

▶ U.S. ATTITUDES TOWARD TERRORISM AND COUNTERTERRORISM ◀

AUTHORS

GARY LAFREE

Director, START Consortium at the University of Maryland

STANLEY PRESSER

Professor, Joint Program in Survey Methodology at the University of Maryland

ROGER TOURANGEAU

Vice President, WESTAT Corporation

AMY ADAMCZYK

Associate Professor, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

PURPOSE

COLLECT comprehensive baseline information about U.S. attitudes toward terrorism and counterterrorism activities

INFORM government efforts to communicate with the public about terrorism

SUPPORT the development of more resilient social networks within and across communities

BACKGROUND

This project collects survey data to understand public perspectives on the threat of terrorism and the government's role and effectiveness in responding to it. A sample of 1,576 U.S. adults 18 years of age or older completed the first online survey in Fall 2012. A second survey will be conducted in 2013.

THOUGHTS ABOUT TERRORISM

- Approximately 15% said they had thought about the possibility of terrorism in the preceding week, significantly more than the percentage who said they had thought about the possibility of hospitalization (10%) or violent crime victimization (10%). Almost a quarter of those who said they had thought about terrorism reported that it made them extremely or very worried.
- Nearly 5% said a terrorist attack was extremely or very likely to occur in the United States in the next year.
- Education and gender was largely unrelated to reports of having thought about terrorism, but age was. Older respondents were more likely to say they had thought about terrorism and to believe it was likely to occur in the next year.
- There was no evidence that those who lived in metropolitan areas were more likely to have thought about terrorism in the preceding week.

COUNTERTERRORISM



THOUGHTS ABOUT EFFORTS TO COUNTER TERRORISM

Views of government effectiveness at preventing terrorism:

- A large majority of respondents said the U.S. government has been very effective (33%) or somewhat effective (54%) at preventing terrorism.
- Despite this, 69% endorsed the view that “terrorists will always find a way to carry out major attacks no matter what the U.S. government does.”

Willingness to meet with officials to discuss terrorism:

- Clear majorities of respondents said that would be willing to meet with DHS (57%) or local police (58%) to talk about terrorism.
- Not surprisingly, individuals who said the government had been somewhat effective or very effective at preventing terrorism were more willing to meet with DHS or local police than those who said the government had not.

Reported Likelihood of Calling the Police in Response to Various Actions

	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Too Likely	Not at All Likely	Total
A Person					
...talking about joining a terrorist group	41.4%	28.7%	20.8%	9.1%	100% (1545)
...talking about planting explosives in public place	76.1%	13.1%	4.6%	6.1%	100% (1543)
...reading material from terrorist group	20.6%	28.5%	35.4%	15.5%	100% (1544)
...traveling overseas to join terrorist group	52.0%	23.4%	14.7%	9.9%	100% (1547)
...distributing handouts in support of terrorism	46.2%	28.4%	17.4%	7.9%	100% (1540)

“If You See Something Say Something” CAMPAIGN

- More than 56% of respondents said they had not heard anything about the “If You See Something Say Something” campaign, and an additional 20% were not sure whether they had heard anything about it.
- Of those who had heard something about the campaign, most thought it would be very (18%) or somewhat (67%) effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increased marketing for the “If You See Something, Say Something” campaign, which is positively perceived by those aware of it, would likely benefit DHS.
- This survey offers support for increased levels of community engagement between DHS, local law enforcement, and local communities, as the results suggest considerable willingness for such engagement exists among the U.S. public.

This research was supported by the Resilient Systems Division of the Science and Technology Directorate of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through Award Number 2010ST108LR0004 made to the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Contact START

8400 Baltimore Avenue, Suite 250
College Park, Maryland 20740
301.405.6600
infostart@start.umd.edu
www.start.umd.edu