

Public, Political Left at Odds over Interrogation

Independents and Republicans Believe Harsh Interrogation Techniques Justified; Democrats Oppose

Washington, D.C. (May 16, 2009) – American voters believe harsh interrogations of high-value al-Qaeda detainees were justified by a 19-point margin in the most recent survey conducted by Resurgent Republic, an independent, not-for-profit organization that aims to inform the debate over the proper role of government. The 53 to 34 percent margin is almost identical to a recent Gallup Poll that found 55 percent of Americans believed harsh interrogation techniques for terrorism suspects were justified.

Independents, who constitute 30 percent of the respondents, sided with Republicans on the issue, with 53 percent believing harsh techniques were justified and 31 percent opposing. Eighty-two percent of Republicans believed harsh techniques were justified with 10 percent opposing. Only 27 percent of Democrats believed harsh techniques were justified with 57 percent believing they were not justified.

By a margin of 52 to 39 percent, American voters think harsh interrogations have made us safer. Democrats think harsh techniques have not made us safer by 55 to 36 percent. However, Republicans think they have made us safer by 71 to 23 percent, and Independents agree by 51 to 39 percent.

"The political left is driving a debate over enhanced interrogation that's driving a divide between the public and their allies in Congress. A solid majority sees enhanced interrogation techniques as having made America safer, and do not believe that those who authorized or implemented them should be subject to criminal investigation, with Independents siding heavily with Republicans on the issue," said Resurgent Republic board member Ed Gillespie.

On each of the following issues, questions presented common arguments on both sides of this debate. Highlights of public perceptions include:

- Voters believe the Obama Administration made a serious mistake in releasing memos from the Bush Justice Department on harsh interrogation techniques (54 to 41 percent), and they strongly oppose criminal investigations of those responsible for authorizing or conducting those interrogations (62 to 32 percent).
- Voters believe Congressional leaders like Speaker Nancy Pelosi were thoroughly briefed on those techniques at the time, and are only now objecting because of politics (57 to 29 percent).
- When asked about specific techniques, large majorities believe prolonged standing, confinement in cramped spaces, and diet alteration are justified. A majority believes making detainees remain naked during interrogation by interviewers of the same gender, as long as there is no threat of sexual abuse, is not justified. By a narrow margin (50 to 46 percent), voters overall believe waterboarding is not justified. Republicans believe waterboarding is justified (75 to 20 percent), as do Independents by a narrow margin (49 to 46 percent). Democrats think waterboarding is not justified (80 to 18 percent).

To see the survey's memo and complete poll, please visit www.resurgentrepublic.com.

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Contact:

Jim Dyke, 843.722.9670
Jim Dyke & Associates
info@dykeassociates.com