

World Citizens Reject Torture, BBC Global Poll Reveals

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[Questionnaire/Methodology](#)

A majority of people around the world are opposed to torture even if its purpose is to elicit information that could save innocent lives from terrorism, according to a BBC World Service poll of more than 27,000 people in 25 different countries.

The poll shows that 59 percent of the world's citizens are unwilling to compromise on the protection of human rights while 29 percent think governments should be allowed to use some degree of torture in order to combat terrorism.

Most Americans (58%) are against any use of torture. But opposition to torture in the United States is less robust than in Europe. The percentage of Americans favoring the practice in certain cases (36%) is one of the highest among the 25 countries polled.

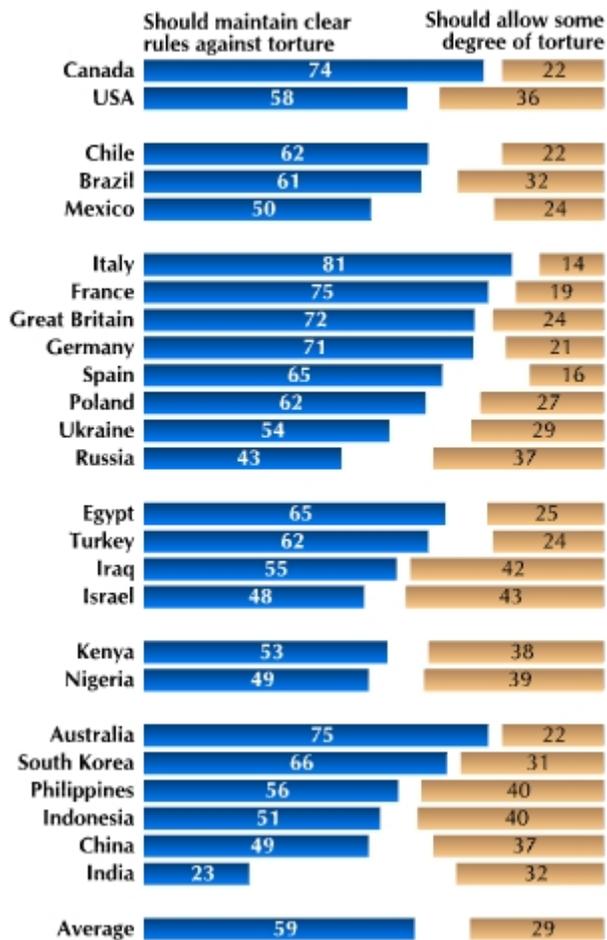
The survey of 27,407 respondents across 25 countries was conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. GlobeScan coordinated fieldwork from May through July 2006.

Steven Kull, director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes, notes, "The dominant view around the world is that terrorism does not warrant bending the rules against torture."

GlobeScan President Doug Miller, adds, "The poll reveals a public opinion climate in which human rights violations by governments are likely to cause outrage, especially in Western Europe."

Less Support in Countries Suffering Attacks

Views of Rules Prohibiting Torture



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There is, however, somewhat less support for outlawing torture in several countries that have suffered terrorist attacks or political violence.

India is the only country surveyed where slightly more respondents (32%) favor relaxing the rules against torture than not (23%). India has a long history of terrorism and political violence, including a 2001 attack on its Parliament. This survey was completed before July 11, 2006 when terrorists bombed seven crowded commuter trains in Mumbai. Interestingly, there is no difference in the views of Hindus and Muslims in India on this question.

The largest percentage endorsing torture was found in Israel. Forty-three percent say some degree of torture should be allowed, though slightly more (48%) think the practice should be prohibited. Israeli responses vary significantly by religion. A majority of Jewish respondents (53%) favor allowing governments to use torture to obtain information while 39 percent want clear rules against it. In contrast, Muslims in Israel (who represented 16 percent of total responses in that country) are overwhelmingly (87%) against any use of torture.

Italians are the most opposed to the use of torture with 81 percent against, followed by three-quarters of respondents in Australia and France, 74 percent in Canada, 72 percent in the UK, and 71 percent in Germany.

Majorities in 19 Countries Favor Ban

Countries polled were Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, and the US.

Majorities in 19 countries supported upholding the rule against torture as did pluralities in five countries.

All of the countries surveyed are parties to the Geneva Conventions that contain Article 3 forbidding torture as well as other forms of abuse. All but one of the countries surveyed are also parties to the more recent Convention Against Torture that goes further in explicitly prohibiting torture. India, which has signed but not yet ratified it, is the exception.

In addition to India and Israel, there were four other countries where those rejecting torture fell short of a majority: Russia (43% reject torture, 37% accept), Nigeria (49% reject, 39% accept), China (49% reject, 37% accept), and Mexico (50% reject, 24% accept).

There is little variation in the worldwide averages by income or education. But support for a ban on torture increases slightly with age: 57 percent of those younger than 35 years old were against torture compared to 61 percent of those 35 and older. Men are five points more likely to accept some use of torture than are women. As for religion, Israel is the only country where statistically significant differences exist between major religious groups on this question.

Respondents were asked the following question:

Most countries have agreed to rules that prohibit torturing prisoners. Which position is closer to yours?

- Terrorists pose such an extreme threat that governments should now be allowed to use some degree of torture if it may gain information that saves innocent lives.
- Clear rules against torture should be maintained because any use of torture is immoral and will weaken international human rights standards against torture.

In total 27,407 citizens in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States were interviewed between 26 May and 6 July 2006. Polling was conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan and its research partners in each country. In 7 of the 25 countries, the sample was limited to major urban areas. The margin of error per country ranges from +/-2.5 to 4 percent. For more details, please see the Questionnaire/Methodology.