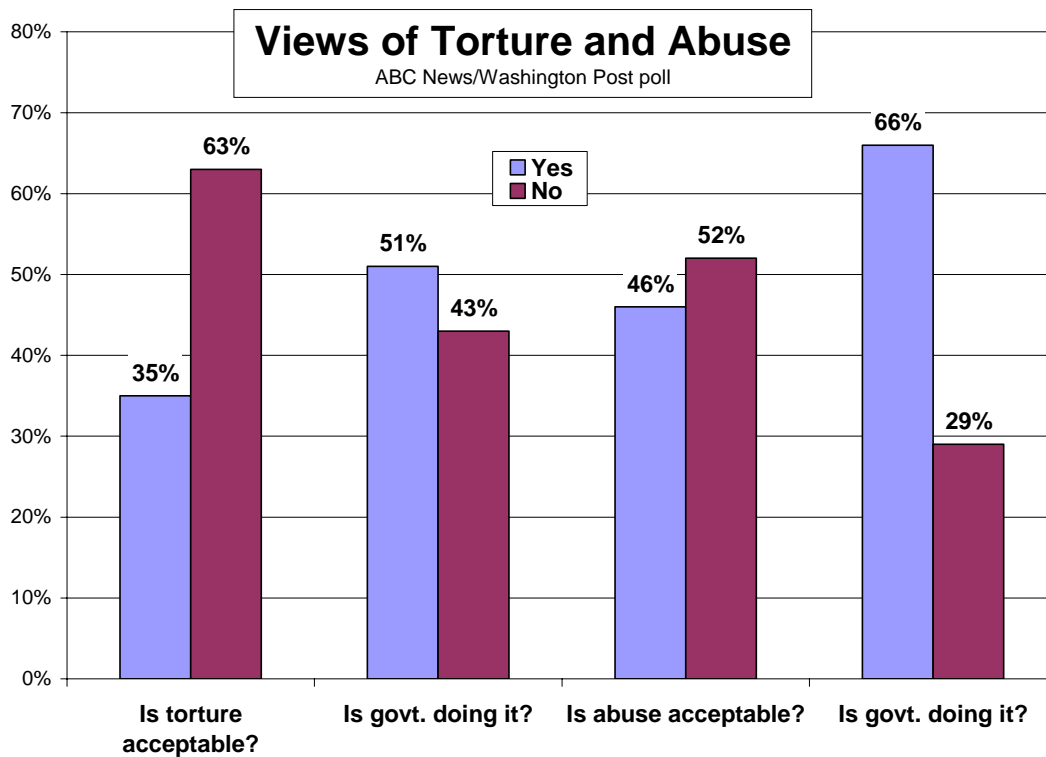


Most Americans Reject Torture, but Back Some Coercive Practices

Americans by nearly 2-to-1 oppose torturing terrorism suspects – but half believe the U.S. government, as a matter of policy, is doing it anyway. And even more think the government is employing physical abuse that falls short of torture in some cases.

Given pro and con arguments, 63 percent say torture is never acceptable, even when other methods fail and authorities believe the suspect has information that could prevent terrorist attacks. Thirty-five percent say torture is acceptable in some such cases.

There's more of a division, though, on physical abuse that falls short of torture: Forty-six percent in this ABC News/Washington Post poll say it's acceptable in some cases, while 52 percent say not.



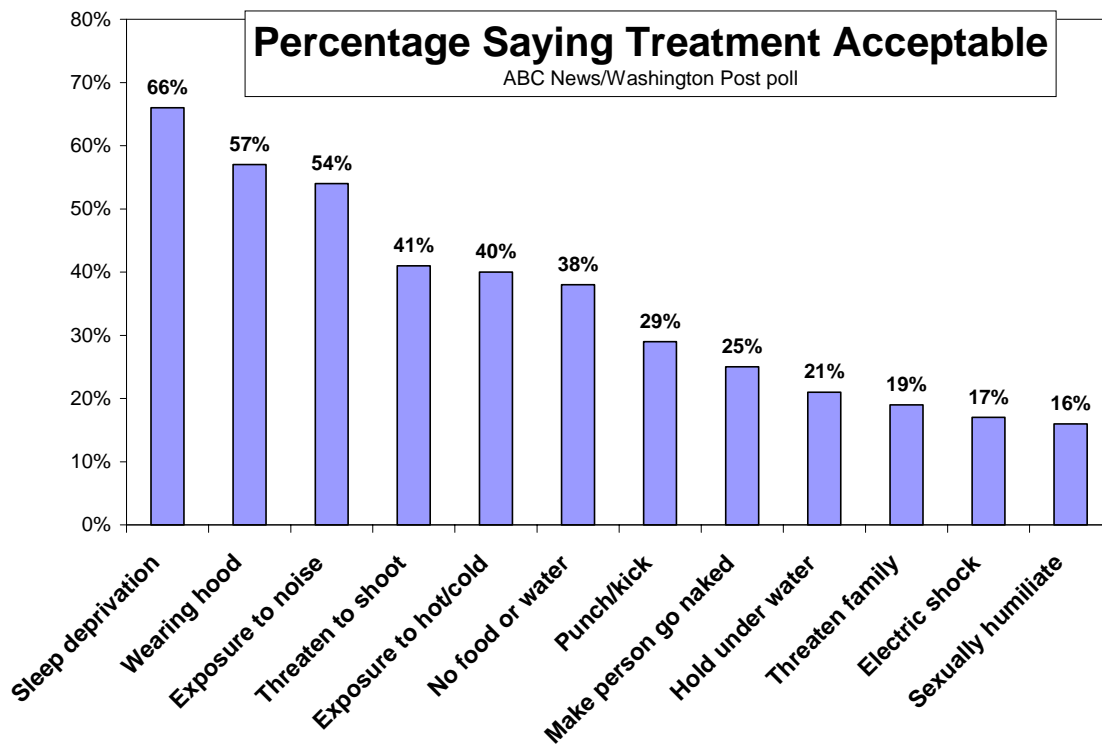
Majorities identify three specific coercive practices as acceptable: sleep deprivation (66 percent call it acceptable), hooding (57 percent) and so-called “noise bombing” (54 percent), in which a suspect is subjected to loud noises for long periods.

Far fewer Americans accept other practices. Four in 10 call it acceptable to threaten to shoot a suspect, or expose a suspect to extreme heat or cold. Punching or kicking is deemed acceptable by 29 percent. And 16 percent call sexual humiliation – alleged to have occurred at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad – acceptable in some cases.

DOES IT HAPPEN? – Whatever their personal tolerance for various practices, 51 percent of Americans believe the U.S. government is employing torture "as a matter of policy" as part of the war against terrorism. And two-thirds think the government is using physical abuse that stops short of torture.

There are partisan differences in these views. Among Republicans, who are more apt to think positively of the Bush administration, 36 percent think the government tortures people; among Democrats, who are less favorably inclined, this rises to 63 percent. (It's 52 percent among independents.)

There's also a difference, but a less striking one, on physical abuse: Majorities in all three groups think the government does it as a matter of policy, including 73 percent of Democrats, 67 percent of independents and 58 percent of Republicans.



Perhaps surprisingly, views on torture and physical abuse are virtually identical whether the targets are suspected terrorists, or suspects in recent attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. (Half the public thinks international terrorists are involved in those attacks.) Just over six in 10 call torture unacceptable for either type of suspect and just over half call abuse unacceptable in either case.

	Torture		Physical abuse	
	Acceptable some cases	Unacceptable all cases	Acceptable some cases	Unacceptable all cases
Terror suspects	35%	63	46%	52
Suspects in attacks	34%	64	45%	53

Regarding the Abu Ghraib case, which has resulted in charges against some U.S. soldiers and calls for congressional investigations, the public is twice as likely to see what occurred there as abuse (60 percent) rather than torture (29 percent).

In asking about torture, this poll asked if it were acceptable against people suspected of terrorism “in cases where other methods have failed and the authorities believe the suspect has information that could prevent terrorist attacks and save lives”; or unacceptable because “it’s cruel, it may violate international law, it may not work, and it could be used unnecessarily or by mistake on innocent people.”

DIVIDING LINES – Partisanship, and views of the war in Iraq, also produce sharp dividing lines in these views. Among Americans who strongly feel the war was worth fighting, half say torture is acceptable at times. Among those who strongly believe it wasn’t worth fighting, three in four say torture is never acceptable.

Similarly, 57 percent of strong war supporters say abuse is acceptable, while two-thirds who strongly say the war wasn’t worth fighting say abuse is never acceptable.

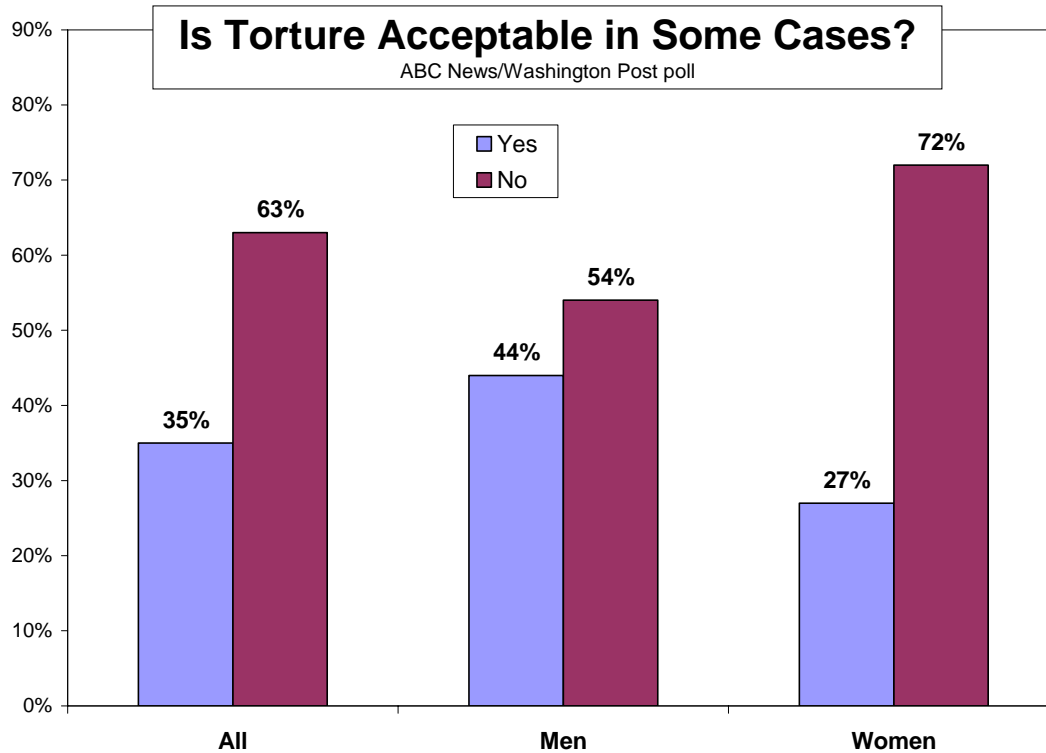
In terms of partisanship, most Republicans, 55 percent, say physical abuse is acceptable in some cases; so do about half of independents, but 38 percent of Democrats. About four in 10 Republicans and independents say torture is acceptable in some cases, while fewer Democrats, 27 percent, agree.

GENDER GAP – There’s a gender gap in many of these questions. Forty-four percent of men, compared with 27 percent of women, say torture is acceptable in some cases. Fifty-four percent of men, compared with 39 percent of women, say physical abuse that stops short of torture is acceptable at times.

There’s also a gender gap on the acceptability of some coercive methods. Most men call sleep deprivation, hooding and noise bombing acceptable, and about half say the same about exposing someone to extreme hot or cold or threatening to shoot the person. Most women accept only sleep deprivation, and they are much less apt to accept a range of other approaches.

	Method of obtaining information		
	Acceptable in some cases		
	All	Men	Women
Sleep deprivation	66%	74%	60%
Wearing a hood	57	67	47
Exposure to noise	54	65	44
Threaten to shoot	41	49	33
Exposure to hot/cold	40	50	30

No food or water	38	46	31
Punching/kicking	29	33	25
Make person go naked	25	33	18
Hold under water	21	29	14
Threaten relatives	19	23	15
Use electric shocks	17	26	8
Sexually humiliate	16	22	9



OTHER GROUPS – Race is another factor. Whites divide, 49-49 percent on whether abuse that falls short of torture is acceptable in some cases, while 62 percent of non-whites call it unacceptable. On torture; six in 10 whites, and seven in 10 non-whites, say it’s unacceptable.

And there’s a difference by age: Young adults, under age 30, are about twice as likely as senior citizens to say torture is acceptable in some cases, 44 percent to 23 percent.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone May 20-23, 2004, among a random national sample of 1,005 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by David Morris and Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html>.

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Full results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

1-21 previously released.

22. Do you think what Americans soldiers did to prisoners did at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad amounts to torture, or do you think it was abuse, but not torture?

	Torture	Abuse but not torture	Some of both (vol.)	Not abuse (vol.)	No opinion
5/23/04	29	60	5	2	4

23-28 previously released.

29. On another subject, some people say (it's acceptable to torture people suspected of terrorism, in cases where other methods have failed and the authorities believe the suspect has information that could prevent terrorist attacks and save lives.) Other people say (the use of torture is never acceptable because it's cruel, it may violate international law, it may not work, and it could be used unnecessarily or by mistake on innocent people.)

What's your view - do you think (it's acceptable to torture people suspected of terrorism in some cases), or do you think (the use of torture is never acceptable)?

	Torture is acceptable in some cases	Torture is never acceptable	No opinion
5/23/04	35	63	1

28. What about physical abuse that falls short of torture? Do you think (it's acceptable to physically abuse but not torture people suspected of terrorism in some cases), or do you think (the use of physical abuse is never acceptable)?

	Physical abuse is acceptable in some cases	Physical abuse is never acceptable	No opinion
5/23/04	46	52	2

28a. What about people who are suspected of involvement in recent attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq or Afghanistan? Do you think torture is acceptable or unacceptable in some of those cases?

	Yes, torture is acceptable in those cases	No, torture is not acceptable in those cases	No opinion
5/23/04	34	64	2

28b. Again, thinking about people who are suspected of involvement in recent attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq or Afghanistan, do you think physical abuse that falls short of torture is acceptable or unacceptable in some of those cases?

	Yes, physical abuse is acceptable in those cases	No, physical abuse is not acceptable in those cases	No opinion
5/23/04	45	53	2

29. Just your best guess, do you think the U.S. government as a matter of policy is or is not using torture as part of the U.S. campaign against terrorism?

	Is using torture	Is not using torture	No opinion
5/23/04	51	43	6

30. Just your best guess, do you think the U.S. government as a matter of policy is or is not using physical abuse that falls short of torture as part of the U.S. campaign against terrorism?

	Is using physical abuse	Is not using physical abuse	No opinion
5/23/04	66	29	5

31. As part of the U.S. campaign against terrorism, please tell me if you think each item I name is acceptable in some cases as a method of getting information from prisoners, or is unacceptable in all cases.

5/23/04 - Summary Table*

	Acceptable	Unacceptable	No op.
a. Not allowing the suspect to sleep	66	33	1
b. Withholding food and water	38	61	1
c. Threatening to harm the suspect's family members	19	80	*
d. Applying electric shocks to the suspect	17	82	2
e. Making the suspect go naked	25	74	1
f. Bombarding the suspect with loud noise for long periods of time	54	45	1
g. Holding the suspect's head under water	21	78	1
h. Threatening to shoot the suspect	41	57	2
i. Keeping a hood over the suspect's head for long periods of time	57	42	1
j. Sexually humiliating the suspect	16	84	1
k. Exposing the suspect to extreme heat or cold	40	58	2
l. Punching or kicking the suspect	29	69	2

*One-third sample asked items a-d, another one-third asked e-h, another one-third asked i-l.

END