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

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Pennsylvania 2016 Pre-Election Poll on Policy and Governance



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Homeland Security

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

Summary: Pennsylvanians mainly see Homeland Security as a comprehensive effort of the federal government to fight terrorism at home and abroad. While it most often has a positive connotation, the multi-faceted mission space of homeland security is widely unknown.

Introduction

Homeland Security is strategically defined as 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. The first Quadrennial Homeland Security Review of 2010, established the “Homeland Security Enterprise” to capture that approach and explain how the effort transcends the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.* The effort is further based on an all-hazards approach, addressing the full range of risks from terrorism to industrial accidents and natural disasters so that “American interests, aspirations, and way of life can thrive.”*

While Homeland Security in addition to government agencies and the private sector counts on each single citizen, little is known about how it actually resonates with citizens. This research brief reports first results of a recent representative phone poll to assess Pennsylvanians’

perception of Homeland Security. Respondents were asked the following open-ended question: *“How would you define ‘Homeland Security?’ Specifically, think about what Homeland Security protects you from and how it affects your daily life.”* This approach allowed to develop a picture of security culture. Responses were coded by content analysis.

How Citizens Define Homeland Security

A clear majority of Pennsylvanians (64%) define Homeland Security as something of positive value that provides needed protection to U.S. citizens. 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, but just very few (2%) inaccurately believe it relates to military action abroad.

What Homeland Security Protects From

Few Pennsylvanians (16% of respondents) are aware of the all-hazards approach to Homeland Security and that its mission space extends beyond preventing terrorism. There are in fact five core missions for the Homeland Security Enterprise as a whole. The founding core mission of “Preventing Terrorism and Enhancing Security” is cited by more than a third (37%).

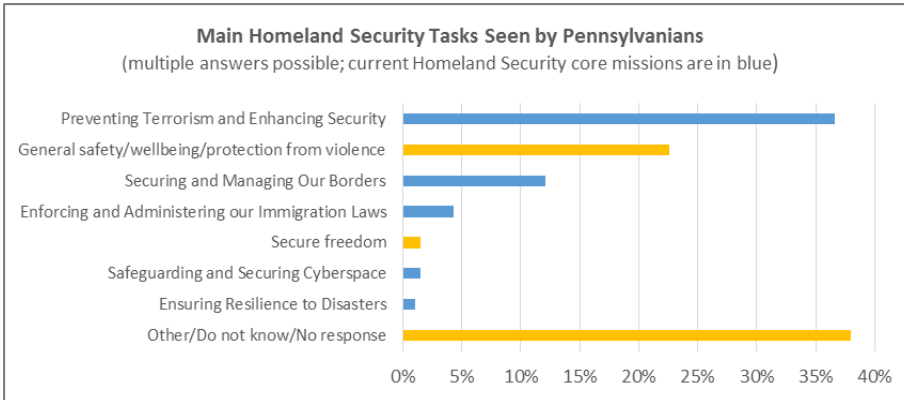
Not as much recognition exists for the other four core missions. In any case, 12% cite the core mission of “Securing and Managing Our Borders,” whereas only 4% refer to the core mission of “Enforcing and Immigration Laws.” That “Safeguarding and Securing Cyberspace” and “Ensuring Resilience to Disasters” are Homeland Security core missions is largely unknown to Pennsylvanians. Yet nearly a quarter (23%) see an additional main mission in

* See: <https://www.dhs.gov/quadrennial-homeland-security-review>

Homeland Security

Homeland Security: Ensuring general safety, wellbeing of the people, and protection from violence as such. The table below illustrates those findings.

Homeland Security affects their daily lives somehow – such as by ensuring safe and secure neighborhoods; via the Transportation Security



Who Provides Homeland Security

The majority of Pennsylvanians (63%) regard the federal government as the main provider of Homeland Security. 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. While most Pennsylvanians (70%) are not sure about the effect of Homeland Security on their daily lives, almost a quarter (23%) feel

Administration (TSA) when travelling on a plane, through security precautions in public transportation generally; or by encouragement to report suspicious activity. Only 7% believe Homeland Security has nothing to do with their daily lives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Pennsylvanians appreciate Homeland Security as something that the country does as a whole to protect the right to be an American, and feel safe against external and internal threats. No more than a few, though, are aware that they themselves, as citizens, are part of the national effort. Increased citizen-involving campaigns are needed, 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 campaigns such as by AMTRAK should be more visibly co-branded with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Methodology

Data consists of responses from 660 randomly selected adult Pennsylvania residents, who participated in the School of Public Affairs’ Pennsylvania Pre-election Poll on Policy and Governance. This was an omnibus survey administered by telephone through the Center for Survey Research at Penn State Harrisburg between August 18 and October 15, 2016. The Center employed a dual-frame design consisting of both landline and cell phone samples, with 60.8% of respondents interviewed via cell phone and 39.2% interviewed via landline. The survey cooperation rates for the landline portion and cell portion of the sample were 73.4% and 60.1%, respectively. Responses were weighted by demographic criteria to enhance representativeness. Margin of error is +/- 4.0 percentage points with 95% degree of confidence.

Sponsor:

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