

## Quick Facts: The US Patriot Act

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Less than a month after making a show of reading the U.S. Constitution into the Congressional Record, the Republican-led House of Representatives have passed a temporary extension of the Patriot Act, a controversial law that allows surveillance of the American people and their transactions.

The House sent the bill to the U.S. Senate on Monday by a vote of 275 to 144 a week after its failed attempt to garner a supermajority to extend the Act.

### Applications of the USA Patriot Act

The official objectives of the Act are:

To strengthen U.S. measures to prevent, detect and prosecute international money laundering and financing of terrorism.

To subject to special scrutiny foreign jurisdictions, foreign financial institutions, and classes of international transactions or types of accounts that are susceptible to criminal abuse.

To require all appropriate elements of the financial services industry to report potential money - laundering.

To strengthen measures to prevent use of the U.S. financial system for personal gain by corrupt foreign officials and facilitate repatriation of stolen assets to the citizens of countries to whom such assets belong. [fincen.gov](#)

### Patriot Act and the minority groups

The FBI has unfairly targeted minority and immigrant communities with its surveillance and enforcement efforts. The FBI and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) rounded up over a thousand immigrants as 'special interest' detainees, holding many of them without charges for months. A 'Special Registration' program now requires tens of thousands of Arab and Muslim immigrants to submit to a call-in interview from which other immigrants are exempted.

The National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) says the Act has resulted in increase of reports and acceptance of racial, ethnic and religious profiling.

Following September 11th, many Arabs, South Asians and Muslims along with Americans of Arab decent reported being questioned by the FBI and other law enforcement agencies, and an increase of racial and ethnic profiling from airport security officers. There were also reports of the FBI collecting data and conducting surveillance on mosques and Islamic centers. [aclu.procon.org](#)

### Impacts of the Patriot Act

The Act dramatically reduces restrictions on law enforcement agencies' ability to search telephone, e-mail communications, medical, financial, and other records without a warrant and eased restrictions on foreign intelligence gathering within the United States. [securusvault.ch](#)

The Act expands the Secretary of the Treasury's authority to regulate financial transactions, particularly those involving foreign individuals and entities.

The Act broadens the discretion of law enforcement and immigration authorities in detaining and deporting immigrants suspected of terrorism-related acts. [dm.usda.gov](#)

It also expands the definition of terrorism to include "domestic terrorism." [aclu.org](#)

### Later modifications

In July 2005, the U.S. Senate passed a reauthorization bill with substantial changes to several sections of the act, while the House reauthorization bill kept most of the act's original language. [nsm.org.in](#)

The two bills were then reconciled in a conference committee that was criticized by Senators from both the Republican and Democratic parties for ignoring civil liberty concerns.

The bill, which removed most of the changes from the Senate version, was passed in Congress on

March 2, 2006.

It was signed into law by President George W. Bush on March 9 and 10, 2006. Examiner

HJ/KAMMN

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