

# MSRG Special Report: Restrictions on Civil Liberties, Views of Islam, & Muslim Americans

December 2004

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## Introduction

This report is a summary of the key findings from the 2004 national omnibus survey of public opinion and media use, conducted by the Communication 282 Industry Research Methods class in the Department of Communication located at Cornell University. The survey was conducted in cooperation with the ILR Survey Research Institute at Cornell University. The Communication Omnibus Survey is an annual survey of citizens within the continental United States who are at least 18 years of age and eligible to vote. The primary goal of the survey is to explore the relationship between public opinion and/or political behavior and various forms of communication behaviors. This year's survey focused on public opinion and perceptions about the U.S. War on Terror, restrictions on civil liberties, U.S. foreign policy, and Islam. The Media & Society Research Group (MSRG) within the Cornell Department of Communication sponsored the data collected and presented in this report. Dr. Geri Gay and the Department of Communication provided additional financial support. More information on MSRG may be found at <http://www.comm.cornell.edu/msrg/msrg.html>.

The survey was conducted between October 25 and November 23, 2004; it consists of 715 interviews from a national listed household sample. The response rate was 25.7% and the cooperation rate 54.5%, measured according to AAPOR standards. All results presented in this report have been weighted based on age, gender, and race. The margin of error for reported nationwide results is plus or minus 3.6 percentage points. Margin of error may be higher for reported results from subgroups. Additional information on the methodology can be provided upon request.

This summary provides topline results for selected topics on the 2004 Cornell Communication Omnibus including perceived likelihood and danger of terrorist attack, knowledge and views regarding Islam, support for general restrictions on civil liberties, and support for

restrictions targeting Muslim Americans. This report also explores the role of political party affiliation, fear of terrorist attacks, mass media use, and religiosity in shaping public opinion on these issues. The following are key findings of this report:

- In November, 2004 37% of respondents believe a terrorist attack within the next 12 months is likely, compared to 90% in November 2002.
- Twice as many respondents who pay a high level of attention to TV news (18%) feel *personally* in danger from a terrorist attack, as compared to Respondents who pay a low level of attention to TV news (9%).
- Nearly half (47%) of respondents support greater power for the government to monitor Internet activities, while nearly two-thirds (63%) agree that the government should be able to detain indefinitely suspected terrorists.
- Christians with a high level of religiosity are almost twice as likely to agree that the government should have more power to monitor Internet activities (61%), that the government should outlaw some un-American actions (43%), and that the media should not report criticisms of the government in times of crisis (44%), when compared to respondents with a lower level of religiosity.
- One-quarter (27%) of respondents believe that Islamic values are similar to Christian values.
- Nearly half (47%) of respondents believe that Islam is more likely to encourage violence compared to other religions. That percentage rises to sixty-five percent among highly religious respondents.
- Nearly half (44%) of all respondents agree that at least one form of restriction should be placed on Muslim American civil liberties.
- Forty-two percent of highly religious respondents believe that Muslim Americans should register their whereabouts with the federal government.

## Measurement of Party Affiliation, Fear, Religion, & TV News

The 2004 Communication Omnibus included several measures to assess respondents' party affiliation, fear of terrorist attack, personal religiosity, and attention to TV news. Party affiliation was assessed by asking respondents to self-identify as a Democrat, Republican, or Independent.

Adding the measures of perceived likelihood of terrorist attack in the U.S and assessment of personal danger from terrorist attack created an overall measure of fear of a terrorist attack. Using a median split on the combined scale, respondents were then categorized as expressing lower or higher fear.

Religiosity is measured only for Christian, Atheist, or Agnostic respondents; together these comprise eighty-seven percent of the sample (625 respondents). Adherents to other faiths are excluded from analyses involving religion. The measure is a standardized additive index of four separate questions: self-reported church attendance, literal interpretation of the Bible, self-identification as an "evangelical," and whether the respondent believes Israel is a fulfillment of the biblical prophesy about the second coming of Jesus. Using the overall measure, respondents were split into thirds and categorized as exhibiting low, moderate, or high religiosity.

Attention to TV news was assessed by asking respondents two separate questions regarding how much attention they paid to news about national politics and to the U.S. War on Terror. Both measures were added to create an overall attention measure. Respondents were then segmented into low, moderate, and high levels of attention to TV news.

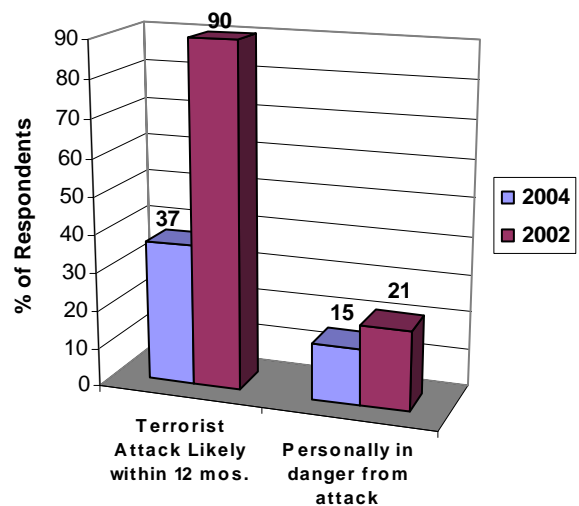
Support for or agreement with the questions on the survey was measured utilizing ten-point scales. Respondents who answered six (6) or greater are considered supporting or agreeing with the given statement or question.

### Likelihood & Danger of Terrorist Attack

The 2004 Communication Omnibus asked respondents two questions to assess overall fear of terrorist attack within the United States. The first question asked respondents to rate the likelihood of a terrorist attack within the United States within the next 12 months on a ten-point scale. The second question

asked respondents to assess whether they felt they were in personal danger from a terrorist attack, again on a ten-point scale. Respondents who answered six (6) or greater on each scale were coded as either perceiving an attack as likely or feeling in personal danger from an attack. These questions were also asked on a previous Communication Omnibus conducted in October and November 2002, providing the opportunity for comparison. Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents who believed a terrorist attack is likely and who felt they were in personal danger.

Figure 1 Likelihood and Danger of Terrorist Attack



The percentage of respondents who believe that a terrorist attack within the United States is likely within the next 12 months has dropped since November 2002 from 90 percent to about 40 percent. However, the number of respondents who feel personally in danger from a terrorist attack has remained relatively steady with a drop of 6% since 2002, within the two surveys' margin of error.

The perceived likelihood of terrorist attack and personal danger from such an attack varies by how much attention individuals pay to television news, with significant variations in the perceived likelihood and danger of terrorist attack emerging across the audience segments. Table 1 summarizes the results.

Respondents who pay a high level of attention to television news about national politics and the War on Terror are more likely (43% vs. 31%) to believe that a terrorist attack will occur in the next 12 months than those who pay low attention to television news. Similarly, viewers who report high or moderate attention to television news are twice as likely to feel

personally in danger from a terrorist attack.

**Table 1** Perceived Likelihood & Danger of Terrorist Attack by Level of Attention to TV News (% Agree)

| Statement   | Level of Attention |          |      |
|---|--------------------|----------|------|
|   | Low                | Moderate | High |
| A future terrorist attack somewhere in the United States is likely within the next 12 months. | 31                 | 37       | 43   |
| I am personally in danger of being a victim of a terrorist attack.                            | 9                  | 17       | 18   |

## Support for Restrictions on Civil Liberties

The 2004 Communication Omnibus asked respondents their level of agreement with eight statements relating to possible restrictions on civil liberties in light of the ongoing U.S. War on Terrorism. Specifically, respondents were asked whether they agreed that 1) Government should have greater power in monitoring Internet activities such as email and online transactions, 2) Law enforcement officials should be able to indefinitely detain suspected terrorists, 3) We need to outlaw some un-American actions, even if they're Constitutionally protected, 4) Government officials sometimes need to lie to the press about military operations, 5) In a time of crisis or war, the media should NOT cover anti-war protests, 6) In a time of crisis or war, the media should NOT report comments of individuals who criticize the government, 7) In a time of war or crisis, individuals should be allowed to stage public protests against the government or its policies, and lastly 8) In a time of war or crisis, individuals should be allowed to criticize publicly the government, or its policies.

These same statements were also posed on the 2002 Communication Omnibus. Table 2 provides the percentage of respondents that agreed with each statement for both 2002 and 2004. Overall public support for restrictions on specific civil liberties varies widely. In 2004, nearly two-thirds of the respondents support the indefinite detainment of suspected terrorists, while nearly half support increased monitoring of the Internet by the government and lying by government officials regarding military operations.

However, fewer respondents, about a third, support restrictions on free speech in terms of criticism or protest

by the media or individuals. Compared to data collected in the fall of 2002 and prior to the Iraq war, public support for restrictions on civil liberties is relatively stable. This is notable considering the drop in perceived likelihood of terrorist attack since 2002. Only in the case of government officials lying is there a significant difference outside the margin of error between the 2002 and 2004 surveys.

**Table 2** Public Support for Restrictions on Civil Liberties

| Statement                               | % Agree 2004 | % Agree 2002 |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| Govt. monitoring of Internet activities | 47           | 41           |
| Indefinitely detain terrorists          | 63           | 57           |
| Outlaw some un-American actions         | 36           | 40           |
| Government officials sometimes lie      | 48           | 57           |
| Media should NOT cover protests         | 33           | 30           |
| Media should NOT report criticisms      | 31           | 31           |
| Individuals allowed to protest          | 60           | 62           |
| Individuals allowed to criticize        | 63           | 65           |

As would be expected, the 2004 Communication Omnibus found that public support for restrictions on civil liberties varied by party affiliation. Table 3 provides the percentage of respondents that agreed with each statement for self-identified Democrats, Independents, and Republicans.

**Table 3** Restrictions on Civil Liberties by Party (% Agree)

| Statement                               | Rep | Ind | Dem |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| Govt. monitoring of Internet activities | 64  | 34  | 40  |
| Indefinitely detain terrorists          | 76  | 55  | 54  |
| Outlaw some un-American actions         | 42  | 30  | 34  |
| Government officials sometimes lie      | 62  | 42  | 36  |
| Media should NOT cover protests         | 48  | 26  | 24  |
| Media should NOT report criticisms      | 45  | 25  | 22  |
| Individuals allowed to protest          | 50  | 63  | 71  |
| Individuals allowed to criticize        | 51  | 65  | 75  |

Republicans are significantly more supportive of restrictions than either Democrats or Independents. The largest differences between Democrats and Republicans are on government power to monitor the Internet, the indefinite detention of suspected terrorists, and media reporting of protests or criticism of the government during times of crises.

Public support for restrictions on civil liberties also varied significantly by degree of individual fear of

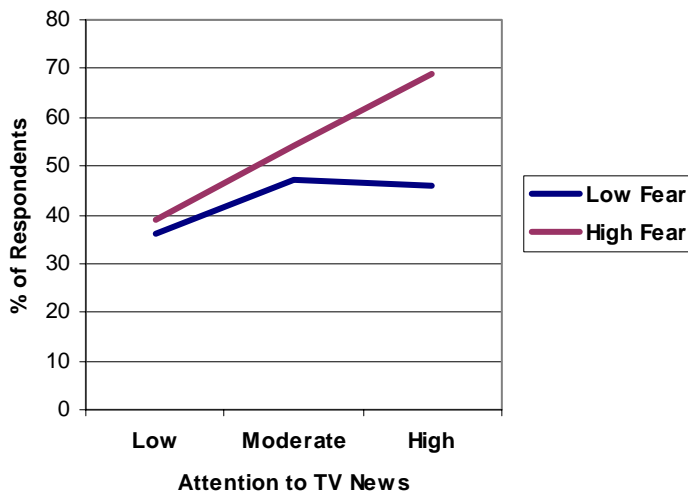
terrorist attack and religiosity. Table 4 provides the percentage of respondents that support the stated restrictions on civil liberties across categories of personal fear. The results demonstrate that fear of terrorist attack is associated with increased public support for several types of restrictions on civil liberties, especially the outlawing of some un-American actions (50% of highly fearful respondents). A high fear of terrorist attack is also associated with support for media censorship of government criticism during times of crises.

**Table 4** Public Support for Restrictions on Civil Liberties by Individual Level of Fear (% Agree)

| Statement                               | Low Fear | High Fear |
|---|----------|-----------|
| Govt. monitoring of Internet activities | 43       | 57        |
| Indefinitely detain terrorists          | 59       | 73        |
| Outlaw some un-American actions         | 30       | 50        |
| Government officials sometimes lie      | 46       | 52        |
| Media should NOT cover protests         | 31       | 37        |
| Media should NOT report criticisms      | 29       | 39        |
| Individuals allowed to protest          | 62       | 58        |
| Individuals allowed to criticize        | 64       | 62        |

Beyond an association between fear of terrorist attack and increased support for some restrictions on civil liberties, attention to TV news may interact with personal fear to further amplify public support for restrictions among some audience segments. For example, Figure 2 charts the percentage of high-and low-fear respondents that support greater government power to monitor Internet activities.

**Figure 2** Interaction of Fear and TV News on Support for Government Power to Monitor Internet Activities (% Agree)



As Figure 2 illustrates, as attention to television news increases, a significantly greater proportion of respondents with a high level of fear support greater government power to monitor Internet activities than respondents with a low level of fear at the same level of attention to TV news.

Table 5 illustrates differences based on intensity of personal religious beliefs, providing the percentage of respondents that support each type of restriction for each category.

**Table 5** Public Support for Restrictions on Civil Liberties by Personal Religiosity (% Agree)

| Restriction/Liberty                     | Level of Religiosity |          |      |
|---|----------------------|----------|------|
|   | Low                  | Moderate | High |
| Govt. monitoring of Internet activities | 35                   | 52       | 61   |
| Indefinitely detain terrorists          | 50                   | 65       | 79   |
| Outlaw some un-American actions         | 28                   | 39       | 43   |
| Government officials sometimes lie      | 48                   | 51       | 49   |
| Media should NOT cover protests         | 24                   | 28       | 46   |
| Media should NOT report criticisms      | 20                   | 29       | 44   |
| Individuals allowed to protest          | 69                   | 56       | 51   |
| Individuals allowed to criticize        | 72                   | 58       | 54   |

In every case, except for a government official sometimes needing to lie, a greater degree of personal religiosity was associated with a higher level of support for restrictions on civil liberties. This was especially the case for government monitoring of the Internet, indefinitely detaining terrorists, and the media not reporting criticisms of the government

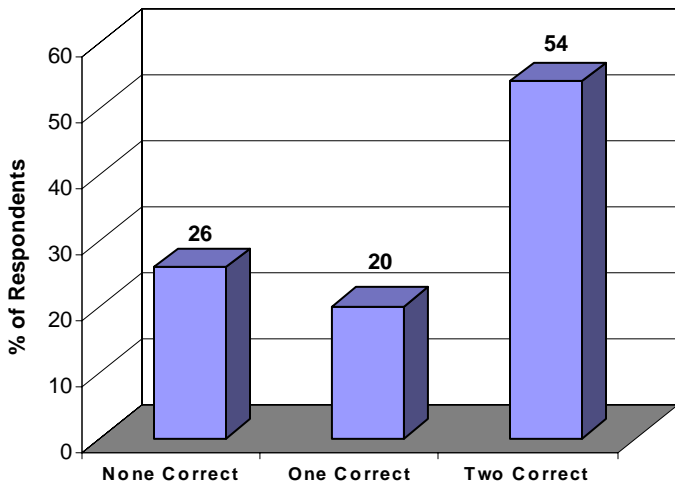
## Knowledge & Views of Islam

Turning to the topic of American perceptions of Islam, the 2004 Communication Omnibus queried respondents regarding their basic knowledge of Islam, how similar they perceived Islamic beliefs and values were to Christian/Western beliefs and values, and whether respondents believed that Islam encouraged violence more so than other religions.

The Communication Omnibus posed to respondents two basic questions regarding Islam, a) whether the respondent knew what name Muslims use to refer to

God (Allah), and b) whether the respondent knew the name of the Islamic equivalent to the Bible (Koran). Overall, two-thirds of respondents answered each question correctly. Combining the two questions, Figure 3 provides the number of respondents that answered none, one, and two of the questions correctly. Overall, fifty-four of all respondents could answer both questions correctly, twenty percent answered one question correctly, and roughly a quarter of respondents could not answer either question.

**Figure 3** American Knowledge About Islam: Number of Questions Answered Correctly



Beyond knowledge, the 2004 Communication Omnibus also explored basic perceptions toward Islam, specifically how similar its beliefs are to Christianity and whether it is more likely to encourage violence than other religions. Table 6 provides the percentage of respondents that agreed with each statement.

**Table 6** American Perceptions of Islam

| Statement   | % Agree |
|---|---------|
| Islamic values and beliefs are very similar to Western/Christian values and beliefs.      | 27      |
| The Islamic religion is more likely than others to encourage violence among its believers | 47      |

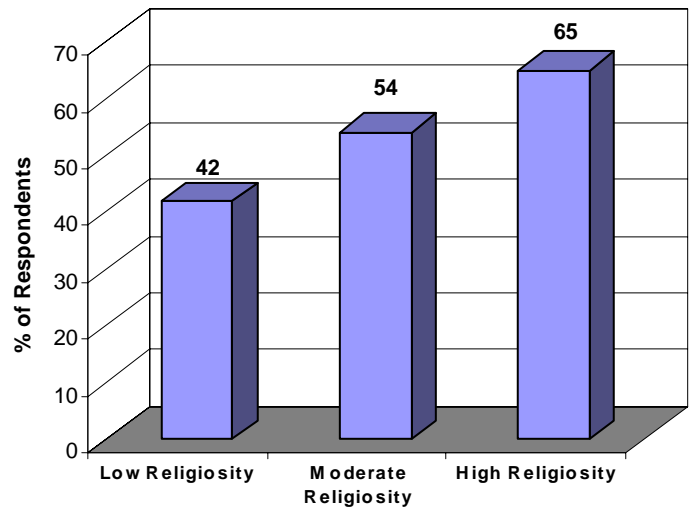
A quarter of respondents agreed that Islamic beliefs and values are similar to Western/Christian beliefs and values. In addition, nearly half (47%) of respondents agreed that Islam encourages violence more so than other religions. Interestingly, these percentages did not vary significantly across levels of individual knowledge

about Islam.

These results are consistent with those from a similar question asked by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press in July 2004. They found that forty-six percent of their respondents believed that Islam was more likely to encourage violence among its believers than other religions.

Respondents' perceptions also vary by level of personal religiosity. Figure 4 provides the percentage of respondents for each category of religiosity that agree with the given statement.

**Figure 4** Perception of Islam as Violent by Personal Religiosity (% Agree)



## Muslim American Civil Liberties

Turning to the Muslim American community within the United States, the 2004 Communication Omnibus asked respondents their level of agreement with a series of four statements regarding possible restrictions on civil liberties of Muslim Americans. Specifically, respondents were asked whether all Muslim Americans should be required to register their whereabouts with the federal government, whether mosques should be closely monitored and/or surveyed by U.S. law enforcement agencies, whether U.S. government agencies should profile citizens as potential threats based on being Muslim or having Middle Eastern heritage, and lastly whether Muslim civic and volunteer organizations should be infiltrated by undercover law enforcement agents to keep watch on their activities and fundraising.

Table 7 provides the percentage of all respondents that agreed with each statement, as well as the

percentage of respondents that agreed to none of the restrictions, agreed with at least one of the restrictions, and agreed with two or more of the restrictions.

**Table 7** Public Support for Restrictions on Muslim Americans

| Statement  | % Agree |
|--|---------|
| All Muslim Americans should be required to register their whereabouts with the federal government.   | 27      |
| Mosques should be closely monitored and surveilled by U.S. law enforcement agencies.   | 26      |
| U.S. government agencies should profile citizens as potential threats based on being Muslim or having Middle Eastern heritage.                         | 22      |
| Muslim civic and volunteer organizations should be infiltrated by undercover law enforcement agents to keep watch on their activities and fundraising. | 29      |
| Agreed with none of the statements   | 48      |
| Agreed with one statement  | 15      |
| Agreed with two or more statements   | 29      |

Approximately one-quarter of respondents agreed with each statement, with the infiltration of Muslim civic and volunteer organizations garnering the most support (29%). Overall, nearly half of all respondents (44%) supported one of the possible restrictions on Muslim American civil liberties, with twenty-nine percent of all respondents supporting two or more type of restrictions.

Support for restrictions on Muslim Americans also varies by party affiliation, degree of fear of a terrorist attack, and personal religiosity. In addition, support for restrictions also varies by level of attention to TV news. Table 8 provides the percentage of respondents agreeing with each statement by political party affiliation.

**Table 8** Restrictions on Muslim Americans by Party (% Agree)

| Statement   | Rep | Ind | Dem |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| All Muslim Americans should be required to register their whereabouts | 40  | 17  | 24  |
| Mosques should be closely monitored                                   | 34  | 24  | 22  |
| U.S. government agencies should profile Muslim citizens               | 34  | 15  | 17  |
| Muslim civic and volunteer organizations should be infiltrated        | 41  | 27  | 21  |

As one would expect, agreement with each type of restriction on Muslim Americans varies by party affiliation. For example, roughly forty-percent of Republicans agree that Muslim Americans should register their whereabouts and law enforcement agents should infiltrate Muslim volunteer and civic organizations compared to roughly a quarter of Democrats.

Table 9 shows the percentage of respondents agreeing with each statement by level of fear of a terrorist attack.

**Table 9** Public Support for Restrictions on Muslim Americans by Level of Fear (% Agree)

| Statement   | Low Fear | High Fear |
|---|----------|-----------|
| All Muslim Americans should be required to register their whereabouts | 24       | 37        |
| Mosques should be closely monitored                                   | 21       | 42        |
| U.S. government agencies should profile Muslim citizens               | 19       | 31        |
| Muslim civic and volunteer organizations should be infiltrated        | 25       | 42        |

For each type of restriction, respondents with a high level of fear of terrorist attack are significantly more likely to agree than those who have a lower level of fear. The gap in support is most wide for the surveillance of mosques (21% vs. 42%) and the infiltration of Muslim civic and volunteer organizations (25% vs. 42%).

A similar pattern emerges when considering variations in support for restrictions across respondents with different levels of personal religiosity. Table 10 provides the percentage of respondents agreeing with each type of restriction by level of personal religiosity.

Approximately forty percent of highly religious respondents agree that all Muslim Americans should register their whereabouts with the government and that Muslim civic and volunteer organizations should be infiltrated. In contrast, fewer than half as many respondents with low religiosity feel the same way. Roughly one-third of moderately religious respondents agree that Muslim Americans should register their whereabouts, that mosques should be closely surveilled, and that Muslim civic organizations should be infiltrated.

**Table 10** Public Support for Restrictions on Muslim Americans by Personal Religiosity (% Agree)

| Statement  | Level of Religiosity |          |      |
|--|----------------------|----------|------|
|  | Low                  | Moderate | High |
| All Muslim Americans should be required to register their whereabouts  | 15                   | 30       | 42   |
| Mosques should be closely monitored                                    | 13                   | 33       | 34   |
| U.S. government agencies should profile citizens based on being Muslim | 16                   | 24       | 29   |
| Muslim civic and volunteer organizations should be infiltrated         | 19                   | 33       | 40   |

The amount of attention paid to TV news also is associated with public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans. Table 11 provides the percentage of respondents agreeing with each type of restriction by amount of attention to TV news about national politics and the U.S. War on Terror.

**Table 11** Public Support for Restrictions on Muslim Americans by TV news (% Agree)

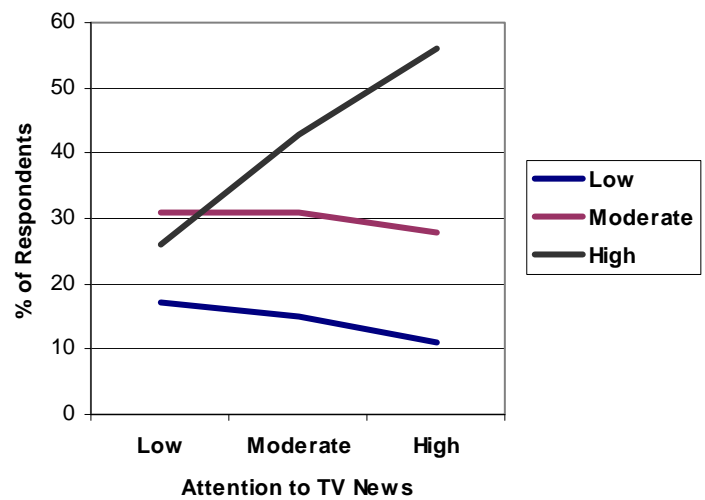
| Statement  | Level of Attention |          |      |
|--|--------------------|----------|------|
|  | Low                | Moderate | High |
| All Muslim Americans should be required to register their whereabouts  | 23                 | 29       | 32   |
| Mosques should be closely monitored                                    | 22                 | 27       | 32   |
| U.S. government agencies should profile citizens based on being Muslim | 17                 | 23       | 27   |
| Muslim civic and volunteer organizations should be infiltrated         | 24                 | 31       | 36   |

As was the case with public support for greater government power to monitor the Internet, individual predispositions such as religiosity may interact with mass media use to amplify support for restrictions on Muslim Americans. For example, our analysis suggests that increasing levels of attention to TV news among highly religious individuals is significantly related to support for the registration of Muslim Americans. However, a similar association between increasing levels of attention to TV news and support for the registration

of Muslim Americans is not apparent for respondents with low or moderate levels of religiosity.

Figure 5 illustrates the interaction between religiosity and attention to TV news and in relation to public support for the registration of Muslim Americans. As attention to TV news increases, the percentage of highly religious individuals who support the registration of Muslim Americans more than doubles from twenty-six to fifty-six percent. However, the support for such a measure among low and moderately religious individuals remains relatively flat across levels of attention to TV news.

**Figure 5** Interaction of Religiosity and TV News on Public Support for Registration of Muslim Americans (% Agree)



## For More Information

If you are interested in more information on the methodology, data, or topics presented in this report, the Media & Society Research Group, or the 2004 Communication Omnibus Survey, please contact:

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## Special Thanks

The authors would like to thank the students of Communication 282 who were instrumental in collecting the survey data presented in this report. We would also like to thank Dr. Ronald Ostman, the instructor of Communication 282, and his teaching assistants, Zuoming Wang and Jennifer Thom-Santelli. Lastly, we also thank the Survey Research Institute and its staff for its cooperation and assistance with this project.



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