaysia	54	39	5	1	1
China	46	44	8	1	1
India	57	35	6	2	0
Japan	15	44	31	7	2
South Korea	30	57	11	1	1
Ethiopia	57	29	12	1	1
Ghana	46	38	17	8	1
Ivory Coast	65	27	5	3	0
Kenya	58	31	8	3	0
Mali	61	28	8	3	0
Nigeria	66	24	7	3	0
Senegal	68	22	8	2	0
South Africa	50	35	10	4	0
Tanzania	73	20	5	2	1
Uganda	54	30	10	3	2

⁵⁰ WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

Do you think the [country's] government should be responsible for ensuring that its citizens can meet their basic need for food, OR do you think that is NOT the government's responsibility?

	Should be responsible	Should not be responsible	Depends (vol.)	DK / NS
Argentina	94	3	1	1
Mexico	89	7	2	2
United States	74	25		1
France	86	13	1	1
Germany	93	5	2	0
Great Britain	86	10	3	1
Italy	92	5	3	0
Russia	77	12	10	1
Ukraine	89	6	3	2
Azerbaijan	93	5	2	1
Egypt	82	14	3	1
Jordan	96	2		2
Palestinian Territories	80	17	1	1
Turkey	87	10	3	1
Kenya	96	4	0	
Nigeria	84	10	3	3
China	96	1	2	2

Hong Kong	92	4	4	0
Macau	95	3	1	1
India	70	10	13	7
Indonesia	97	2	1	0
South Korea	85	12	2	1
Taiwan	92	3	2	3
Thailand	85	1	9	4
Average	87	8	3	2

⁵¹ **WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008**

What about the basic need for healthcare? Do you think the government should or should not be responsible for ensuring that people can meet this need?

	Should be responsible	Should not be responsible	Depends (vol.)	DK / NS
Argentina	97	1	0	1
Mexico	96	2	1	1
United States	77	21		2
France	92	7	1	0
Germany	95	4	1	0
Great Britain	93	4	2	1
Italy	97	2	2	0
Russia	96	2	2	1
Ukraine	97	1	1	1
Azerbaijan	96	2	2	1
Egypt	81	14	4	0
Jordan	97	1		2
Palestinian Territories	79	19	2	1
Turkey	96	3	1	0
Kenya	96	4	0	0
Nigeria	95	3	1	1
China	96	1	2	1
Hong Kong	94	2	4	1
Macau	99	1	1	0
India	70	12	11	6
Indonesia	97	2	1	0
South Korea	93	4	1	1
Taiwan	96	1	2	1
Thailand	88	2	5	6
Average	92	5	2	1

⁵² WorldPublicOpinion.org 2008

What about the basic need for education? Do you think the government should or should not be responsible for ensuring that people can meet this need?

	Should be responsible	Should not be responsible	Depends (vol.)	DK / NS
Argentina	98	1	0	1
Mexico	96	2	2	1
United States	83	16		1
France	89	10	1	0
Germany	93	5	2	0
Great Britain	96	3	1	1
Italy	95	3	1	1
Russia	94	3	2	1
Ukraine	95	2	2	1
Azerbaijan	89	3	7	2
Egypt	77	19	4	1
Jordan	97	1		2
Palestinian Territories	85	11	3	2
Turkey	97	2	0	0
Kenya	95	5	0	0
Nigeria	91	3	6	0
China	98	1	1	1
Hong Kong	97	1	2	1
Macau	98	1	0	1
India	64	8	19	8
Indonesia	97	2	1	1
South Korea	95	3	1	1
Taiwan	95	2	1	2
Thailand	90	1	3	6
Average	91	5	3	1

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