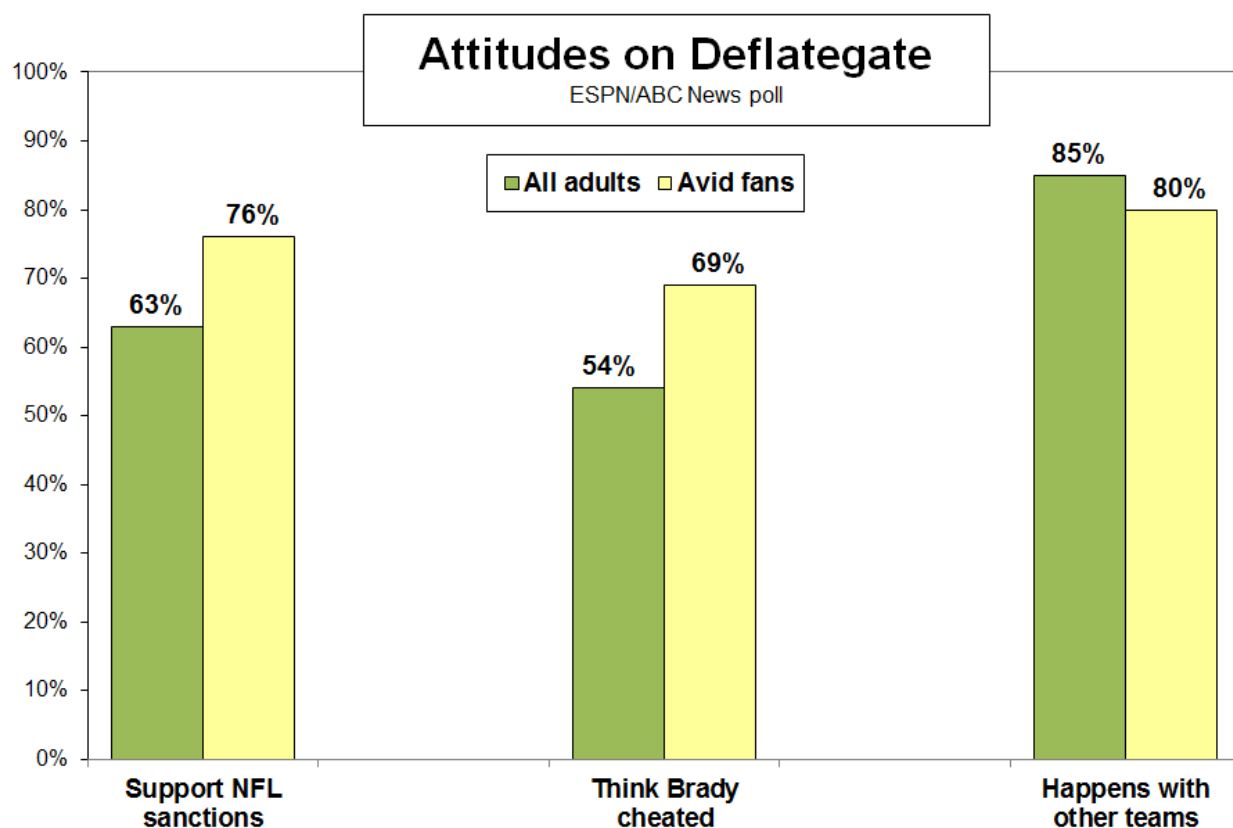


Fans Broadly Back NFL Sanctions; Eight in 10 Suspect Other Teams, Too

Americans overall, and avid fans in particular, broadly support NFL sanctions against New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady and his team for using underinflated footballs in January's AFC title game.

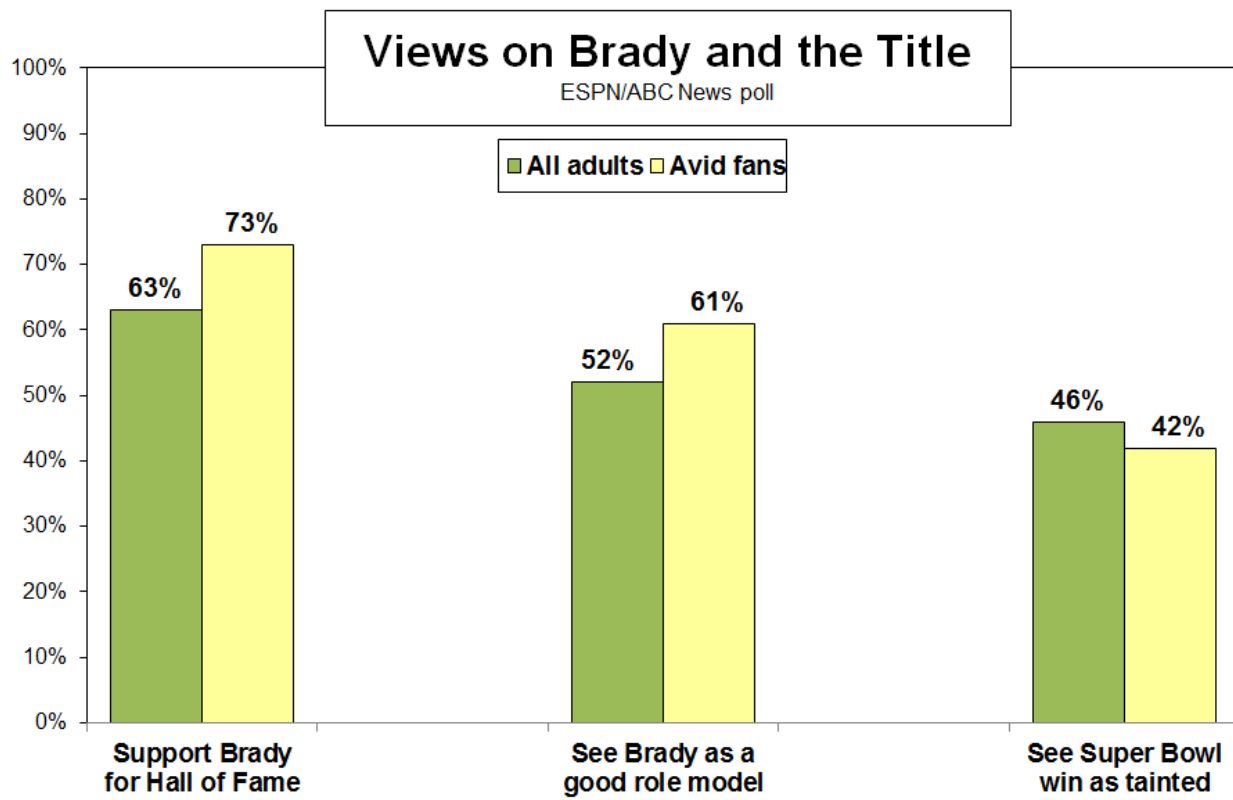
But the sport has a bigger problem: Eighty-five percent in a new ESPN/ABC News poll think other teams do the same kind of thing.

The national survey finds Americans by more than a 2-1 margin lining up behind the league's move this week to suspend Brady for four games, fine the Patriots \$1 million and dock it two draft picks: Sixty-three percent support the action, vs. 26 percent opposed. Support rises to 76 percent among avid fans, and 69 percent of those fans say flat out that Brady cheated.



But the controversy may not define the celebrated quarterback's career: Despite the episode, 63 percent of Americans, rising to 73 percent of avid fans, say they'd support Brady's eventual election to the Professional Football Hall of Fame.

The public is somewhat less forgiving in other measures. Only a narrow majority overall, 52 percent, sees Brady as a role model for young people; that goes negative among those who think he cheated. And the public splits on whether the Patriots' Super Bowl championship is now tainted, although avid fans are less apt to think so.



That said, perhaps the most troubling result in the poll, produced for ESPN and ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#), is the sense that the deflation incident represents broader practice. A mere 6 percent think this kind of thing is limited to the Patriots; 85 percent say "it happens with other NFL teams as well."

That includes vast majorities of fans and non-fans and Brady critics and supporters alike. Even among avid fans, just 12 percent see the situation as limited to the New England team.

The Patriots were sanctioned in 2007 for videotaping opposing teams' coaches' play signals. But the poll's result on suspected misdeeds elsewhere indicates the public overwhelmingly sees this not as a Patriots-only issue, but as an example of broader behavior in the league.

The NFL based its sanctions on an investigation by attorney Ted Wells that, while lacking conclusive evidence, found it “more probable than not” that Patriots personnel deflated balls intentionally before the AFC game and that Brady probably was “at least generally aware” of it. Two lower-level employees were implicated; the team’s coaches and other senior management were not.

Perhaps as a result, just a narrow majority of Americans, 52 percent, say the Patriots cheated; 38 percent think not, with the rest unsure. As with Brady himself, though, belief that the team cheated rises among avid fans, in this case to 63 percent.

FANS – Differences among fans are notable, especially the way avid fans differentiate among issues given their appreciation for the sport. On one hand, as noted, they’re especially likely to support the sanctions and to say Brady and the Patriots cheated. On the other, avid fans also are more apt than occasional or nonfans to support Brady for the Hall of Fame and to see him as a good role model, and much more apt than others to say the Super Bowl victory is not tainted by this incident (58 percent take that position). All these suggest that avid fans’ views of Brady and the Patriots’ sports achievements mitigate the damage from the deflation incident.

Among other results, avid fans’ support for the NFL punishment is particularly deep as well as broad. Not only do 76 percent support the sanctions, but 55 percent of avid fans do so “strongly,” more than in other groups.

OTHERS – Support for the sanctions, naturally, is especially high among people who think Brady (or the Patriots) cheated. And there are other differences based on this view. Brady’s seen as a good role model for young people by 80 percent of those who think he did not cheat, vs. just 40 percent of those who think he cheated. Similarly, 82 percent of those who think he didn’t cheat back Brady for the Hall of Fame; among those who think he cheated it’s still a majority, but a much smaller one, 57 percent.

Other differences include a gender gap on some issues. Sixty-four percent of men see Brady as a good role model, while just 41 percent of women agree. Men are 20 percentage points more likely than women to support Brady as a future hall of famer, 73 vs. 53 percent. And women are 11 points more apt than men to see the Patriots’ victory in Super Bowl XLIX as tainted, 51 vs. 40 percent.

METHODOLOGY – This ESPN/ABC News survey was conducted by landline and cellular telephone interviews May 12, 2015, among a random national sample of 504 adults. Overall results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 5 percentage points. The survey was designed and analyzed for ESPN and ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by SSRS of Media, Pa.

Full results follow. Asterisks in data columns indicate results less than 0.5 percent.

1. Thinking about professional football, would you describe yourself as an avid fan, a casual fan, an occasional fan or not a fan?

		Avid	Casual	Occasional	Not a fan	No opinion
5/12/15	All	25	21	27	28	*

2. The National Football League says it believes that New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady was aware that his team used under-inflated footballs in the AFC championship game in January. It suspended Brady without pay for four games, fined the Patriots one million dollars and took away two of its draft picks. Do you support or oppose the NFL taking this action against Brady and the Patriots? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

		----- Support -----			----- Oppose -----			No
		NET	Strongly	Smwht	NET	Smwht	Strongly	op.
5/12/15	All	63	38	25	26	12	13	11
	Avid fans	76	55	21	24	10	14	0

3. Just your best guess, do you think Brady cheated, or not?

		Yes, cheated	No, did not cheat	No opinion
5/12/15	All	54	35	11
	Avid fans	69	29	2

4. Regardless of Brady's actions, do you think the Patriots cheated, or not?

		Yes, cheated	No, did not cheat	No opinion
5/12/15	All	52	38	10
	Avid fans	63	34	3

5. Do you think this kind of thing is limited to the Patriots, or do you think it happens with other NFL teams as well?

		Limited to the Patriots	Happens with other NFL teams as well	No opinion
5/12/15	All	6	85	9
	Avid fans	12	80	8

6. The Patriots went on to win the Super Bowl. Do you think that victory is tainted because of this incident, or not?

		Yes, victory is tainted	No, victory is not tainted	No opinion
5/12/15	All	46	49	6
	Avid fans	42	58	*

7. Balancing this incident and his career overall, would you support or oppose Brady being elected to the Football Hall of Fame at some point?

		Support	Oppose	No opinion
5/12/15	All	63	28	9
	Avid fans	73	24	4

8. Do you think Brady is or is not a good role model for young people?

		Good role model	Not a good role model	No opinion
5/12/15	All	52	38	10
	Avid fans	61	34	5