

US Network TV: Torture Advocates Outnumbered Critics 2-to-1

FAIR survey finds torturers well-represented on TV news

By [FAIR](#)

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A new FAIR study finds that torture defenders outnumbered critics of torture by nearly 2 to 1 in TV news coverage of the Senate Intelligence Committee report released on December 9.

FAIR surveyed the guests of nine news programs for the week of December 7 to December 14, when [discussion of the torture report's findings](#) was most prominent. The programs included the Sunday talk shows (**NBC's Meet the Press**, **CBS's Face the Nation**, **ABC's This Week**, **Fox News Sunday** and **CNN's State of the Union**) along with four weekday news shows (**MSNBC's Hardball**, **Fox's Special Report**, the first hour of **CNN's Situation Room** and the **PBS NewsHour**).

Of the 104 guests discussing the topic on these shows, 53 expressed a discernible opinion either for or against the use of torture. Thirty-five of those who took a position, or 66 percent, were supportive of torture. This included a few individuals who claimed to be against "torture," but defended interrogation methods such as waterboarding and other "enhanced interrogation techniques" that are recognized as torture under [US](#) and [international law](#).

Only 18 guests (34 percent) articulated clear opposition to the CIA's torture practices—about half as many as spoke up in defense of torture.

Journalists—mostly news correspondents brought on to discuss the report's release—made up 64 of the 104 total guests; few of these expressed an overt opinion on torture. Thirty-five former and current government officials—including nine CIA officers, seven of whom defended the torture program—were the bulk of the remaining guests.

Many of these former government officials were involved in authorizing or implementing the CIA's torture program, including George W. Bush (**State of the Union**, [12/7/14](#)), Vice President Dick Cheney (**Special Report**, [12/10/14](#); **Meet the Press**, [12/14/14](#)), Attorney General Alberto Gonzales (**Situation Room**, [12/10/14](#)), White House adviser Karl Rove (**Fox News Sunday**, [12/14/14](#)), CIA Director Michael Hayden (**Face the Nation**, [12/7/14](#); **This Week** [12/14](#)), CIA Deputy Director Jose Rodriguez (**Fox News Sunday**, [12/14/14](#)) and CIA spokesperson Bill Harlow (**NewsHour**, [12/10/14](#); **Situation Room**, [12/11/14](#)).

Guantanamo prosecutor David Iglesias also appeared on the **NewsHour** ([12/10/14](#)); of the eight former government officials who had a connection to the torture program, he was the only one to express opposition to it.

While those who ordered, justified and carried out torture were well-represented in the debate over the report, advocates for the victims of torture were seldom heard from. Joseph Margulies (**Hardball**, 12/9/14) and Meg Satterthwaite (**This Week**, [12/14/14](#)), two lawyers representing victims of CIA torture, were the exceptions. Representatives of human rights groups and experts on international law were notable for their absence.

Among partisan guests–politicians and campaign officials–Republicans outnumbered Democrats 19 to 7. Sixteen of the Republicans defended torture, while three spoke against it—including Sen. James Risch (R-Idaho), who opposed releasing the report or prosecuting torturers, but indicated that as a member of the Intelligence Committee he would block the CIA from conducting similar interrogations. Of the seven Democratic appearances, four spoke against torture, while three voiced no clear opinion.

Guests were coded by occupation, partisan affiliation and their expressed opinion on torture. Sources whose soundbites appeared in short taped segments were not counted as guests.

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