

Polling News & Notes

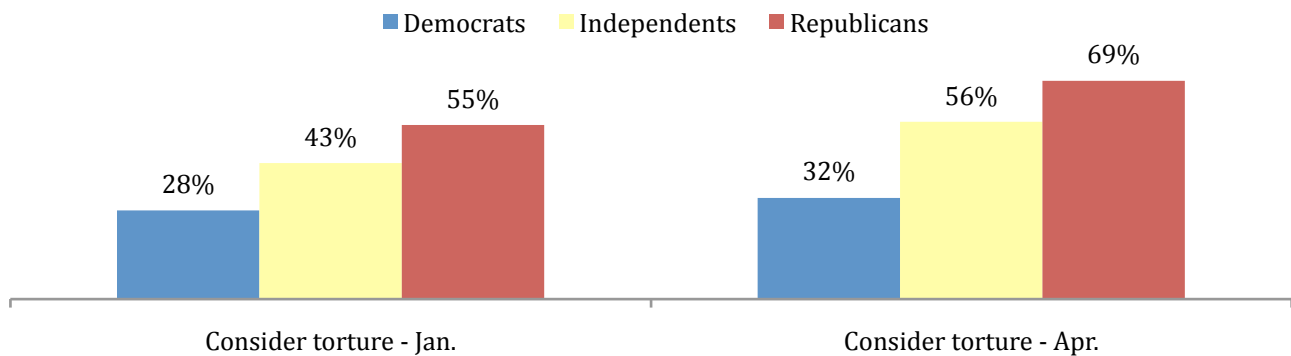
Overlooked Recent Polling and Insights • May 7, 2009

Public Opinion Shifting on Torture Debate: Polling on the interrogation techniques the Bush Administration authorized for terrorist suspects has shown seemingly-contradictory results. Some polls have shown Americans consider these enhanced interrogation techniques to be torture, while others have shown that Americans support their use, and still others have shown that they want government investigations into their use. What's to explain these varying results?

First, a majority of Americans considers the enhanced interrogation techniques to be a form of torture: a recent CNN/ORC poll (4/23-4/26) found that 60% considered them to be torture, while 36% did not. But that doesn't mean Americans don't support their use. The same CNN poll found that 50% approve of the Bush Administration's decision to use "harsh interrogation techniques" against "suspected terrorists," while 36% disapprove. An ABC News/*Washington Post* poll (4/21-4/24) that used the more charged word "torture" against "terrorism suspects" found approximately the same support, with 48% in favor, but significantly higher opposition, with 49% against.

Interestingly, ABC News/*Washington Post* found that the number of Americans who support considering torture against terrorism suspects has increased significantly since Obama took office. In their January 13-16 poll, 40% supported considering torture, while 58% were opposed; in April, it was 48% in favor and 49% opposed. Among independents, the number saying the U.S. should consider using torture increased from 43% to 52% (+9), a sign that Obama's politicization of the debate may be working against him.

ABC News/WP: Support for Considering Torture Against Terrorism Suspectings Rising



A Gallup poll (4/24-4/25) found a slim majority of Americans, 51%, favors a government investigation into the use of interrogation techniques. However, this number is relatively low compared investigations into other topics like oil company profits (82% support) or Hurricane Katrina (70% support).

Furthermore, while many voters may support investigations in the abstract, their support slips when the question says who will conduct the investigation, and whom they will target. The CNN poll found that just 42% support a congressional panel or independent prosecutor to investigate Bush Administration officials, and only 34% support a congressional investigation into intelligence or military personnel, while 65% are opposed. President Obama and his advisors should take heed: the more Americans hear about investigations into the Bush Administration's interrogation policies, the less they like the idea of pursuing them.

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