



### U.S. ATTITUDES TOWARD TERRORISM AND COUNTERTERRORISM BEFORE AND AFTER THE APRIL 2013 BOSTON MARATHON BOMBINGS

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#### PURPOSE

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

**COMPARE** U.S. attitudes before and after a highly publicized terrorist event.

**INFORM** government efforts to communicate with the public about terrorism.

#### Background

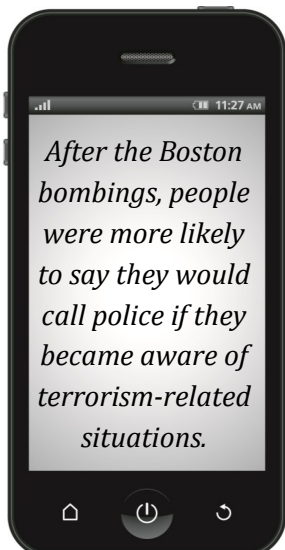
This study examines differences in U.S. attitudes about terrorism and government countermeasures before and after the Boston Marathon bombings by comparing the responses of American adults who completed a survey immediately before the bombings with the responses of a similar group of Americans who completed the survey immediately after the bombings.

#### What Remained Consistent Before and After the Boston Bombings?

- ◆ There was no difference in the proportion of respondents—about 1 in 6—who said they had thought during the previous week about the possibility of a terrorist attack.
- ◆ Roughly 3 out of 4 people said that “terrorists will always find a way to carry out major domestic attacks,” while 1 in 4 said that “the government can eventually prevent all major attacks in the United States.”
- ◆ There was no change in respondents’ views regarding the probability of a terrorist attack happening **in their community** or in the proportion of people saying they had done something different due to the possibility of attack.

#### What Changed After the Boston Bombings?

- ◆ People perceived higher probabilities of a terrorist attack occurring in the United States. (See below.)
- ◆ People were less likely to say the government was effective in preventing terrorism in the United States. Before the bombings, 86.9% of respondents viewed the government as very or somewhat effective, compared with 78.5% after.
- ◆ There was an increase in the proportion of respondents saying they would be very or somewhat likely to call the police if they became aware of various terrorism-related scenarios. (See below.)



Perceived probability of:	A Terrorist Attack in U.S.		A Major Terrorist Attack in U.S. Like 9/11	
	Before Bombings	After Bombings	Before Bombings	After Bombings
Extremely Likely	0.4%	5.1%	0.8%	2.1%
Very Likely	3.4%	8.3%	1.5%	0.7%
Somewhat Likely	9.5%	13.5%	9.0%	11.8%
About as Likely as Unlikely	35.7%	39.7%	26.7%	32.6%
Somewhat Unlikely	18.9%	12.8%	20.4%	14.6%
Very Unlikely	16.5%	14.7%	25.0%	20.8%
Extremely Unlikely	15.6%	5.8%	16.5%	17.4%

## Reported Likelihood of Calling the Police Before and After Boston Bombings

		Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Too Likely	Not at All Likely
<b>If Aware of Person(s)</b>					
...talking about joining a terrorist group	Before	39.4%	31.5%	21.4%	7.7%
	After	54.1%	25.0%	13.5%	7.4%
...talking about planting explosives in public place	Before	76.2%	11.3%	6.7%	5.7%
	After	80.6%	13.6%	1.9%	4.0%
...reading material from terrorist group	Before	18.7%	25.5%	41.3%	14.5%
	After	24.2%	31.4%	31.3%	13.1%
...traveling overseas to join terrorist group	Before	50.0%	25.8%	16.2%	8.0%
	After	62.5%	21.0%	10.0%	6.5%
...distributing handouts in support of terrorism	Before	43.6%	28.8%	18.9%	8.7%
	After	52.0%	27.2%	13.6%	7.1%

- Both before and after the bombings, about 60 percent of respondents expressed a willingness to meet with DHS officials or local police about terrorism.
- The proportion of respondents who said they had heard about the “See Something, Say Something” campaign remained consistent before (26.3%) and after (27.6%) the bombings. Of these people, roughly 4 out of 5 thought the campaign would be somewhat or very effective.



### OVERALL FINDINGS

- The results of this study suggest that public attitudes toward terrorism and government responses to it are fairly stable even in the face of a highly publicized terrorist event.
- At the same time, a highly publicized event appears to increase the willingness of the American public to help the authorities prevent future attacks.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- This study offers support for increased levels of community engagement between DHS, local law enforcement and local communities, especially following highly publicized terrorist events.
- The results also underscore a long understood characteristic of policing in general: that to be effective, policing requires direct citizen engagement and cooperation.

*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.*

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