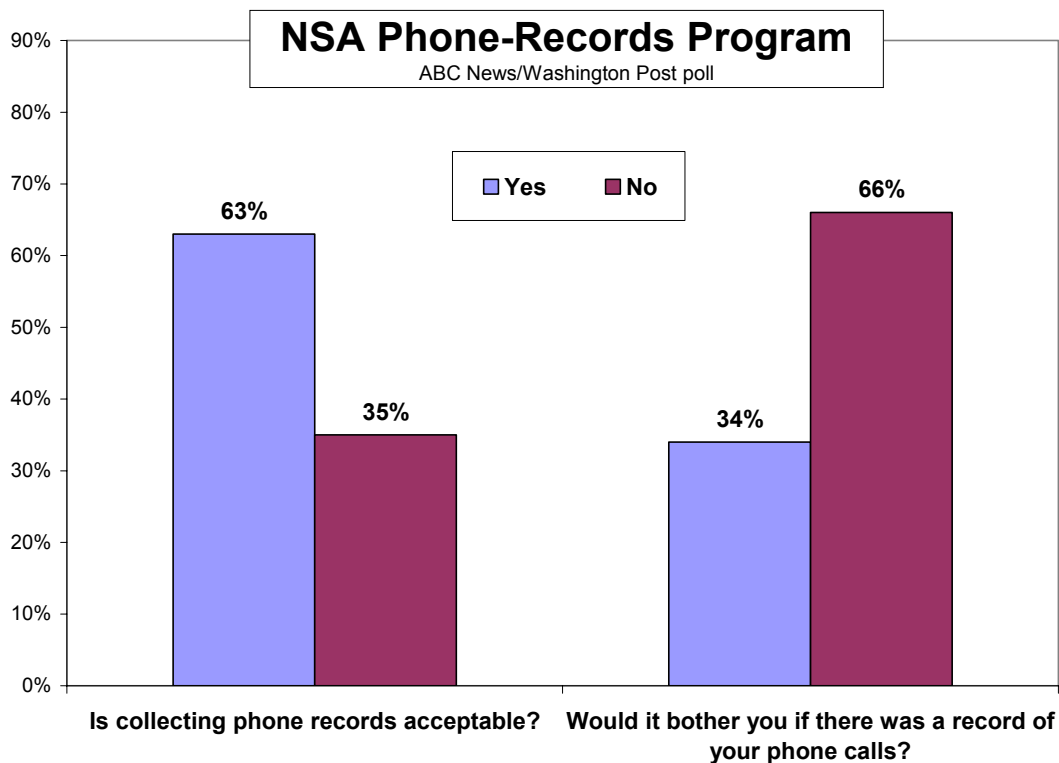


## **Phone-Records Surveillance Is Broadly Acceptable to Public**

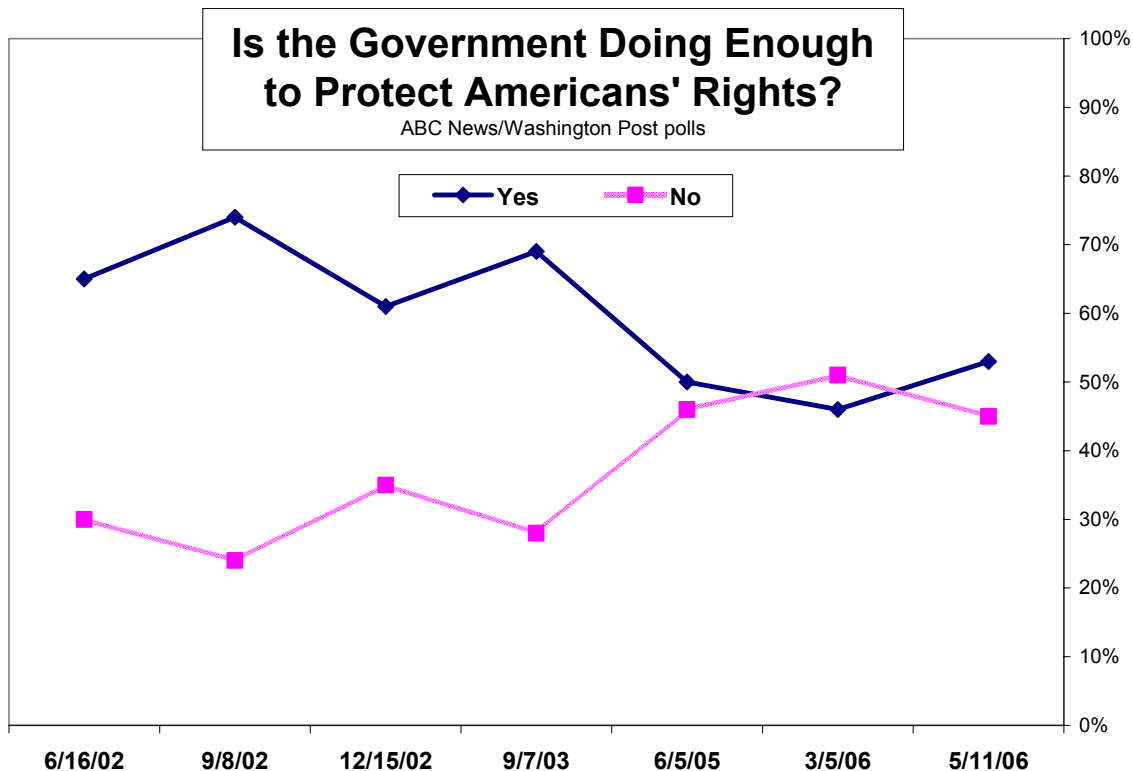
Americans by nearly a 2-1 margin call surveillance of telephone records an acceptable way for the federal government to investigate possible terrorist threats, expressing broad unconcern even if their own calling patterns were scrutinized.

Lending support to the administration's defense of its anti-terrorism intelligence efforts, 63 percent in this ABC News/Washington Post poll say the secret program, disclosed Thursday by USA Today, is justified, while far fewer, 35 percent, call it unjustified.

Indeed 51 percent approve of the way President Bush is handling the protection of privacy rights, while 47 percent disapprove – hardly a robust rating, but one that's far better than his overall job approval, in the low 30s in recent polls.



This doesn't mean privacy intrusions aren't a concern: Nearly half the public; 45 percent, says the government is not doing enough to protect Americans' rights as it investigates terrorism. This concern is far higher than it was in 2002 and 2003, closer to the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks – but slightly down in this poll from its level two months ago.



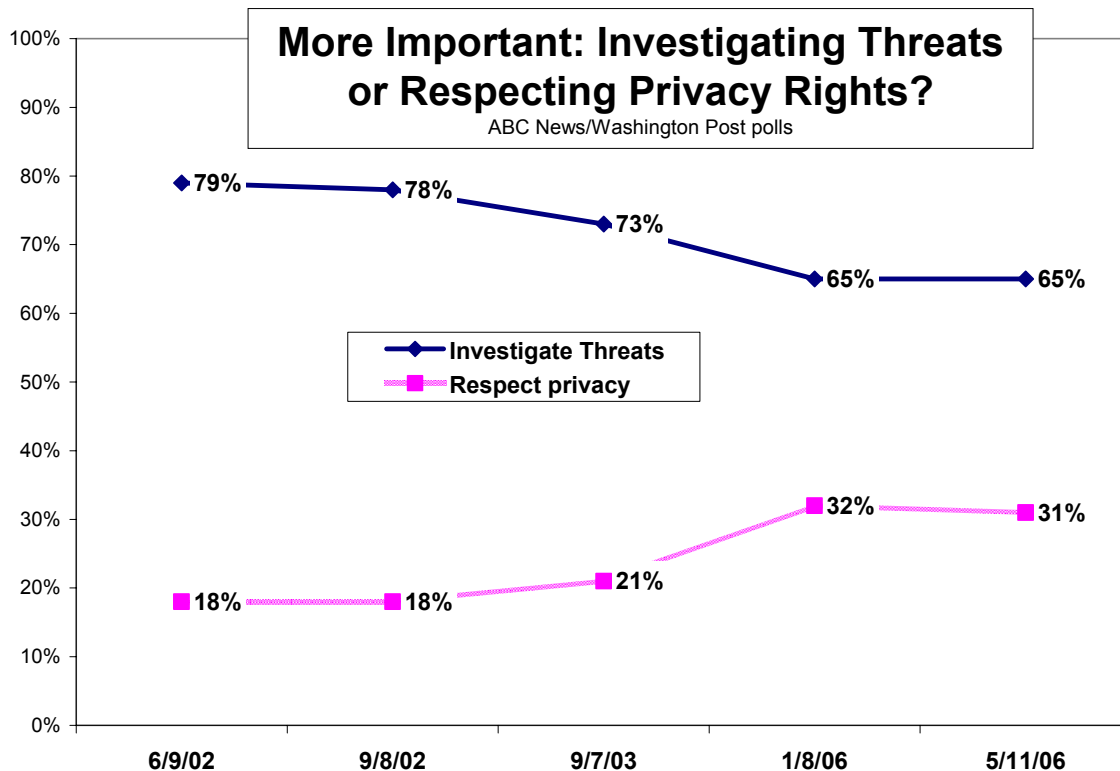
Despite such concerns, however, the public continues to place a higher priority on terrorism investigations than on privacy intrusions. Sixty-five percent say it's more important for the government to investigate possible threats, even if that intrudes on personal privacy, than for it to avoid privacy intrusions if that limits its investigative ability. It was the same in January, although higher still in 2002 and 2003 polls.

The phone-records program, moreover, is not broadly seen as intrusive. Two-thirds of Americans say it wouldn't bother them if the National Security Agency had a record of phone numbers that they themselves have called. A third would be bothered; fewer, about a quarter, say it would bother them a lot.

The intensity of sentiment on this issue is in the administration's favor as well: Substantially more people, 41 percent, feel "strongly" that the program is acceptable than the number who feel strongly that it's unacceptable, 24 percent.

The public previously has come down on the government's side on NSA surveillance. An earlier-disclosed NSA program of wiretapping targeted phone calls and e-mails between the United States and international destinations has been rated acceptable by more than half of Americans in ABC/Post polls this year, including 54 percent in March.

At the same time most don't endorse criticism of the media for disclosing the secret NSA program: Fifty-six percent say disclosing the program was right for the news media to have done; 42 percent call it wrong.



**PARTY/IDEOLOGY** – There are partisan differences in views on the program: Eighty-five percent of Republicans call it acceptable, compared with 45 percent of Democrats. Crucially for the administration, six in 10 independents say the program passes muster.

Similarly, eight in 10 conservatives call the NSA program acceptable. But six in 10 moderates agree, as do just over four in 10 liberals.

There are even sharper differences among these groups in ratings of Bush’s and the government’s performance in protecting privacy, and on both these independents and moderates are somewhat more skeptical. However, six in 10 independents and half of Democrats also say that investigating threats currently is more important than protecting privacy; among Republicans, that jumps to 84 percent.

Some of these differences also are reflected in sensitivity about personal records. Just 12 percent of Republicans and 18 percent of conservatives say it would bother them to learn that the NSA had records of their own calls. That rises to about four in 10 independents and moderates – and half of Democrats and liberals.

	Dem	Ind	Rep	Lib	Mod	Cons
Approve of Bush's handling	26%	47	84	24%	47	72
Gov't doing enough	30	49	83	37	49	67
Investigating threats						
more important	50	60	84	44	65	75
NSA program acceptable	45	60	85	42	59	80
Bothered if NSA had records						
of your own calls	49	39	12	51	38	18

Republicans and conservatives are much more critical of the media's disclosure of the program – nearly six in 10 say it was wrong, while, among other Americans, six in 10 or more call it the right thing to do.

OTHER GROUPS – There's also a gender gap on these issues, explained in part, albeit not entirely, by the fact that women are more apt than men to be Democrats. Women are 17 points less likely than men to approve of Bush's handling of Americans' privacy rights, 13 points less likely to think the government is doing enough to protect them and 18 points less likely to call the NSA program acceptable. Equal numbers of men and women, however, support media disclosure of the program.

A prime factor driving views on this issue is the belief that investigating terrorist threats is more important than respecting personal privacy. Among Americans who call terrorism investigations more important, more than eight in 10 support the NSA program. Among those who call privacy protection more important, that dives to 24 percent. People who are sensitive about their own records, similarly, are vastly more critical of the program.

	NSA program	
	Acceptable	Unacceptable
More important:		
Investigate threats	82%	16
Respect privacy	24	75
NSA having your records:		
Would bother you	22%	76
Would not bother you	84	14

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone May 11, 2006, among a random national sample of 502 adults. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer and Dalia Sussman.

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

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow (\*= less than 0.5 percent).

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling Protecting Americans' privacy rights as the government investigates terrorism?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
5/11/06	51	47	2

2. As it conducts the war on terrorism, do you think the United States government is or is not doing enough to protect the rights of American citizens?

	Is	Is not	Doing too much (vol.)	No opin.
5/11/06	53	45	*	1
3/5/06	46	51	1	2
6/5/05	50	46	1	2
9/7/03	69	28	*	3
12/15/02	61	35	*	3
9/8/02	74	24	*	1
6/16/02	65	30	2	3

3. What do you think is more important right now - (for the federal government to investigate possible terrorist threats, even if that intrudes on personal privacy); or (for the federal government not to intrude on personal privacy, even if that limits its ability to investigate possible terrorist threats)?

	Investigate threats	Respect privacy	No opin.
5/11/06	65	31	4
1/8/06	65	32	3
9/7/03*	73	21	5
9/8/02	78	18	4
6/9/02	79	18	3

\*9/7/03 and previous: "FBI" rather than "federal government"

4. It's been reported that the National Security Agency has been collecting the phone call records of tens of millions of Americans. It then analyzes calling patterns in an effort to identify possible terrorism suspects, without listening to or recording the conversations. Would you consider this an acceptable or unacceptable way for the federal government to investigate terrorism? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Acceptable -----			----- Unacceptable -----			No opin.
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
5/11/06	63	41	22	35	11	24	2

5. If you found out that the NSA had a record of phone numbers that you yourself have called, would that bother you, or not? IF YES: Would it bother you a lot, or just somewhat??

	-----Yes-----					No opin.
	NET	A lot	Somewhat	No		
5/11/06	34	24	10	66	*	

6. Do you think it is right or wrong for the news media to have disclosed this secret government program?

	Right	Wrong	No opin.
5/11/06	56	42	1

\*\*\*END\*\*\*