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Americans' Attitudes toward an International Criminal Court

Prepared for the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights
April 9, 2002

Overview

The majority of Americans - 54% - think the U.S. government should change its current position and join other countries to establish a permanent International Criminal Court to try individuals suspected of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. Even more Americans, seven in 10, agree that because of the September 11th attacks on the United States, it is particularly important for the U.S. government to work with other nations to create this International Criminal Court.

The more people know about the possible formation of the International Criminal Court the more likely they are to support it. In addition, close to 20% of Americans who originally did not think the United States should support a permanent International Criminal Court change their mind after learning additional information about the Court's procedures.

Summary of the Findings

The Majority of Americans Have Limited Knowledge about the Formation of an International Criminal Court

Four in ten Americans (39%) say they have heard or read about the possibility of forming a permanent International Criminal Court, including 4% who know a lot and 13% who know some. The majority of Americans (61%) report that they have not heard or read anything at all about this initiative.

The Majority of Americans Believe the U.S. Government Should Change Its Position and Support an International Criminal Court

A majority of Americans (54%) believe the U.S. government should change its current position and support the creation of a permanent International Criminal Court that would prosecute individuals suspected of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. Support is consistent across the country. A majority of adults in all four regions of the United States think the government should change its position and support the Court. Slightly more than one-third of adults (37%) do not think the United States should support the formation of a court such as this and 10% are unsure.

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Seven in Ten Americans Think the United States Should Work with Other Nations to Establish an International Criminal Court

A large majority of Americans (71%) agree that because of the events of September 11th it is more important for the United States to work in concert with other nations to create an International Criminal Court. Thirty-seven percent of Americans strongly agree with this attitude and 33% somewhat agree. Nine percent of Americans do not think the events of September 11th have any effect on whether or not the United States should work with other nations to establish a court of this kind, and 18% disagree that the United States should work with other countries to achieve this goal.

The More People Know About the Court the More Likely They Are to Support It

The more people have heard or read about the possible formation of this Court, the more likely they are to think the U.S. government should support it. More than six in ten Americans (61%) who say they have heard or read a lot or some about the possibility of creating an International Criminal Court think the United States should support it. Among those who knew "nothing at all" about the Court, the level of support is lower, only five in ten Americans (51%) say they support it.

More Knowledge of 'the Court's Specific Procedures Makes Some People Change Their Opinion About Whether the U.S. Government Should Support the Court

Those who did not think the United States should support the creation of the Court were given more information about the Court's procedures, specifically that the rules of the Court give countries with established legal systems the right to try their own citizens in their own courts, instead of having them tried in the International Criminal Court. Upon hearing this information, 21 % of those who originally did not think the United States should support the Court, change their opinion and say the United States should support the Court.

Methodology

RoperASW conducted this study via telephone among a nationally representative sample of 1,043 adults 18 or older. This survey was conducted from March 28 to March 30, 2002 using Random Digit Dialing. The sample was weighted by demographic factors including age, sex, and geographic region to ensure reliable and accurate representation of the United States adult population. Results are projectable to the entire adult population in the United States, with a sampling error of ± 3.3 percentage points. Results based on subgroups have a larger sampling error. Also due to rounding, the results presented in this report may be one percentage point different than the results in the cross tabulations.

Posted Questionnaire

1. How much have you heard or read about the possibility of a permanent international criminal court being established? Would you say you have heard a lot, some, not too much or nothing at all?

A lot	4%
Some.....	13
Not too much.....	21
None at all	61
(VOL) Don't Know/No response	*

2. Over 100 countries have agreed to establish a permanent international criminal court to try individuals suspected of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. However the US government is not supporting this court. Do you think the US should support or not support this court?

Support	54%
Not support.....	37
(VOL) Don't Know/No response	10

3. Please tell me how much you agree with the following statement. Given the events of September 11th, it is more important for the United States to work in concert with other nations to establish an international criminal court. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, or do the events of September 11" make "no difference."

Strongly Agree	37%
Somewhat Agree.....	33
Somewhat disagree	10
Strongly disagree	8
No difference.....	9
(VOL) Don't Know/No response	3

4. (FOR THOSE WHO SAY DO NOT SUPPORT IN Q2) Some say US service members, such as those who use force in a peacekeeping operation, could be brought before an international court. However, the rules of the court say countries with strong legal systems such as the US, would have the right to try their own citizens in their own court systems instead of having their citizens tried in the international criminal court. Does this change your opinion about whether the US should support the court? (n=392)

Yes	21
No	76
(VOL) Don't Know	3

