



Gallup: Almost Half of Americans View Government as Threat to Freedom

A Gallup Governance poll conducted from September 9-13 found that 49 percent of Americans believe the federal government poses “an immediate threat to the rights and freedoms of ordinary citizens.” An equal percentage denied that government posed such a threat, with the other two percent apparently having no opinion.



Gallup provided a history of its polls asking the same question back to 2003, when just 30 percent viewed the federal government as a threat to their freedom. The polling organization attributed that low number back then to the more positive attitude Americans had about government in the years immediately following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The percentage viewing government as a threat to their freedom gradually increased to 44 percent by 2006, and hovered in the 46-49-percent range in four surveys that Gallup conducted since 2010.

Gallup’s connection between a smaller percentage of citizens fearing their government in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks reflects a somewhat natural phenomenon: When citizens are fearful of danger from outside their borders, they tend to look upon government more as a protector and less as a danger. Though Gallup did not project this mindset further, it serves to explain why authoritarian governments often attempt to focus their citizens’ attention on an external threat, as they work to increase the centralized power of their own regime.

The surveys conducted on this topic indicated that respondents were more likely to regard government as a threat to their freedom when the party opposite of the one they identified with occupied the White House. The four surveys conducted during the administration of Republican George W. Bush indicated that Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents were more likely than Republicans and Republican-leaning independents to say the federal government posed an immediate threat to their freedom.

Conversely, the four most recent surveys conducted during the administration of Democrat Barack Obama caused more respondents identifying as Republicans to regard government as a threat.

The current survey included an open-ended question that allowed those surveyed to indicate the factors they regarded as most threatening to their freedom. The factors most frequently cited by respondents as threats to their freedom were “Too many laws/Government too big in general” (19 percent),



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on September 22, 2015

“Violations of freedoms/civil liberties” (15 percent), and “Gun control/Violating Second Amendment” (12 percent).

Gallup reported that the majority of those who presently believe that government is an immediate threat to freedom are either Republicans or Independents who lean Republican. The smaller number of Democrats who regard the government as a threat were less likely than Republicans to mention gun control or specific issues such as marriage, taxes, immigration, spending, or ObamaCare as issues that they thought posed threats to freedom

While the results were interesting and might be encouraging to those who seek to awaken a healthy fear of too much government among Americans, the survey nevertheless employed a somewhat dated, partisan view of how Americans identify their political philosophies. It would have been interesting if the survey had included more identifiers such as “libertarian” or “constitutionalist” — as people who so identify themselves might be expected to be much more concerned about the threat that government poses to freedom than those who adhere to the two major parties.



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