

CIA Interrogation: Torture or Technique?

Americans are divided over whether the CIA's harsh interrogation methods constitute "torture" or are better viewed as "enhanced interrogation techniques" (EITs). But according to a national telephone poll of adults by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind™, the "enhanced" label is slightly preferred over "torture," 46% to 40%.

Two in three (68%) Republicans say the methods are enhanced techniques, compared to one in three Democrats (33%). A majority of Democrats (55%) view the methods as torture, as compared to just 22% of Republicans. "Partisan differences over the interrogation program extend even to the definition of the methods, about whether they amount to torture," said John W. Schiemann, a professor of political science at FDU and author of an article on interrogational torture in the December 2011 issue of *Political Research Quarterly*.

Americans who feel the methods are justified are more likely to believe they should be called EITs, whereas those who feel they are not justified are more likely to call them torture. "It comes as little surprise that those who feel harsh interrogations are justified prefer not to call them torture, whereas those who oppose them do refer to the program as torture," said Schiemann.

Nearly three in four Americans (73%) say harsh interrogation methods can be justified, even if only rarely, as opposed to just one in five (20%) who say they can never be justified. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say the methods are "often" or "sometimes" justified (78% to 44%), while 27% of Democrats say torture is "never" justified, and just 5% of Republicans agree.

Two in three Americans (65%) say torture is "somewhat" or "very" effective. Just 23% say such methods are not very effective or not effective at all. Males are more likely than females to say torture is very effective (41%-25%), and Republicans are more likely than Democrats or independents to say it is very effective (50%-21%-33%). Democrats are more likely than both independents and Republicans to say that the methods are "not effective at all" (24%-11%-5%).

"The successful operation against bin Laden revived the debate over whether the CIA's interrogation program led to useful intelligence and whether the harsh methods were justified," said Schiemann. "Bin Laden was bad guy No. 1, and most Americans believe that the CIA's harsh interrogation methods are both effective and justified. This is particularly true for Republicans and independents."

When those who say that the methods are effective and justified, even if only rarely, are asked if the harsh methods would be justified if they were not effective,

64% say they would not be justified and 18% say the methods would still be justified. The more the methods are perceived as effective, the more likely Americans are to say harsh interrogation is justified.

“Support for harsh interrogation methods by most Americans depends on the perceived effectiveness of the techniques,” said Schiemann. “Two-thirds of those who think the methods are effective and justified would withdraw their support if they thought the methods didn’t work.”

Schiemann added that, “To the extent this is an issue in the presidential election, it will appeal to the Republican base. But Obama and the Democrats must be more cautious, given that a broad middle of Americans, including nearly eight in 10 independents, think the techniques can be both effective and justified.”

In response to the survey results, Matthew Alexander, former senior military interrogator in Iraq and author of *Kill or Capture: How a Special Operations Task Force Took Down a Notorious al Qaeda Terrorist* says the U.S. public needs to be educated on the question effectiveness CIA interrogations. "What Americans need to understand about this issue are three things. First, the definition of "works" has to include the long-term ramifications of using torture, which include helping Al Qaeda recruit new members, making other detainees less cooperative, and exposing our own troops to such treatment in future conflicts at the hands of our enemies.

“Second, there are other tactics of war that are not used based on a morality and legal argument, such as mustard gas and flamethrowers, even though they are 100% effective and could save U.S. lives. The reason we don't use them is because they are immoral and cause unnecessary human suffering and have been outlawed by international law and the laws of war, just like torture.

“And finally, Americans should understand that interrogators can and have done their jobs successfully without using torture. Saddam Hussein, Abu Musab al Zarqawi, and now Osama bin Laden -- all found without using torture. And we made it through World War II without it facing two much more powerful foes.”

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 808 adults nationwide was conducted by telephone using both landlines and cell phones from June 1, through June 7, 2011, and has a margin of error of +/-3.5 percentage points.

Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>
For more information, please call 201.692.7032

Methodology, Questions, and Tables

The survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was of 808 permanently resident adults nationwide, conducted by telephone using both landlines and cell phones from June 1 through June 7, 2011, and has a margin of error of +/-3.5 percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers. PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a land-line phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected. Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phone-only-households, interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender.

Finding Osama Bin Laden has raised the question about whether harsh interrogation methods such as waterboarding are effective in gathering useful information. In general, do you think harsh interrogation methods are ... in gathering useful intelligence?

	All	Party ID			Gender		Justified	Never Justified
		D	I	R	M	F		
Very effective	33%	21	33	50	41	25	42	9
Somewhat effective	32%	26	36	35	26	37	36	19
Not very effective	9%	15	10	4	9	9	8	16
Not effective at all	14%	24	11	5	12	15	6	44
Unsure	13%	14	9	6	12	14	8	13

Do you think the use of harsh interrogation techniques can be justified...?

	All	Dem	Ind	Rep
Often	21%	15	19	35
Sometimes	37%	29	43	43
Rarely	15%	21	17	15
Never	20%	27	19	5
Unsure	7%	8	3	3

Would harsh interrogation methods be justified if they were not effective? (N=609)

Yes	18%
No	64%
Unsure	18%

Some people call the harsh interrogation methods ... while others call them... Which is closer to your view?

<i>Rotate order</i>	All	D	I	R	Justified	Never Justified
Enhanced interrogation techniques	46%	33	45	68	59	3
Torture	40%	55	41	22	30	88
Unsure	14%	11	13	10	11	9

Question Wording and Order

T1. Finding Osama Bin Laden has raised the question about whether harsh interrogation methods such as waterboarding are effective in gathering useful information. In general, do you think harsh interrogation methods are very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not effective at all in gathering useful intelligence...READ?

Very effective
Somewhat effective
Not very effective
Not effective at all
Not sure/DK (vol)

T2. Do you think the use of harsh interrogation techniques can READ ...often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?

Not sure/DK (vol)

T3a. Would harsh interrogation methods be justified if they were not effective? [ASKED OF THOSE WHO ANSWERED ANYTHING BUT "NOT EFFECTIVE AT ALL" TO T1. AND WHO ANSWERED ANYTHING BUT "NEVER JUSTIFIED" TO T2.]

Yes
No
Not sure/DK

T3b. Would harsh interrogation methods be justified if they were effective? [ASKED OF THOSE WHO ANSWERED "NOT EFFECTIVE AT ALL" TO T1. AND WHO ANSWERED "NEVER JUSTIFIED" TO T2.]

Yes
No
Not sure/DK

4. Some people call the harsh interrogation methods ["enhanced interrogation techniques,"] while others call them ["torture."] [ROTATE] Which is closer to your view?

Enhanced interrogation techniques
Torture
Not sure/DK

Sample Characteristics

Gender

Male	50
Female	50

Party ID

Democrat	36
Ind. Lean Dem.	11
Independent	15
Ind. Lean Rep.	11
Republican	23
Other/ref.	5

Age

18-29	14
30-44	30
45-59	27
60+	26
ref.	3

In addition to being American, would you say you are...?

White	67
Black	13
Hispanic or Latino	13
Asian	2
Other/ref.	5

Census regions

Northeast	16
North central	23
South	34
West	27