**National Security vs. Civil Liberty: How do you feel about the Patriot Act?**  
  
After Sept. 11, 2001, the federal government decided that restrictions on law enforcement in the United States, especially restrictions on domestic spying, had gone too far following the turbulent 1960s and '70s. President Bush and members of his administration said that the terrorist attacks in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. proved that the United States was ill-prepared to cope with terrorist threats within the country.  
  
**The Patriot Act**  
  
The USA Patriot Act was signed into law on Oct. 26, 2001, citing the need for more cooperation among all levels of security, along with broader powers for law enforcement personnel. Police and other departments were given wider preemptive authority and encouraged to share information. The goal: a safer America in times of international turmoil.  
  
But as the years have passed and the terrorist attacks seem further away, people have begun to question whether too many restrictions on law enforcement were rolled back. Recent news that President Bush has authorized the wiretapping of some phone calls in the United States without court orders upset many. While the government has defended these actions by saying that only suspected terrorists were targeted, some citizens are citing them as further examples of civil liberties being eroded by the Patriot Act.  
  
The Patriot Act has 16 provisions that give the government extensive surveillance and legal powers to use against suspected terrorists. They range from the authority to intercept electronic communication to the ability of law enforcement agencies to delay notice of the execution of a warrant. In other words, under special circumstances, suspected terrorists may be subject to searches without ever being notified.  
  
**Proponents for Renewal**  
  
Proponents of the act suggest that its provisions are ensuring a safer United States. They say citizens should remain focused on the issue of safety, the central point of the Patriot Act. "Any suggestion of civil liberties violations is an effort to shift the focus of the discussion away from the facts," Justice Department spokeswoman Tasia Scolinos said. "There have been no verified civil liberties violations filed against the Patriot Act, period."  
  
Those in favor of the Patriot Act note that no major terrorist attack has occurred on U.S. soil since the bill’s passage. In addition, several terrorist plots have been foiled both here and abroad. President Bush declares the Patriot act to be “essential to fighting the war on terror and preventing our enemies from striking America again.”  
  
**Opponents**  
  
Opponents of the act and its renewal say that the safety of the United States is not affected by the Patriot Act and that the cost to our freedom is too high. They are led by organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and many congressional leaders. Senator Russ Feingold, who has opposed the Patriot Act since its inception in 2001, has argued that the Patriot Act threatens the privacy and personal freedoms of every citizen, despite claims that only suspected terrorists are affected by the law. “The privacy of law-abiding Americans is at stake, along with their confidence in their government," Feingold said in February 2005. "Congress should act to protect our privacy and reassure our citizens."  
  
 **Should the Patriot Act be renewed?**

**Do you feel safer with this law in effect?**

**How much of your privacy are you willing to sacrifice in order to be safer from the threat of terrorism in the United States?**