



The Associated Press-NORC
Center for Public Affairs Research

AMERICANS EVALUATE THE BALANCE BETWEEN SECURITY AND CIVIL LIBERTIES



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In the aftermath of recent high-profile attacks on Western targets by Islamic extremists, fear of terrorism has grown while the public remains divided on whether the struggle against terrorism is worth the loss of some rights.

In the latest Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll, 54 percent of Americans say it can be necessary for the government to sacrifice freedoms to fight terrorism; 45 percent disagree. About half of Americans think it is acceptable to allow warrantless government analysis of internet activities and communications—even of American citizens—in order to keep an eye out for suspicious activity. About 3 in 10 are against this type of government investigation.

Following the attacks in Paris and California, the level of concern about being personally affected by terrorism is relatively high compared to prior polls. Twenty percent of Americans have a great deal of concern that they or a family member could be a victim of a terrorist attack, up from 10 percent in an AP-NORC telephone poll taken in 2013. The public is just as uneasy about attacks by Islamic extremists as they are about home-grown terrorism.

In recent months, there have been calls by some politicians to monitor mosques and bar Syrians and other Muslims from entering the United States. While a large majority of Americans agree that freedom of religion is important, some people do differentiate among groups. Eight in 10 say it is important that Christians freely practice their religion; about 6 in 10 say the same about Muslims.

Three Things You Should Know

About the AP-NORC Poll on the Balance between Civil Liberties and Security.

Among all American adults:

- 1) Fifty-four percent say it can be necessary for the government to sacrifice freedoms to fight terrorism; 45 percent disagree.
- 2) Twenty percent have a great deal of concern that they or a family member could be a victim of a terrorist attack, up from 10 percent in 2013.
- 3) More than half of Americans think it is acceptable for the government to analyze the internet activities and communications of American citizens without a warrant.

The nationwide poll was conducted December 10-13, 2015, using the AmeriSpeak Panel, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 1,042 adults.

Some other key findings from the poll include:

- Only about a quarter of Americans say protecting their rights and freedoms as citizens is more critical than being kept secure. Four in 10 say safety is more important than civil liberties. Three in 10 say both are equally important.
- There are partisan differences in the acceptance of government investigations into Americans' internet activities, with Republicans more supportive. Two-thirds of Republicans favor the analysis of internet activity and communication by the government without a warrant. Fifty-five percent of Democrats and only 40 percent of independents agree.
- A majority of the public say the government is doing a good job protecting the right to vote, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press. But they are less positive about government efforts to protect the right to bear arms, equal protection under the law, and unreasonable search and seizure.
- While Republicans and Democrats are equally anxious about the possibility of being personally affected by domestic terrorism, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say they are worried about attacks by Islamic extremists. Two-thirds of Republicans and half of Democrats are greatly or somewhat concerned about becoming a victim of Islamic extremism in the United States.

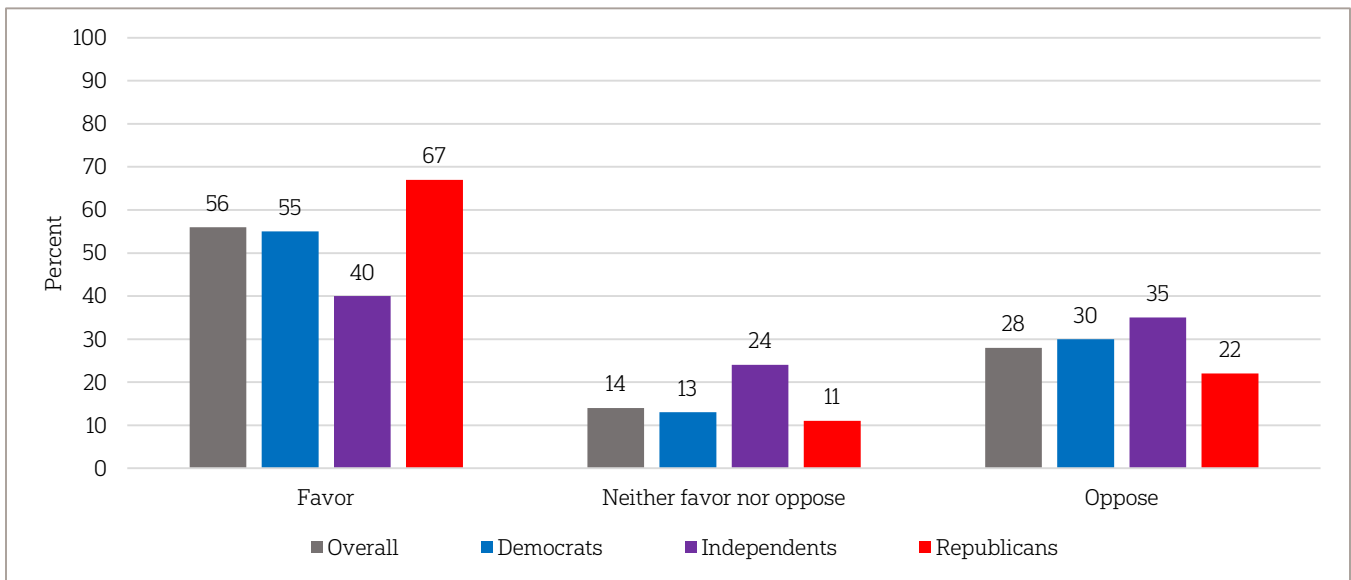
AMERICANS ARE DIVIDED ON HOW TO BALANCE SECURITY AND RIGHTS.

In the wake of the recent terrorist attacks, there is no public consensus on whether it is more important for the government to ensure citizens’ safety or to protect citizens’ rights. Forty-two percent of Americans say security is more important, 31 percent say rights and security are equally important, and 27 percent say rights are more important.

Americans’ concern about security is also evident in public support for government surveillance. A majority of Americans (56 percent) favor warrantless government analysis of internet activities and communications, including those of U.S. citizens, in order to watch out for suspicious activity that might be connected to terrorism. Only 28 percent of Americans oppose such activity, and 14 percent neither favor nor oppose it.

Support for warrantless government surveillance is also tied to political partisanship. Republicans are more likely to support it (67 percent) than either Democrats (55 percent) or independents (40 percent).

Republicans are most likely to favor warrantless government analysis.



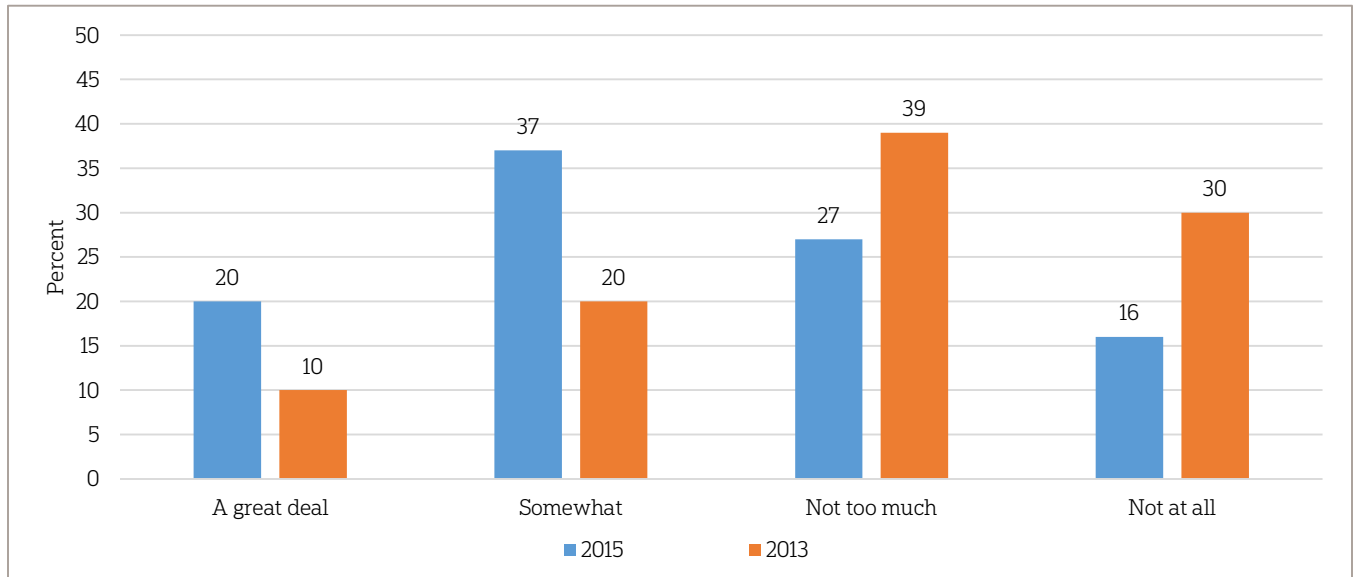
Question: As a way of responding to terrorist threats, do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose government analysis of internet activities and communications, including those involving U.S. citizens, without a warrant, to watch for suspicious activity that might be connected to terrorism?

Opinions about warrantless government analysis of internet activities varies based on gender and age. Men are more likely than women to oppose such government activity (34 percent vs. 22 percent). Younger people are also less supportive of such activity. Only 33 percent of those 18-29 years old support warrantless analysis compared with 63 percent of those age 30 and older.

AMERICANS' CONCERN ABOUT TERRORISM HAS RISEN, AND MANY SEE RECENT ATTACKS AS AN INDICATOR OF INCREASED RISK.

In 2015, nearly 6 in 10 Americans say they are a great deal or somewhat concerned about the chance that they or their family might be a victim of any terrorist attack. In 2013, 3 in 10 said they were at least somewhat concerned.¹

Americans' concerns about the threat of terrorism have grown since 2013.



Questions: How concerned are you about the chance that you or your family might be a victim of a terrorist attack? Would you say a great deal, somewhat, not too much, or not at all?

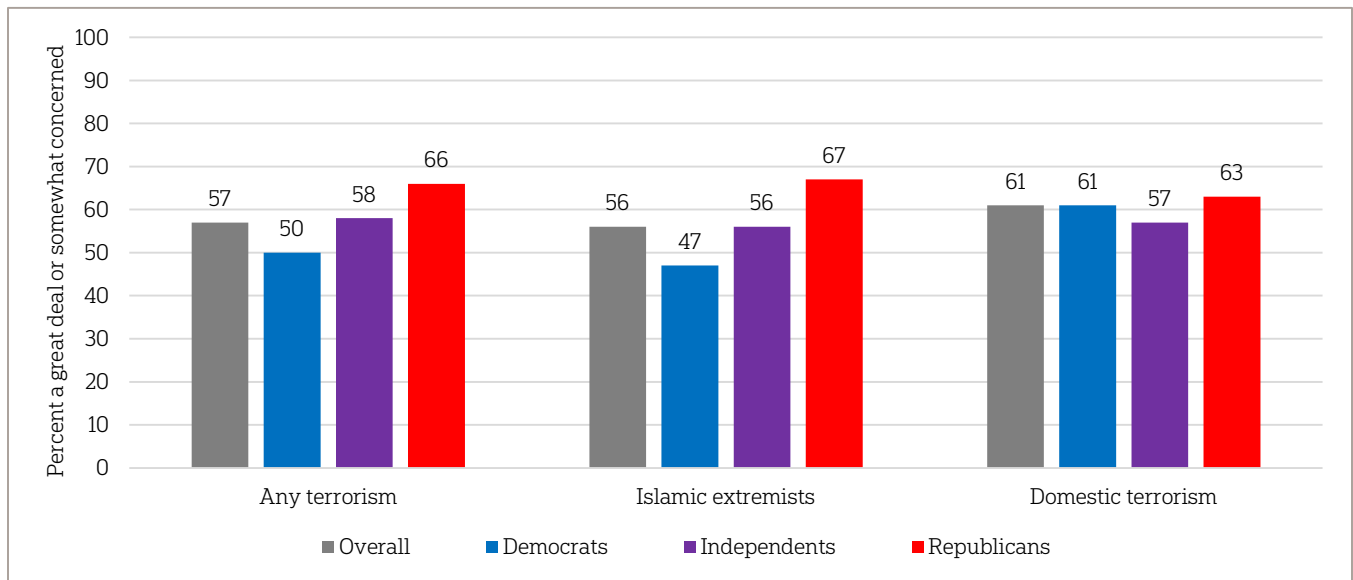
This year, Americans were also asked specifically about concerns regarding an attack by Islamic extremists in the United States. Rates were similar to concerns about terrorism overall, with 56 percent saying they are a great deal or somewhat concerned. Twenty-eight percent are not too concerned. Just 15 percent are not concerned at all.

Concerns are again similar when Americans are asked about being a victim of domestic terrorism committed by American citizens. Sixty-one percent say they are a great deal or somewhat concerned. Twenty-seven percent say they are not too concerned, and just 11 percent say they are not concerned at all.

Republicans express more concern than Democrats about the threat of Islamic extremists, but not terrorism generally or domestic terrorism specifically. Sixty-seven percent of Republicans are at least somewhat concerned compared to just 47 percent of Democrats. Twenty percent of Democrats are not concerned at all versus just 9 percent of Republicans.

¹ AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. 2013. Balancing Act: The Public's Take on Civil Liberties and Security. http://apnorc.org/PDFs/Balancing%20Act/AP-NORC%202013_Civil%20Liberties%20Poll_Report.pdf. The 2015 study was conducted using a random sampling of AmeriSpeak Panel members, and respondents were allowed to complete the survey on the web or over the phone. The 2013 study was conducted via phone as a random-digit-dial survey of American adults, including random sampling of adults within households of more than one adult.

Republicans are more concerned about the threat of attacks from Islamic extremists than are Democrats.



Questions: How concerned are you about the chance that you or your family might be a victim of a terrorist attack? Would you say a great deal, somewhat, not too much, or not at all? How concerned are you about the chance that you or your family might be a victim of an attack by Islamic extremists in the United States? Would you say a great deal, somewhat, not too much, or not at all? How concerned are you about the chance that you or your family might be a victim of domestic terrorism committed by American citizens? Would you say a great deal, somewhat, not too much, or not at all?

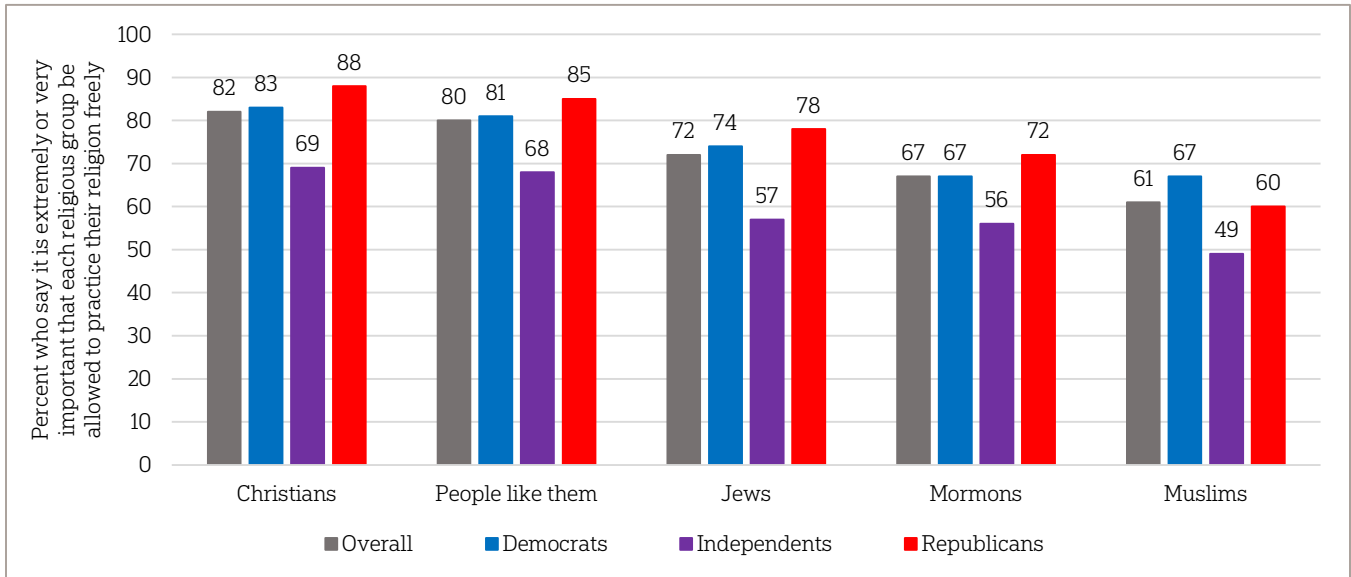
Sixty-one percent of Americans say that the attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California, indicate an increased risk of attacks by Islamic extremists against Western countries compared to 37 percent who say the risk of attacks remains the same. Republicans are especially likely to say these attacks indicate an increased risk compared to either Democrats or independents (74 percent vs. 55 percent and 53 percent, respectively).

AMERICANS PLACE A HIGH IMPORTANCE ON PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO PRACTICE RELIGION FREELY.

A majority of Americans agree that it's important to protect the freedom of religion for various religious groups in the United States. But while 82 percent of Americans say it is very or extremely important that Christians are allowed to practice their religion freely in the United States, just 61 percent say the same about protecting religious freedom for Muslims. Another 80 percent of Americans say it is very or extremely important for people like them to be able to practice their religion freely, 72 percent say it is important to protect the religious freedoms of Jews, and 67 percent say it is important to protect the religious freedoms of Mormons.

Attitudes toward the protection of religious freedoms for American citizens differs significantly between partisans and independents, with independents less likely than partisans to say that protecting religious freedoms is important for all groups.

Independents are less likely to say it is important to protect the religious freedoms of some groups.



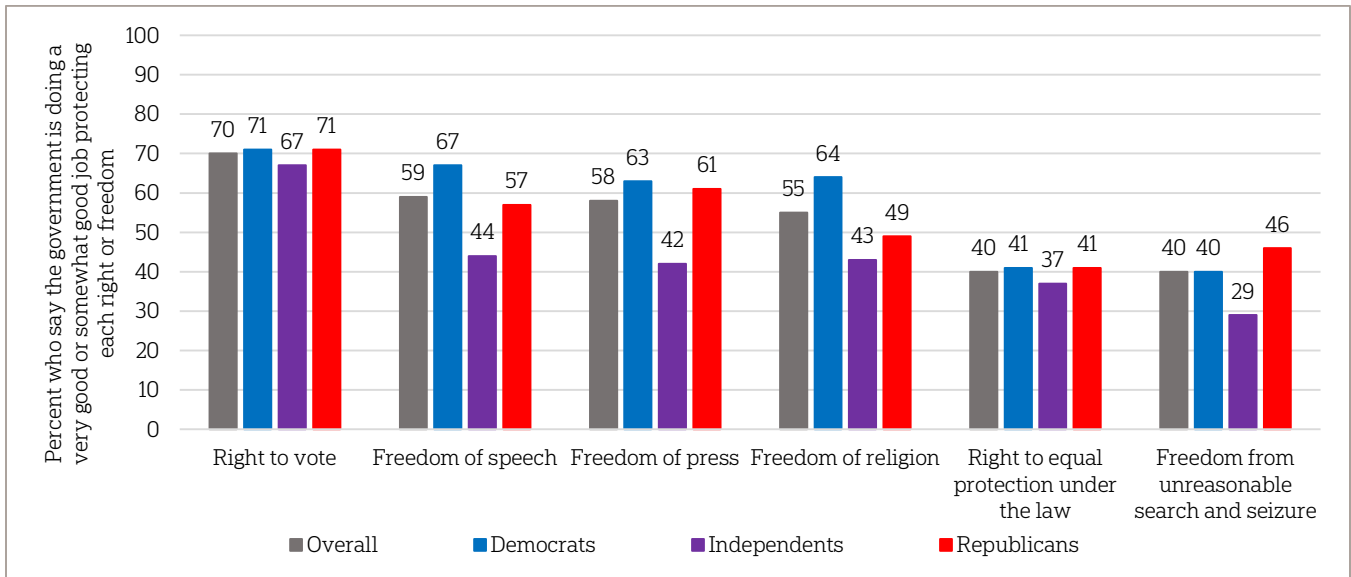
Question: How important do you think it is that each of the following groups is allowed to practice their religion freely in the United States?

THE GOVERNMENT’S ABILITY TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF CITIZENS GETS MIXED MARKS.

A majority of Americans say that the government is doing a very good or somewhat good job protecting the right to vote (70 percent), freedom of speech (59 percent), freedom of religion (55 percent), and freedom of the press (58 percent). But Americans are less positive about the government’s efforts in protecting the right of everyone to equal protection under the law (40 percent), the freedom from unreasonable search and seizure (40 percent), and the right to keep and bear arms (38 percent).

Like attitudes toward the protection of religious freedoms for certain religious groups, attitudes toward the government’s ability to protect some other rights and freedoms of American citizens differs significantly between Democrats, Republicans, and independents, including: the freedom of speech, the right to keep and bear arms, and the freedom of religion.

Partisan differences exist in attitudes toward how the government is doing protecting some freedoms.



Question: The following are some examples of rights and freedoms listed in the Bill of Rights or that are protected under various American laws and court rulings. For each one, please tell me if you think the U.S. government is doing a good job, poor job, or neither a good nor poor job of protecting that right or freedom.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Panel, which is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger omnibus survey that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face).

Interviews for this survey were conducted between December 10-13, 2015, with adults age 18 and over from the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from the AmeriSpeak Panel, and 1,042 completed the survey—728 via the web and 314 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 30.5 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 36.8 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 99 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 11.1 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.9 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data has been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, Census division, race/ethnicity, and household phone status. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or lower) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling.

CONTRIBUTING RESEARCHERS

From NORC at the University of Chicago

Marjorie Connelly
Emily Alvarez
Dan Malato
David Sterrett
Jennifer Benz
Trevor Tompson
Nada Ganesh
Ivana Cvarkovic

From The Associated Press

Emily Swanson

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NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected, independent research institutions in the world.

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.