

Divided Attitudes on Interrogation Techniques Used at Guantanamo

Pluralities, but not majorities, see them as harsh and as torture but also as effective and justified

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – June 2, 2009 – American attitudes to the interrogation methods used with prisoners in Guantanamo are divided. There is nothing close to a consensus. Pluralities of adults, but not majorities, believe the techniques used were harsh and were torture. But pluralities also believe that these techniques were effective in getting information that saved American lives and were justified. The public is split on whether or not they were a violation of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners. Furthermore, a plurality of Americans believes that the United States would have been justified in using these techniques to interrogate Japanese and German prisoners in World War II. But they are divided on whether the Germans and Japanese would have been justified in using them when interrogating American prisoners.

These are some of the findings of The Harris Poll, a new nationwide survey of 2,681 U.S. adults surveyed online between May 11 and 18, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

Republicans and Democrats have very different opinions. Most Republicans' opinions are similar to those expressed by former Vice President Dick Cheney supporting the use of waterboarding and other harsh techniques. Most Democrats line up with President Obama in rejecting their use.

Key findings of this Harris Poll include:

- A 50% to 32% plurality of adults believes the techniques used at Guantanamo, including waterboarding, were harsh; and,
- A 43% to 35% plurality believes they were torture; but,
- A 49% to 22% plurality believes they were effective in getting important information that saved American lives; and,
- A 47% to 30% plurality believes they were justified; and,
- Adults are split 36% to 36% on whether these techniques were a violation of the Geneva Convention with 29% not sure.

Would the Use of these Techniques Have Been Justified in World War II?

A substantial 46% to 29% of adults believe that the use of the interrogation techniques used at Guantanamo would have been justified, if used in the interrogation of German and Japanese prisoners to save American lives in World War II. The public is split (35% to 38%) on whether or not the Japanese and Germans would have been justified in using these techniques when interrogating American prisoners to save Japanese and German lives.

Big Differences between Republican and Democratic Attitudes

Attitudes to the interrogation techniques used in Guantanamo are sharply polarized by party. Former Vice President Dick Cheney spoke for majorities of Republicans who believe the techniques were justified (71%) and effective (74%). Few Republicans (14%) think their use violated the Geneva Convention. Most Republicans (69%) think the U.S. would have been justified in using them in World War II. A modest majority of Republicans (53%) think the Germans and Japanese would have been justified in using them on American prisoners. Only small minorities of Democrats agree with the majority of Republicans on any of these questions. Independents' views fall roughly half way between those of Democrats and Republicans.

So What?

Given the complete absence of consensus (with no majorities on any of these questions) it is likely that this is not an issue on which Americans will agree any time soon. And given the sharp polarization of opinion by party, Republican and Democratic leaders will be able to say very different things that will be well received by their supporters, if not by most Americans.

**TABLE 1
ATTITUDES TO GUANTANAMO INTERROGATION TECHNIQUES**

"Do you think that the interrogation techniques, including waterboarding, used by the CIA on prisoners held in Guantanamo were?"

Base: All adults

		Yes	No	Not Sure
Harsh	%	50	32	17
Effective in getting important information that saved many American lives	%	49	22	29
Justified	%	47	30	23
Torture	%	43	35	21
A violation of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war	%	36	36	29

Note: Totals may not add to 100% because of rounding.

**TABLE 2
WOULD U.S. HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED IN USING THESE TECHNIQUES TO SAVE AMERICAN LIVES IN WORLD WAR II?**

"Would the United States have been justified in using these techniques in World War II to interrogate German and Japanese prisoners to try to save the lives of Americans?"

Base: All adults

	Total
	%
Yes	46
No	29
Not sure	25

TABLE 3
WOULD JAPANESE AND GERMANS HAVEN BEEN JUSTIFIED IN USING THESE TECHNIQUES ON AMERICAN PRISONERS IN WORLD WAR II?

“Would the Japanese and Germans have been justified in using these techniques in World War II to interrogate American prisoners to try to save the lives of their citizens?”

Base: All adults

	Total
	%
Yes	35
No	38
Not sure	26

TABLE 4
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PARTIES ON GUANTANAMO INTERROGATION TECHNIQUES
Percent saying “yes”

Base: All Republicans, Democrats and Independents

	Total	Republican	Democrat	Independent
	%	%	%	%
Interrogation techniques were effective in getting information that saved American lives	49	74	33	46
Interrogation techniques were justified	47	71	30	45
Interrogation techniques were harsh	50	35	62	54
Interrogation techniques were torture	43	24	59	45
Interrogation techniques were a violation of Geneva Convention	36	14	53	39
U.S. would have been justified in using these techniques in WWII	46	69	29	46
Japanese and Germans would have been justified in using these techniques in WWII	35	53	18	40

Methodology

The Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States May 11 and 18, 2009, among 2,681 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

J36305
650, 655, 660

***The Harris Poll*[®] #56, June 2, 2009**

By Humphrey Taylor, Chairman of The Harris Poll, Harris Interactive

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is a global leader in custom market research. With a long and rich history in multimodal research, powered by our science and technology, we assist clients in achieving business results. Harris Interactive serves clients globally through our North American, European and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms. For more information, please visit www.harrisinteractive.com.

Press Contact:

Corporate Communications
Harris Interactive
585-272-8400
press@harrisinteractive.net

Harris Interactive Inc. 06/09