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| **The USA Patriot Act** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| The USA Patriot Act, passed in response to the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, is aimed at providing the tools law enforcement officials need to prevent further terrorist attacks.USA Patriot Act  When President Bush signed the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism, or USA Patriot Act, into law on Oct. 26, 2001, he said the legislation would "help law enforcement to identify, to dismantle, to disrupt, and to punish terrorists before they strike."  "We're dealing with terrorists who operate by highly sophisticated methods and technologies, some of which were not even available when our existing laws were written," Mr. Bush said. "The bill before me takes account of the new realities and dangers posed by modern terrorists." | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| The act allows officials to track an individual's communications on the Internet, install telephone and computer wiretaps, obtain search warrants for voice-mail and e-mail messages, access personal information, such as medical, financial and educational histories, and access library records without proof of a crime. | | http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/images/global/pixel_t.gif | |
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| http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/images/global/pixel_t.gif | **Growing Criticism** | | | | | | | | | | | http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/images/global/pixel_t.gif | | | | | |
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| http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/images/global/pixel_t.gif | book at library checkoutSupporters and critics of the law are constantly at odds over what liberties Americans should have to sacrifice in exchange for their safety.  The Patriot Act's most outspoken critic, the American Civil Liberties Union, or ACLU, an 80-year-old civil rights watchdog organization, called the act a "surveillance monster" and argued that there were "virtually no rules" governing the new powers.  "Of course we want to be safe, but the government…has taken advantage of this unspeakable tragedy to launch a broadside against our fundamental rights."  Some with the ACLU fear that the act also unfairly targets certain minority groups. Ann Beeson of the ACLU stated that “We know from our clients that the FBI is once again targeting ethnic, religious, and political minority communities disproportionately," she added. "Investing the FBI with unchecked authority to monitor the activities of innocent people is an invitation to abuse, a waste of resources, and is certainly not making any of us any safer." | | | | | | | | | | | http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/images/global/pixel_t.gif | | | | | |
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| http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/images/global/pixel_t.gif | **Defending the Patriot Act** | | | | | | | | | | | http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/images/global/pixel_t.gif | | | | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/images/global/pixel_t.gif | In an effort to rally support for the Patriot Act, Attorney General John Ashcroft recently finished a 16-city tour, traveling across the United States to speak to law enforcement officials in defense of the act.  Ashcroft pointed to the triumphs the government has made under the act since Sept. 11, 2001. Among them, federal prosecutors have brought more than 250 criminal charges under the law, resulting in more than 130 convictions or guilty pleas.  "We have used tools provided in the Patriot Act to fulfill our first responsibility -- that of protecting the American people," Ashcroft said. "We've used these tools to provide the security that ensures liberty."  Former Assistant Attorney General Viet Dinh said the act's success is obvious because nothing has happened in the last two years, an achievement for law enforcement officials, the Department of Justice and Ashcroft. | | | | | | | | | | |  | | | | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |