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**INTERNET ACCESS AND NETWORK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES:  
THE PUBLIC REMAINS CONCERNED AND WANTS POLICIES TO ENSURE ACCESS**

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**MARCH 2011**

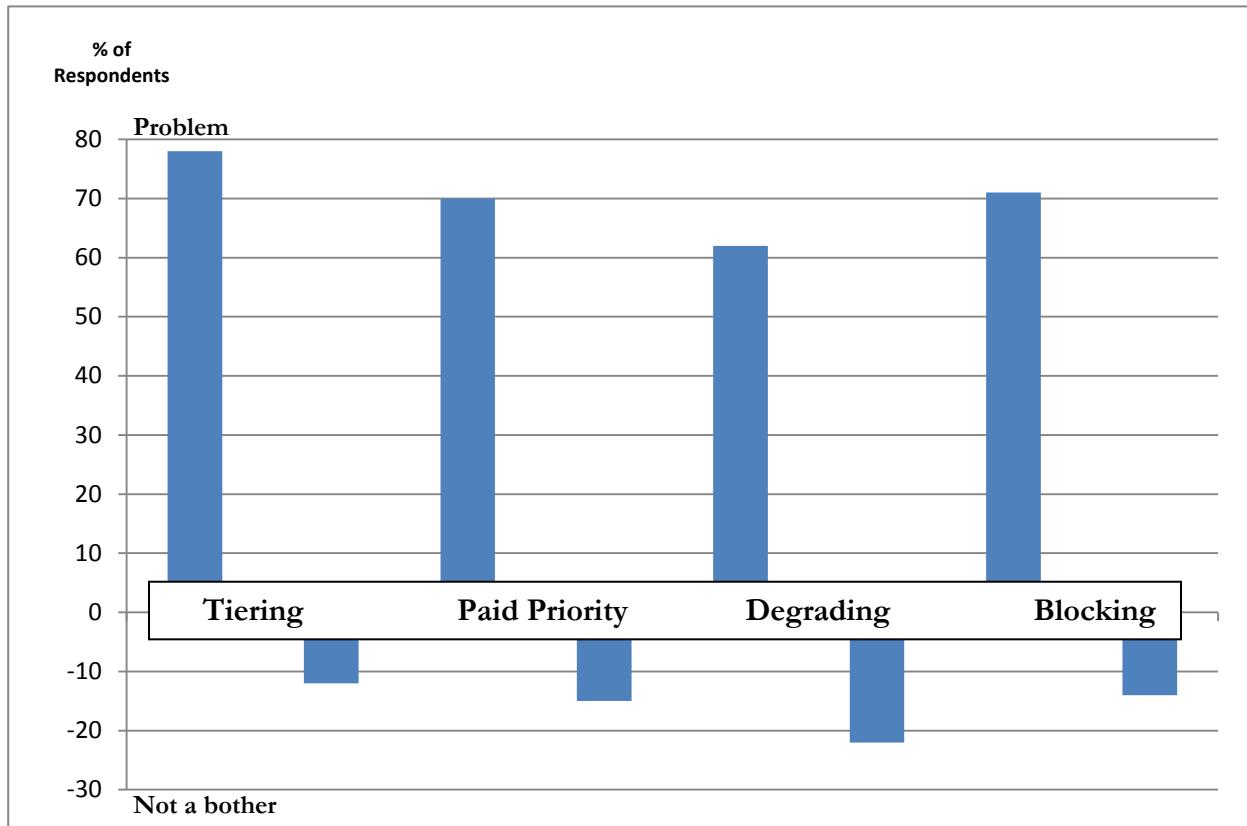
## INTERNET ACCESS AND NETWORK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: THE PUBLIC REMAINS CONCERNED AND WANTS POLICIES TO ENSURE ACCESS

### Executive Summary

**Problematic Network Management Practices:** A national, random sample, public opinion survey conducted for the Consumer Federation of America in February 2011 found that three quarters of the respondents believe that the Internet is important to them. Large majorities of respondents have a negative view of network management practices interfere with their access to the web, applications and content. Respondents are between two and three times as likely to say network management practices, like including tiering, paid prioritization, degrading and blocking, are problematic than say they are not a bother. These findings are based on questions that were originally used in a national random sample poll in 2005 and the results for the 2011 survey are similar to the earlier, 2005 results.

As shown in Figure ES-1, the respondents who said the Internet is important expressed even greater concern about these network management practices. Internet Important Respondents were six times as likely to say the network management practices that involved payment are a problem as not and three to four times as likely to say the service quality management practices are a problem.

#### **ES-1: ATTITUDES TOWARD NETWORK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: INTERNET IMPORTANT RESPONDENTS ONLY**

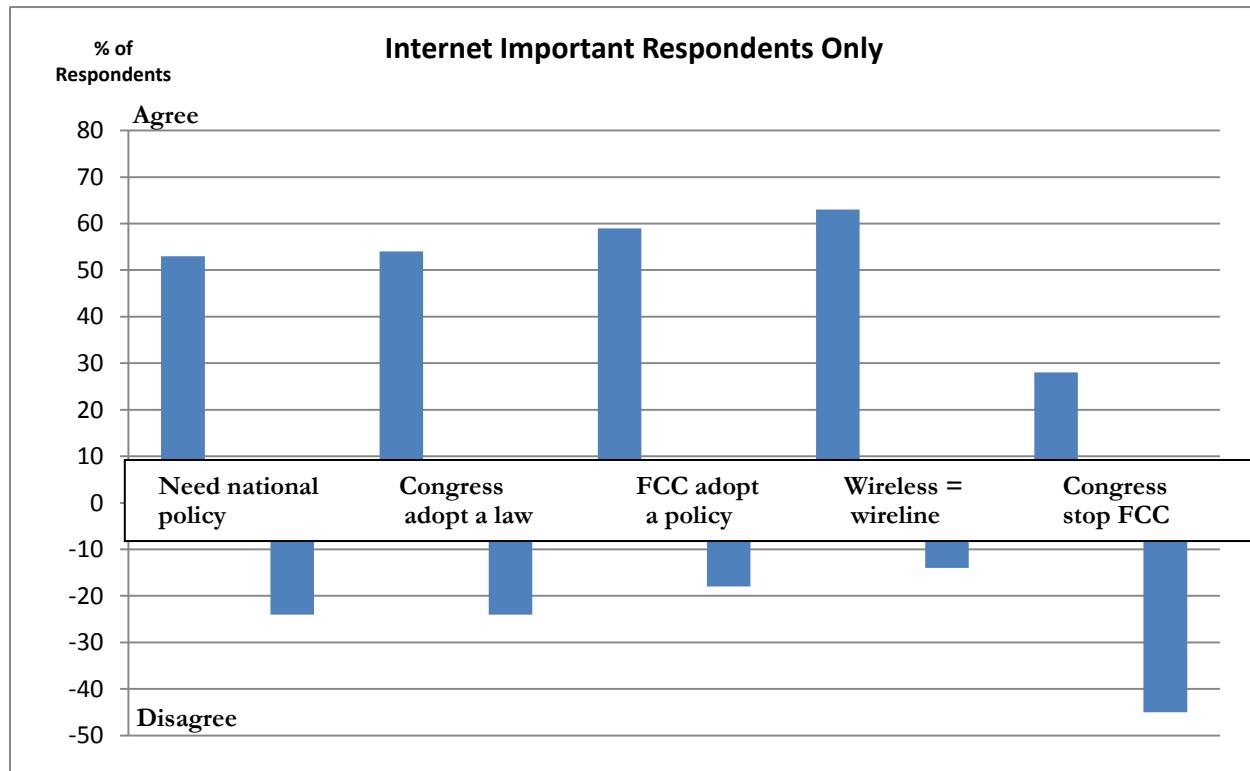


Source: Consumer Federation of America, National Poll, February 2011

- 78% of the respondents said consumer tiering is problematic (68% = severe problem) in contrast to only 12% who said it is not a bother (9% = not really a bother).
- 70% of the respondents said paid prioritization is problematic (53% = severe problem) in contrast to only 15% who said it is not (12% = not really a bother).
- 62% of the respondents said service degrading is problematic (48% = severe problem) in contrast to only 22% who said it is not (16% = not really a bother).
- 71% of respondents said that blocking service is problematic (58% = severe problem) in contrast to 14% it is not (9% not really a bother)

**Agreement with Policies to Ensure Access:** A majority of respondents supports policies to ensure access. Agreement with statements calling for policies to ensure access exceeds opposition by more than two to one. Respondents who say the Internet is important to them are more likely to support policies to ensure access, but the difference with respect to policy is smaller than it was with respect to perception of network management problems.

**FIGURE ES-2: ATTITUDE TOWARD POLICIES TO ENSURE ACCESS**



Source: Consumer Federation of America, National Poll, February 2011

- Among the Internet important respondents, agreement with these policies falls in the range of 53% to 63% and disagreement is in the 13% to 24% range.
- In contrast, 45% disagree with Congress stopping the Federal Communications Commission from adopting policies to ensure access, while 28% of the respondents agree that Congress should stop the Federal Communications Commission.

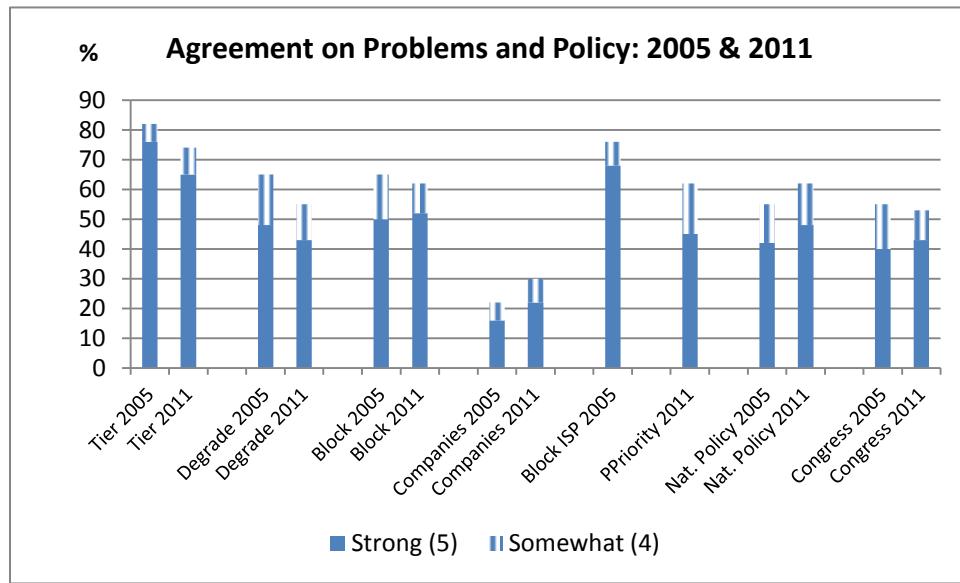
- Application of one set of policies to both wireless and wireline consistently receives the highest level of agreement (63% overall, 51% strong).
- Federal Communications Commission implementation of policies to ensure access receives the second highest level of agreement (59% overall, 42% strong).

**Attitudes Toward Company Behavior:** The respondents are split with respect to the question of whether the telephone and cable companies would engage in the network management practices that are problematic.

- A little over one third believes they would, a little over two fifths believes they would not.
- However, respondents who believe strongly that companies would engage in the practices and those who believe strongly that they would not, both support policies to ensure access. The respondents who are unsure about what the companies will do are less likely to support policies.

**Comparison to the 2005 Survey:** Public opinion about network management practices and policies to ensure access in 2011 are quite similar to public opinion in 2005. Figure ES-3 shows the results for the questions from the two polls that are similar or identical. It shows the percentages of respondents who found the network management practice problematic and those who agreed with the need for policy. These were the predominant responses in both polls. In 2005 and again in 2011 we find large majorities concerned about these network management practices and majorities agreeing with the need for policy.

#### ES-3: COMPARING THE 2005 AND 2011 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

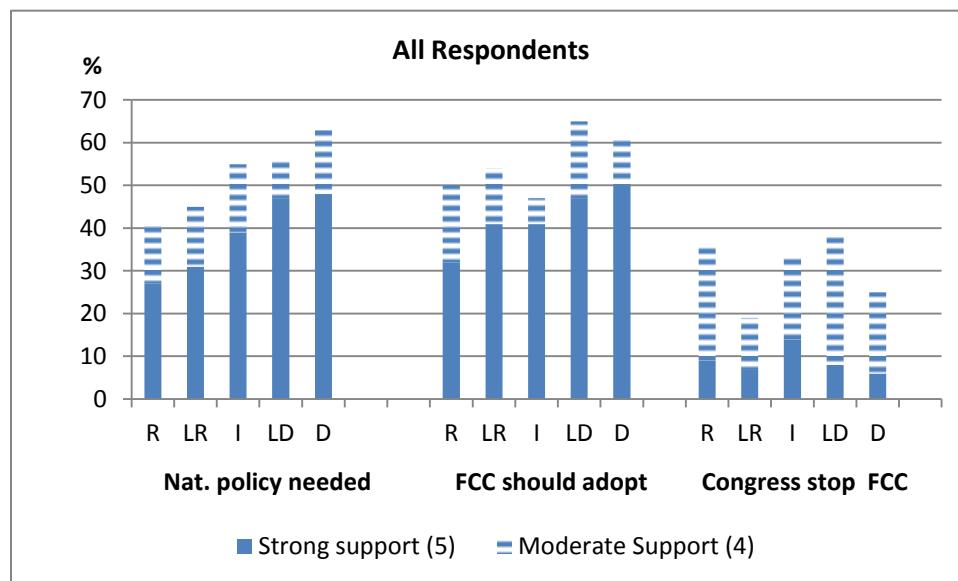


Source: Consumer Federation of America, National Poll, February 2011, October/November 2005

**Political Orientation and Attitudes toward Problematic Practices and Policy Responses:** Not surprisingly, respondents who identify themselves as independent, leaning Democrat or Democrat are more slightly more likely to view the practices as problematic. The responses vary somewhat

more across the political spectrum in the answer to the general question about the need for a national policy, with the independents and Democrats more likely to see the need. However, with respect to the issue of FCC action or the Congress stopping FCC action, the differences are smaller, as shown in Figure ES-4. Moreover, a majority of the respondent who say they are Republican or lean Republican agree that the FCC should adopt policies to ensure access, while about one-third day the Congress should stop the FCC.

**FIGURE ES-4:**  
**POLITICAL ORIENTATION AND ATTITUDE TOWARD POLICIES TO ENSURE ACCESS**



**Conclusion:** The responses to the national public opinion poll show that the public continues to find network management practices that impede their access to the Internet, web sites, content and applications to be problematic. They continue to want policies to be adopted that ensure their access. These responses are similar to the responses from 2005. The three new issues that are addressed in the current survey that reflect recent developments in the debate over access elicit responses that are consistent with the overall tendency of the public to want policies to ensure access. Respondents prefer the FCC over Congress adopting such policies by a small margin. They reject the proposal that Congress should stop the FCC from taking action to ensure access. They express more support for equal treatment of wireless and wireline technologies than any other policy to ensure access.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In late 2005, with Congress taking up legislation on network neutrality, CFA, CU and Free Press commissioned a national public opinion poll on the issues. With network neutrality again on the Congressional front burner, we have commissioned another poll on the topic. The public interest groups are responsible for the wording of the questions, with the advice of Opinion Research Corporation, who executes the poll. To the greatest extent possible, we have used the exact questions used in 2005. Where issues have changed slightly we have modified the wording as little as possible to reflect the change.

The questions are posed without preamble or comment. Jargon is avoided and the questions about issues and concerns are stated in the first person. Questions about policy are stated strongly, asking about actions that should be taken. This approach yields a very low number of respondents who refuse to answer or say they “do not know.”

All results reported below are based on the weighted responses and include respondents who did not answer or said “don’t know,” which makes the sample representative of the population.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The poll is a national random sample of 1006 adults conducted February 17-20. A standard and full set of demographic questions is provided by ORC, including political affiliation.

The initial question, which provides the introduction to the topic, is to ask respondents how important the Internet is to them (in the 2005 survey this question was followed up with a long list of activities that are conducted over the Internet, which was not included in 2011).

How important is the Internet to you? Is it . . .

- 01      Very important
- 02      Somewhat important
- 03      Not at all important
- 99      DON'T KNOW

We asked questions about four primary issues, as follows (for purposes of comparison, the questions from 2005 are provided in the Appendix):

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not really a bother and 5 is a very serious problem, how would you feel if . . .

- 01      Not really a bother (1)
- 02      (2)
- 03      (3)
- 04      (4)
- 05      Very serious problem (5)
- 99      DON'T KNOW

- A.      The company that connects you to the Internet required you to pay an additional fee on top of your regular monthly fee to reach some web sites or to use certain applications. If you did not pay this fee, your service would not allow you to visit these sites or use these specific applications

- B. Services from your preferred websites, like streaming video, were slowed down by interference from the company that connects you to the Internet
- C. New services that other companies wanted to offer, such as telephone calls on the Internet, were blocked by the company that connects you to the Internet
- D. The company that connects you to the Internet blocks or slows certain website content that you requested unless the content provider pays your Internet provider an additional fee

This question identifies two management practices that involve payment and two that involve service quality. One of the payment practices affects the consumer directly, while the other affects service providers. For ease of presentation in the following Exhibits and discussion, we label the consumer payment as “tiering” and the supplier payment as “paid prioritization” (Priority). The two quality of service practices are labeled “Blocking” and “Degrading.”

To round out the set of questions about “problems” and transition to the questions about policy, we also asked respondents the following question about company practices and whether there is a need for policy (this transition is identical to the earlier survey).

Some people say that the telephone and cable companies would not engage in blocking or impairing access to Internet services from other companies, such as streaming video or Internet telephone calls. Other people say we need a national policy to ensure that these problems don’t arise. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

- |    |                       |
|----|-----------------------|
| 01 | Strongly disagree (1) |
| 02 | (2)                   |
| 03 | (3)                   |
| 04 | (4)                   |
| 05 | Strongly agree (5)    |
| 99 | DON’T KNOW            |

- A. The telephone and cable companies would not impair or block services
- B. We need a national policy to prevent these problems

We then asked about public policy options. These reflect the current options on the table (the first option was included in the 2005 survey; the second two have been added to reflect the current situation). The questions are framed as agreement or disagreement with statements about the adoption of policies to ensure access to all lawful websites, content and applications available on the Internet.

Some think Congress should adopt a law to ensure that Internet service providers cannot interfere with their customers’ accessing all lawful websites, content and applications available on the Internet.

Others believe that the Federal Communications Commission, or FCC, should adopt policies to ensure that Internet service providers cannot interfere with access to all lawful websites.

Still, others want Congress to stop the FCC from adopting these policies, thereby allowing the Internet service providers to behave as they choose.

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

- |    |                       |
|----|-----------------------|
| 01 | Strongly disagree (1) |
| 02 | (2)                   |
| 03 | (3)                   |
| 04 | (4)                   |
| 05 | Strongly agree (5)    |

99 DON'T KNOW

- A. Congress should adopt a law to ensure access to all legal Internet services
- B. The FCC should adopt policies to ensure access to all legal Internet services
- C. Congress should stop the FCC from adopting policies to ensure people have access to all legal Internet services, thereby allowing the Internet service providers to behave as they choose

In the discussion below we refer to these as policies to ensure access, "national policy," "Congress act," "FCC Act" and "Congress stop the FCC."

Finally, the new policy issue of whether wireline and wireless broadband should be subject to the same policy was addressed with the following question. We refer to this as equal wireless.

Next, please think about wire based services to access the Internet -- things like cable, fiber optic and DSL phone on one hand and services that provide wireless high speed access to the Internet on the other, such as service through a cell phone.

Some people think that the same policies to ensure users can access all lawful websites, etc. that apply to wire based services should also apply to high speed Internet services provided with wireless technologies. Others believe that the technologies are so different they cannot be subject to the same requirements. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, please tell me whether you agree or disagree the following statement:

One set of policies should apply to both wireless and wire-based high speed Internet service.

- 01 STRONGLY DISAGREE (1)
- 02 (2)
- 03 (3)
- 04 (4)
- 05 STRONGLY AGREE (5)
- 99 DON'T KNOW

### III. FINDINGS

#### Concern about Network Management Practices

We find that approximately four fifths of the respondents say the Internet is important to them and there is a high correlation between those who use the Internet and those who say it is important. As shown in Table 1, 91.5% of those who say they use the Internet also say it is important. In contrast, 87.3% of those who say they do not use the Internet say it is not important at all. In the analysis below, we will pay special attention to those who say the Internet is important.

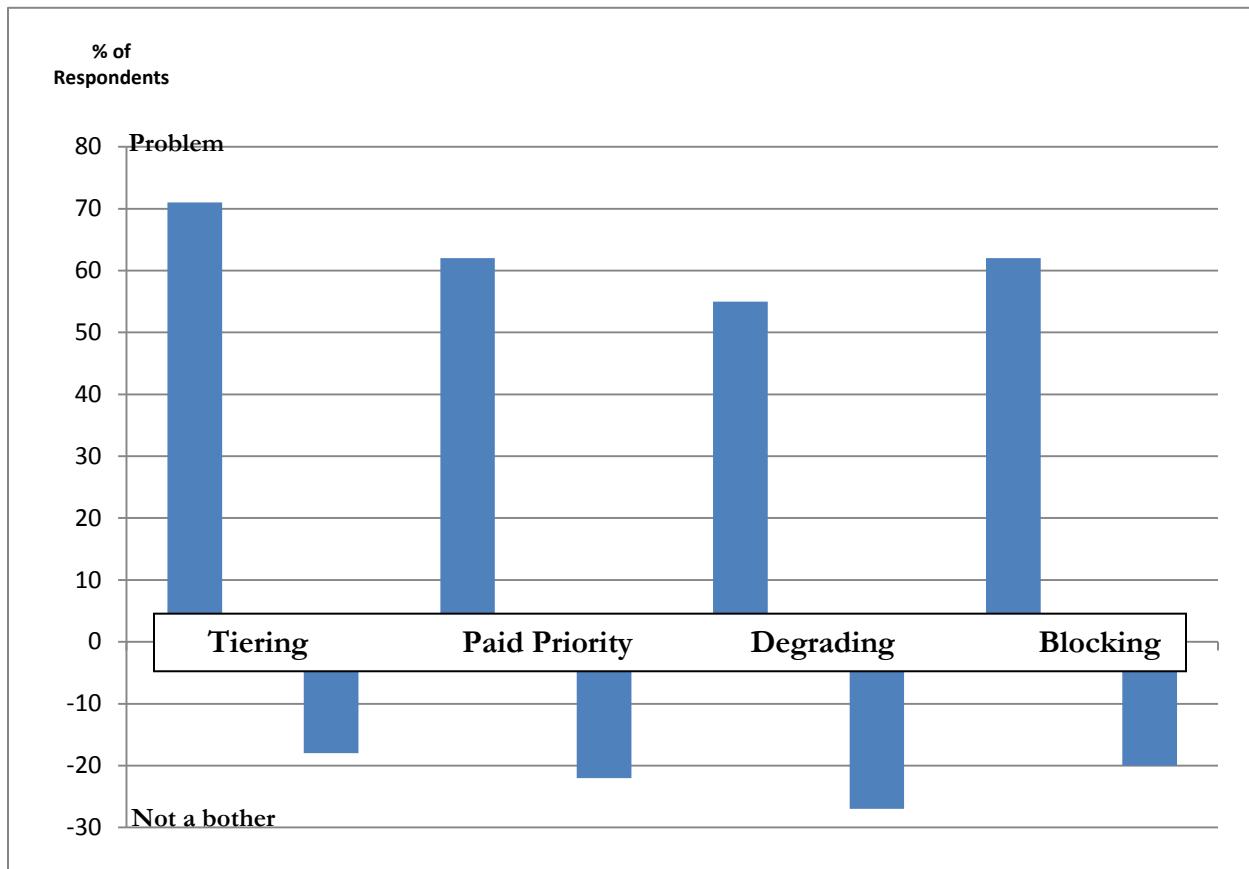
**TABLE 1: IMPORTANCE AND USE OF THE INTERNET**

	<u>Importance</u>		
	Important	Not at All Important	Total
Internet Usage			
Use	91.5%	8.5%	100%
Do Not Use	12.7%	87.3%	100%

Source: Consumer Federation of America, National Poll, February 2011

As shown in Figure 1, large majorities of the respondents to the poll find each of the network management practices that have been the focal point of recent debate to be problematic. Respondents are between two and three times as likely to say these network management are problematic than not.

**FIGURE 1: ATTITUDES TOWARD NETWORK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES:  
ALL RESPONDENTS**



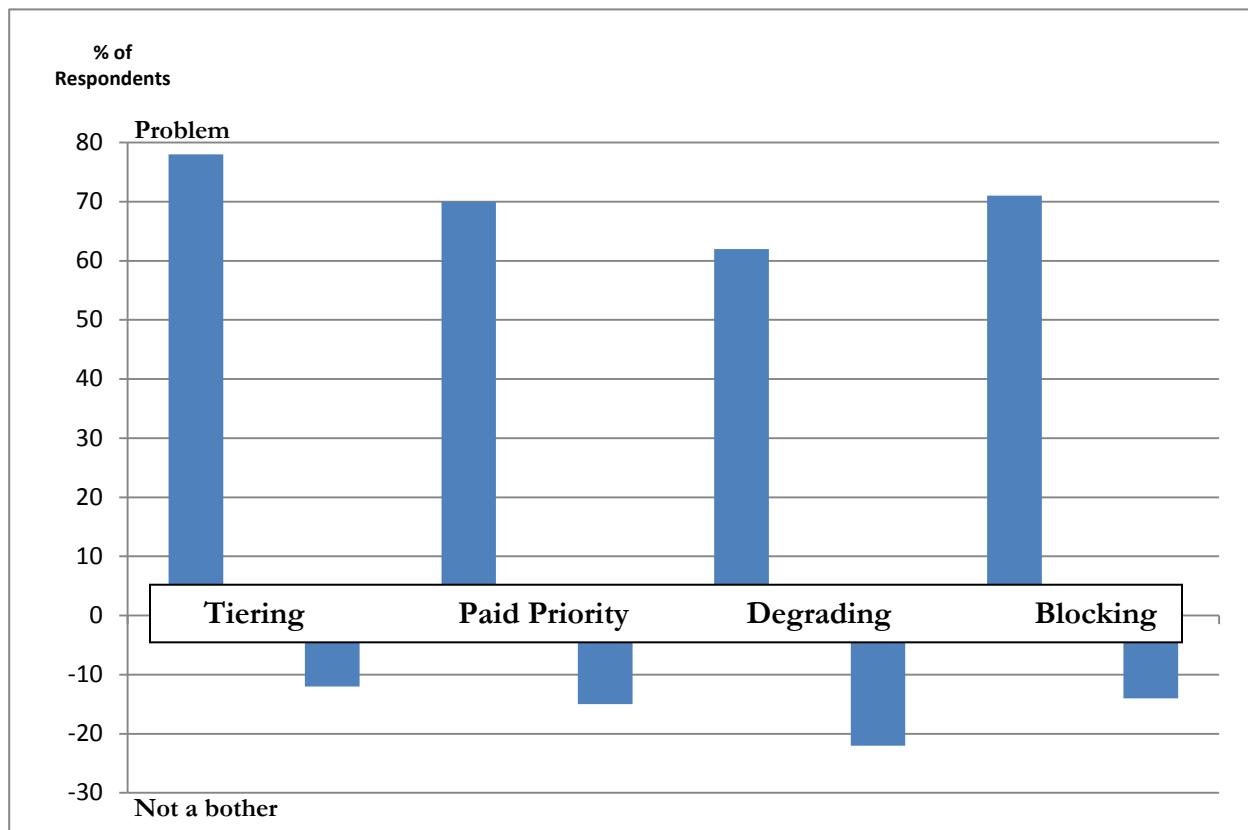
Source: Consumer Federation of America, National Poll, February 2011

- 71% of the respondents said consumer tiering is problematic (62% = severe problem) in contrast to only 18% who said it is not a bother (15% = not really a bother).
- 62% of the respondents said paid prioritization is problematic (45% = severe problem) in contrast to only 22% who said it is not (19% = not really a bother).
- 55% of the respondents said service degrading is problematic (43% = severe problem) in contrast to only 27% who said it is not (23% = not really a bother).
- 62% of the respondents said service blocking is problematic (52% = severe problem) in contrast to only 20% who said it is not (16% = not really a bother).

As shown in Figure 2, respondents who say the Internet is important to them were more likely to view these management practices as problematic and less likely to say they are not a bother. On

average, 7% more of the respondents said they are problematic, while 9% fewer said not they are not.

**FIGURE 2: ATTITUDES TOWARD NETWORK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES:  
INTERNET IMPORTANT RESPONDENTS ONLY**



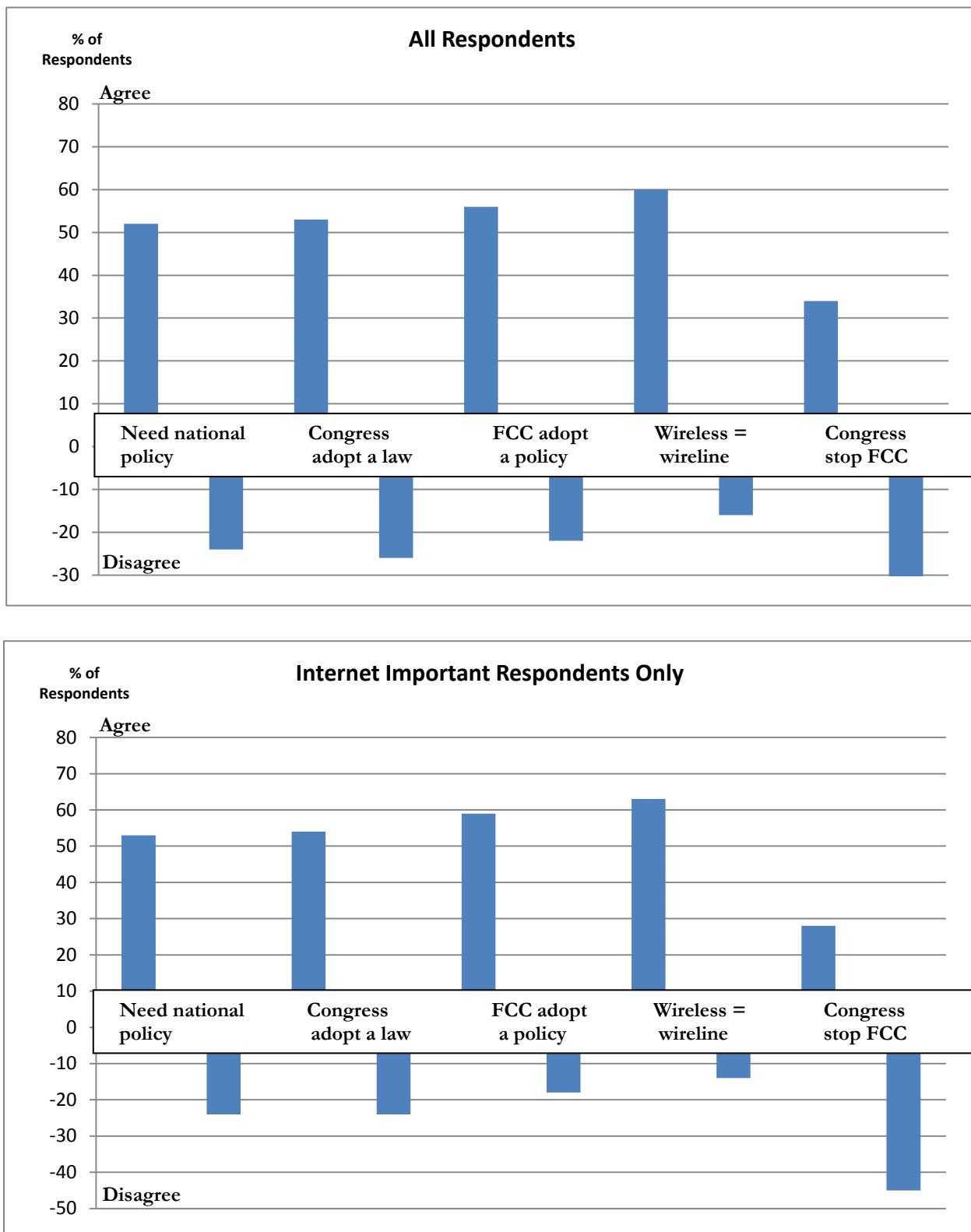
Source: Consumer Federation of America, National Poll, February 2011

- 78% of the respondents said consumer tiering is problematic (68% = severe problem) in contrast to only 12% who said it is not a bother (9% = not really a bother).
- 70% of the respondents said paid prioritization is problematic (53% = severe problem) in contrast to only 15% who said it is not (12% = not really a bother).
- 62% of the respondents said service degrading is problematic (48% = severe problem) in contrast to only 22% who said it is not (16% = not really a bother).
- 71% of the respondents said service blocking is problematic (53% = severe problem) in contrast to only 14% who said it is not (9% = not really a bother).

As shown in Figure 3, the respondents support the adoption of policies to ensure access.

- Clear majorities of the respondents agree with policies to ensure consumers have access,
- Agreement with policies to ensure access exceeds opposition by more than two to one.

**FIGURE 3: ATTITUDE TOWARD POLICIES TO ENSURE ACCESS**



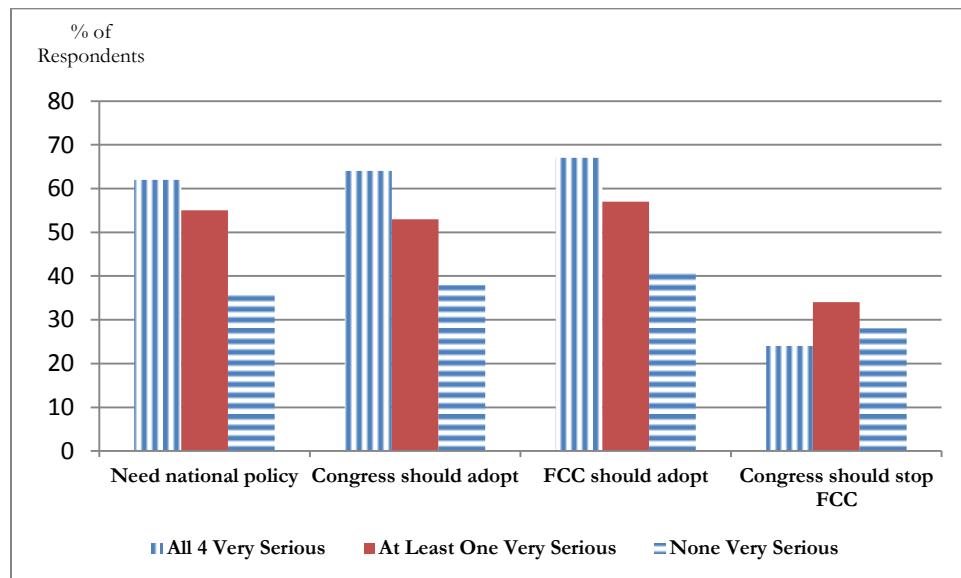
Source: Consumer Federation of America, National Poll, February 2011

Respondents who say the Internet is important to them are more likely to support policies to ensure access, but the difference with respect to policy is smaller than it was with respect to perception of network management problems

- Among the Internet important respondents, agreement with these policies falls in the range of 53% to 63% and disagreement is in the 13% to 24% range.
- In contrast, 45% disagree with Congress stopping the Federal Communications Commission from adopting policies to ensure access, while only 28% the respondents agree that Congress should stop the Federal Communications Commission.
- Application of one set of policies to both wireless and wireline consistently receives the highest level of agreement (63% overall, 51% strong).
- Federal Communications Commission implementation of policies to ensure access receives the second highest level of agreement (59% overall, 42% strong).

Although the perceived importance of the Internet does not have much of an impact on the attitude toward policies to ensure access, perception of the network management practices as problematic does have a large and significant impact. Approximately one quarter of the respondents (26%) say that all four of the network management practices are a very serious problem. Approximately one quarter of the respondents (26%) say that none of the practices is a very serious problem. About one half says that at least one of the management practices is a serious problem. As shown in Figure 4,

**FIGURE 4:**  
**PERCEPTION OF NETWORK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND POLICIES TO ENSURE ACCESS**



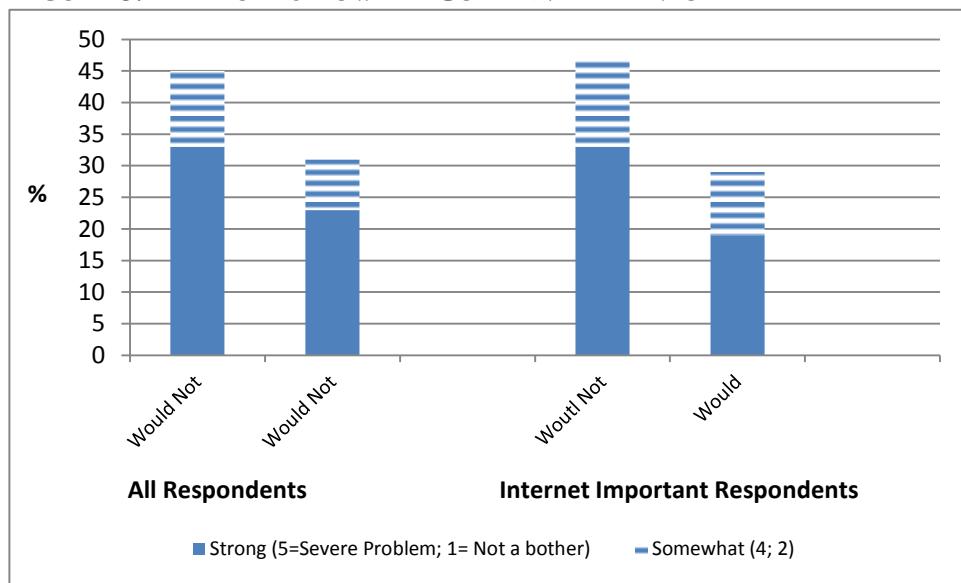
- about two thirds of the respondents who say all four network management practices are a severe problem support policies. This is about 25 percentage points higher than those respondents who say none of the management practices is a very serious problem.

- Over half of the respondents who say at least one (but not all) of the management practices are a serious problem agree with the need to adopt policies to ensure access.

### Attitudes Toward Company Behavior

As shown in Figure 5, the respondents are split with respect to the question of whether the telephone and cable companies would engage in the network management practices that are problematic. A little over one third believes they would, a little over two thirds believes they would not.

**FIGURE 5: ATTITUDES TOWARD COMPANY BEHAVIOR**



Source: Consumer Federation of America, National Poll, February 2011

However, as shown in Figure 6, it is interesting to note, that respondents who believe strongly that companies would engage in the practices and those who believe strongly that they would not, both support policies to ensure access. The respondents who are unsure about what the companies will do are less likely to support policies.

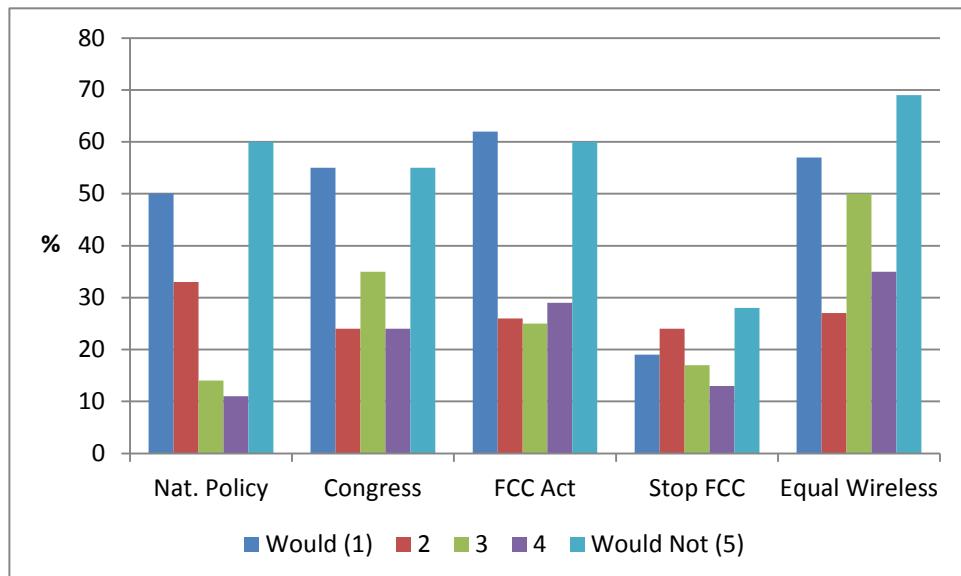
- A majority of the respondents who have a strong opinion about company behavior (either would or would not engage in problematic practices), also strongly support policies to ensure access.
- The support for equal treatment of wireless is also less affected by the attitude toward company behavior than the other two policies examined. The opinion about company behavior has virtually no effect on attitudes toward Congress stopping the FCC from adopting a policy to ensure access. There is little support for stopping the FCC in all categories of attitudes about company behavior.

### Then and Now

- Public opinion about network management practices and policies to ensure access in 2011 are quite similar to public opinion in 2005. Figure 7 shows the results for the questions from the

**FIGURE 6: ATTITUDES TOWARD COMPANY BEHAVIOR AND POLICY:**

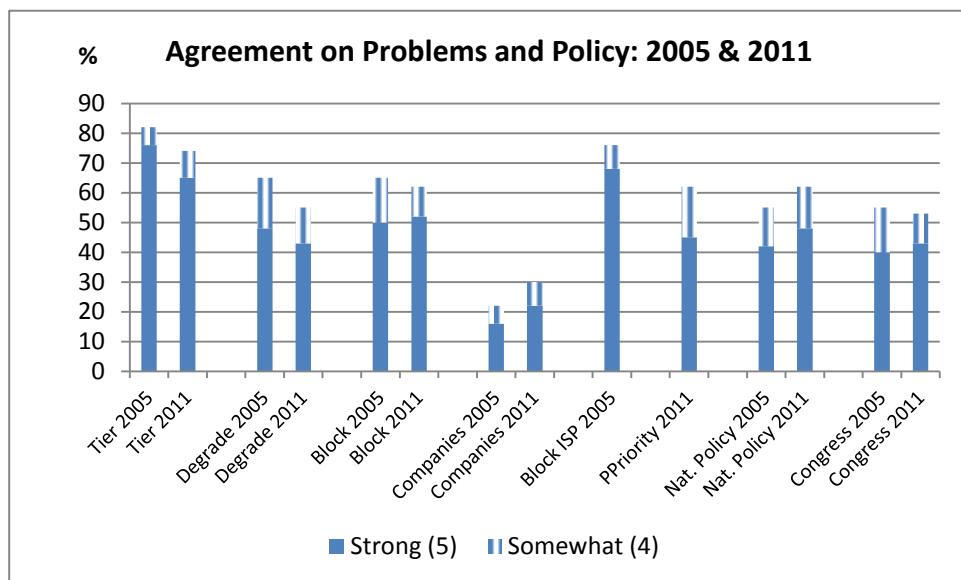
% OF RESPONDENTS WHO STRONGLY AGREE WITH POLICY



Source: Consumer Federation of America, National Poll, February 2011

two polls that are similar or identical. It shows the percentages of respondents who found the network management practice problematic and those who agreed with the need for policy. These were the predominant responses in both polls. In 2005 and again in 2011 we find large majorities concerned about these network management practices and majorities agreeing with the need for policy.

**FIGURE 7: COMPARING THE 2005 AND 2011 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS**

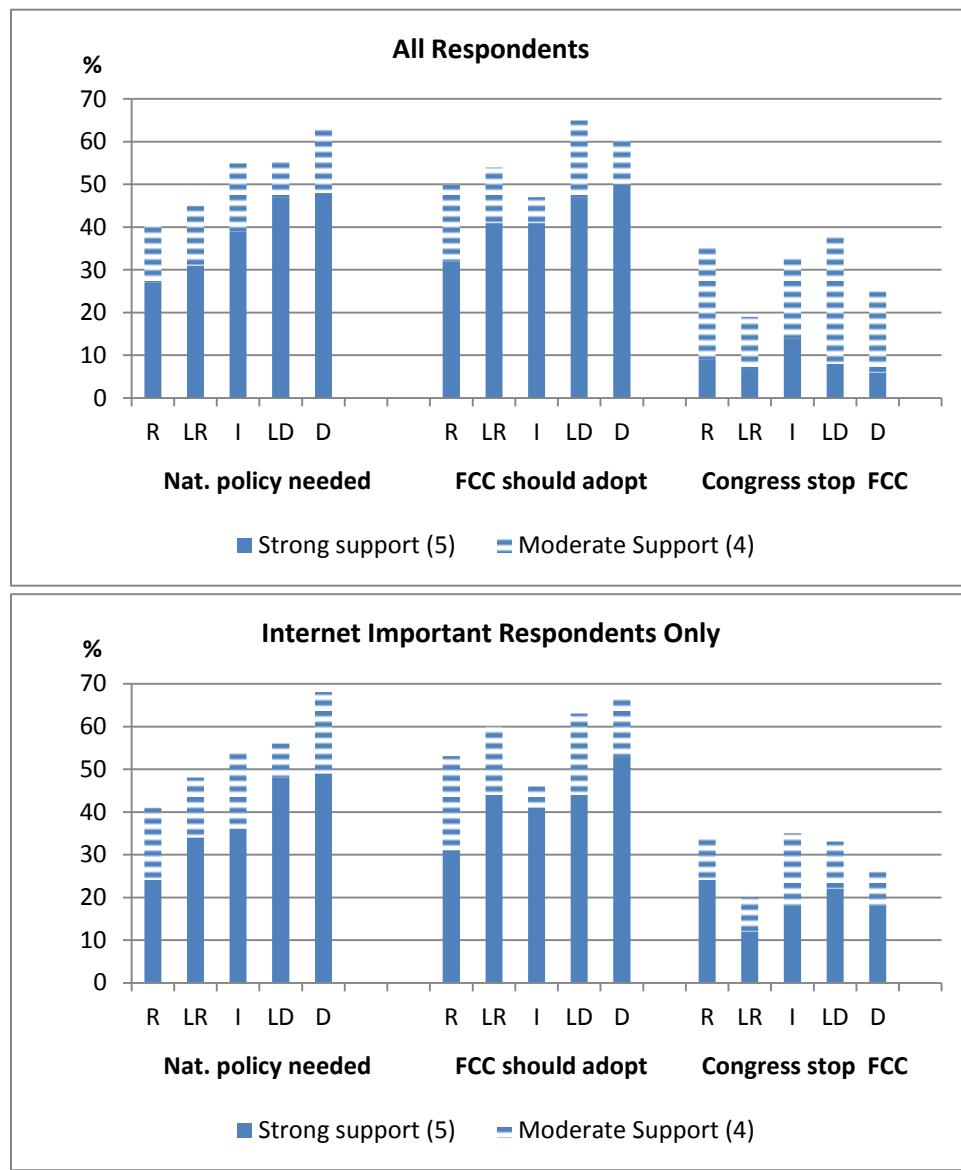


Source: Consumer Federation of America, National Poll, February 2011, October/November 2005

## Political Orientation and Attitudes toward Problematic Practices and Policy Responses:

Not surprisingly, respondents who identify themselves as independent, leaning Democrat or Democrat are slightly more likely to view the practices as problematic. The response varies somewhat more across the political spectrum in the response to the general question about the need for a national policy, with the independents and Democrats more likely to see the need. However, with respect to the issue of FCC action or the Congress stopping FCC action, the differences are smaller, as shown in Figure 8. Moreover, a majority of the respondent who say they are Republican or lean Republican agree that the FCC should adopt policies to ensure access, while about one-third day the Congress should stop the FCC. The responses are similar for all respondents and those who say the Internet is important.

**FIGURE 8:**  
**POLITICAL ORIENTATION AND ATTITUDE TOWARD POLICIES TO ENSURE ACCESS**

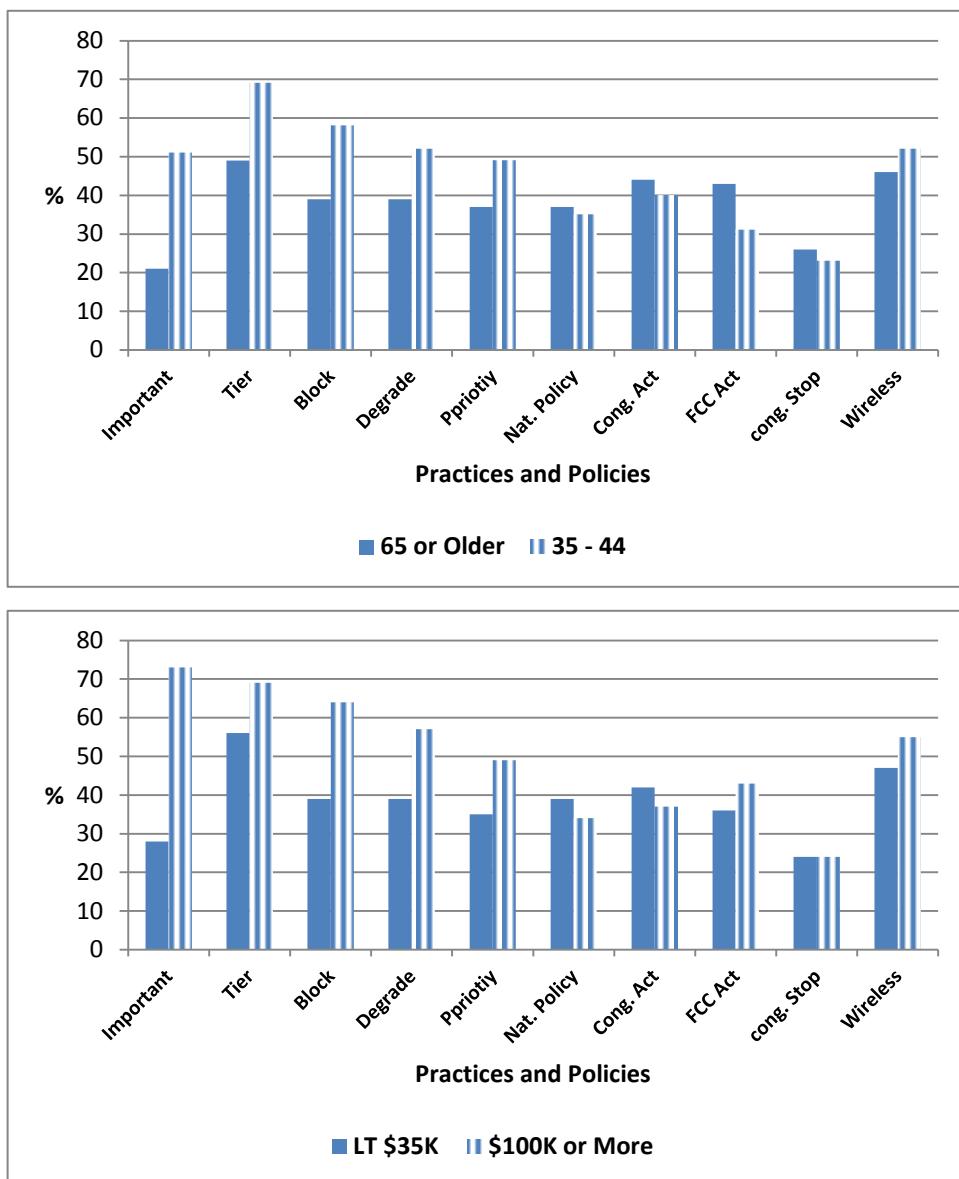


Source: Consumer Federation of America, National Poll, February 2011

## Demographic Factors

Demographic characteristics that are widely recognized as being correlated with Internet adoption and use exhibit similar relationship in this survey. They do not alter the findings discussed above. Figure 9 includes the two demographic traits that have the most consistent relationship with the variables studied in this paper – age and income. Education has a smaller number of correlations that are similar although smaller. To demonstrate the effect, we show the percentage of respondents in the most different categories of the variables. The categories make the largest contribution to the statistically significant difference across the variable.

**FIGURE 9: STRONG AGREEMENT (5) ON PRACTICES AND POLICIES ACROSS DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS**



Source: Consumer Federation of America, National Poll, February 2011

Although respondent 65 and older are less likely to say the Internet is important to them and less likely to agree that the network management practices are problematic, they are not less likely to agree with the positive policy statement to ensure access. They are somewhat more likely to agree with several of the policy statements.

A similar pattern holds across income categories. Although respondent with incomes below \$35,000 are less likely to say the Internet is important to them and less likely to agree that the network management practices are problematic, they are not less likely to agree with the positive policy statement to ensure access. They are somewhat more likely to agree with several of the policy statements.

## **CONCLUSION**

The responses to the national public opinion poll show that the public continues to find network management practices that impede their access to the Internet, web sites, content and applications to be problematic. They continue to want policies to be adopted that ensure their access. These responses are similar to the responses from 2005. The three new issues that are addressed in the current survey, which reflect recent developments in the debate over access, elicit responses that are consistent with the overall tendency of the public to want policies to ensure access. Respondents prefer the FCC over Congress adopting such policies by a small margin. They reject the proposal that Congress should stop the FCC from taking action to ensure access. They express more support for equal treatment of wireless and wireline technologies than any other policy to ensure access.

## **APPENDIX: 2005 Question Wording**

Now I want to ask you some questions about how the Internet might develop in the years ahead. As a result of recent legal decisions, companies that connect most households to the high-speed Internet, mainly cable and telephone companies, may be allowed to change the way you access the Internet. I'm going to read a list of statements about how you think these changes could affect you.

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not really a bother and 5 is a very serious problem, how would you feel if . . .  
[READ AND ROTATE ITEMS]

Not really a bother (01)

- (02)
- (03)
- (04)

Very serious problem (05)

DON'T KNOW

- A. You were not allowed to use the Internet service provider (like AOL or Earthlink) of your choice
- B. The company that connects you to the Internet required you to pay for an Internet service provider you did not want
- C. Services from your preferred Internet service provider, like streaming video, were slowed down by interference from the company that connects your house to the Internet
- D. New services your preferred Internet service provider wanted to offer, such as telephone calls on the Internet, were blocked by the company that connects your house to the Internet

Some people say that the telephone and cable companies would not engage in blocking or impairing access to Internet services from other companies, such as streaming video or Internet telephone calls. Other people say we need a national policy to ensure that these problems don't arise. Finally, some think Congress should adopt a law to ensure that people can have access to all legal Internet services. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. [READ STATEMENTS]

Strongly disagree (01)

- (02)
- (03)
- (04)

Strongly agree (05)

99 DON'T KNOW

- A. The telephone and cable companies would not impair or block services
- B. We need a national policy to prevent these problems
- C. Congress should adopt a law to ensure access to all legal Internet services