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Protecting the Right to Be an American: How Pennsylvanians Perceive Homeland Security

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by Alexander Siedschlag

Introduction

Homeland Security is strategically defined as an enterprise based on a concerted national effort: a nation-wide comprehensive activity, including all of government

across federal, state, local, territorial and tribal tiers; the public and the private sector; and the whole community of first responders and vigilant citizens. While Homeland Security in addition to government agencies and the private sector counts on each single citizen as part of the whole-community approach, little is known about how it actually resonates with citizens. In fall 2016, as part of a representative phone poll (the Penn State Omnibus Poll), Pennsylvania residents' perception of Homeland Security was assessed.

How Citizens Define Homeland Security

A clear majority of Pennsylvanians (65%) define Homeland Security as something of positive value that provides needed protection to U.S. citizens. This matches nation-wide poll data on citizens' approval ratings of the Department of Homeland Security. Only a minority (7%) see it as something negative, citing surveillance and infringement of liberty, huge bureaucracy, or waste of taxpayers' money as reasons. Not a lot of Pennsylvanians are aware that Homeland Security actually transcends the federal level of government.

What Homeland Security Protects From

Not many but at least 16% of Pennsylvanians are aware of the all-hazards approach to Homeland Security and that its mission space extends beyond preventing terrorism. There are in fact five Homeland Security core missions. The founding core mission of Homeland Security, "Preventing Terrorism and Enhancing Security" is cited by more than a third (37%) of Pennsylvanians. Not as much awareness exists for the other four core missions. In any case, 12% cite the core mission of "Securing and Managing Our Borders," whereas only 4% refer to the core mission of "Enforcing and Immigration Laws." That "Safeguarding and Securing Cyberspace" and "Ensuring Resilience to Disaster" are Homeland Security

core missions is largely unknown to Pennsylvanians. Yet nearly a quarter (23%) see an additional main mission in Homeland Security: Ensuring general safety, wellbeing of the people, and protection from violence as such.

Who Provides Homeland Security

The majority of Pennsylvanians (63%) see Homeland Security provided for by the federal government. At the same time, 17% recognize that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is involved in providing Homeland Security to the citizens. The concept of the whole-community approach only has reached a few: Just 1% refer to collaboration among several actors beyond the federal government, and those who do most often cite police as an example, followed by airlines.

How Homeland Security Affects Daily Life

Potentially, Homeland Security affects or even involves citizens on a daily basis. Examples would be suspicious activity reporting, as encouraged through the “If You See Something, Say Something” campaign, cyber security awareness, or active shooter preparedness. Most Pennsylvanians (70%) yet are not sure about the effect of Homeland Security on their daily lives. However, almost a quarter (23%) feel Homeland Security to affect their daily lives – such as by ensuring safe and secure neighborhoods; via the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) when travelling on a plane, through security precautions in public transportation; or by encouragement to report suspicious activity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Pennsylvanians appreciate homeland security as something that the country does to protect the American way of life and the safety of American citizens. No more than a few are aware that they themselves, as citizens, are part of the Homeland

Security Enterprise. Increased citizen-involvement campaigns are needed, and should be placed within a common framework to increase homeland security recognition consistent with the whole-community approach. National campaigns such as "See Something, Say Something," State campaigns such as "Ready.pa," and sector-specific safety and security campaigns such as for example in the public transportation sector should be candidates for visible co-branding with U.S. Homeland Security to place them into a strategic citizen-involving context. Further, as we are moving towards the 2018 Quadrennial Homeland Security Review, a bottom-up review perspective should be included that addresses State-level information, such as empirical analysis of citizens' risk perception, understanding of, and expectations in the Homeland Security Enterprise.

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