

### U.S. ATTITUDES TOWARD TERRORISM AND COUNTERTERRORISM: EXAMINING RESULTS FROM A FOUR-WAVE SURVEY CONDUCTED BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 2012 AND JULY 2014

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#### PURPOSE

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

**EXAMINE** results across multiple survey waves.

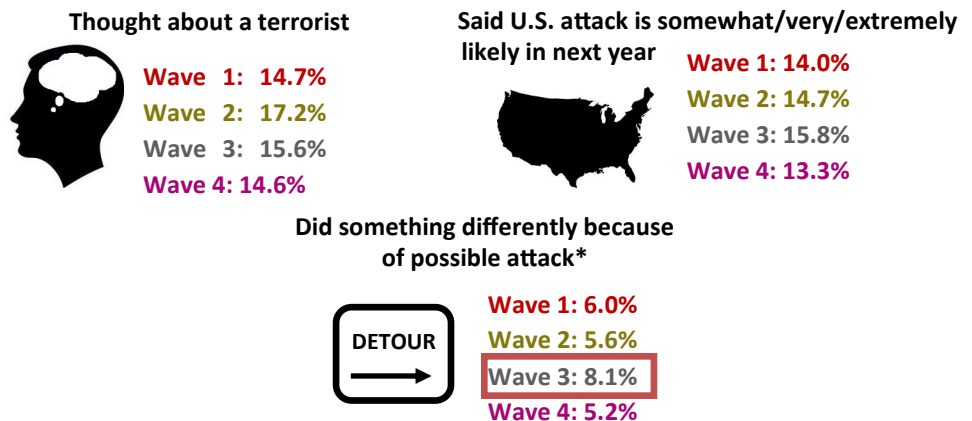
**INFORM** government policies and programs.

#### BACKGROUND

This project examined Americans' beliefs and attitudes about terrorism and government efforts to counter terrorism based on responses to more than 5,500 questionnaires administered in four waves between September 2012 and July 2014. Because the Boston Marathon bombings occurred during the course of the project, researchers were able to assess possible changes in respondents' attitudes following a major, well-publicized terrorist attack.

#### AMERICANS' CONCERNS ABOUT TERRORIST ATTACKS

Respondents answered questions gauging their level of concern about terrorism. There was little change in their responses across the four waves, although in wave 3, nine months after the Boston Marathon bombings, there was a significant uptick in the percentage of respondents who indicated they had changed their behavior in the past year because of the possibility of an attack. This effect largely dissipated by wave 4, which occurred 15 months after the bombings.



#### LIKELIHOOD OF CALLING POLICE IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS

Survey responses were generally stable across waves, but after the Boston Marathon bombings (wave 3) an increased proportion of the public said they would be very likely to notify police if they heard about a person traveling overseas to join a terrorist group. This increase dissipated by wave 4.

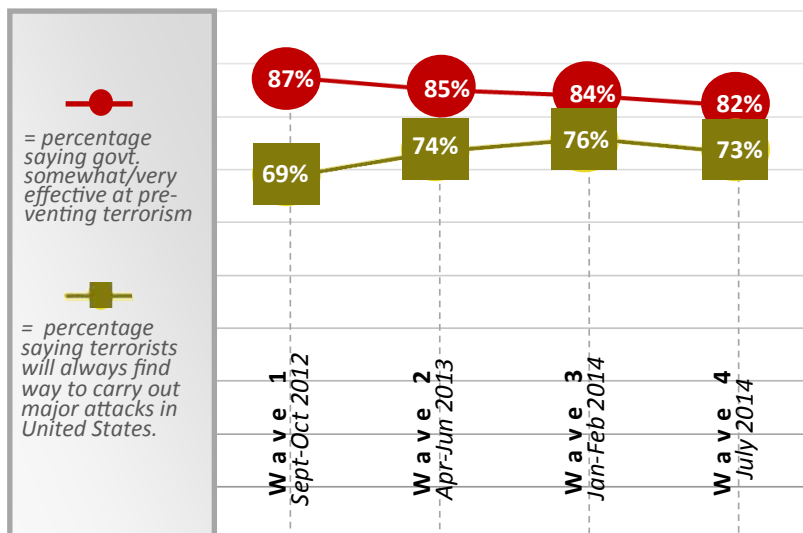
Proportion of Respondents Very Likely to Call Police, by Item and Wave

About a situation in which a person is...	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4
...talking about planting explosives	76.1%	76.5%	80.4%	75.2%
...traveling overseas to join terrorist group	52.0%	52.3%	59.4%	52.7%
...distributing handouts supporting terrorism	46.2%	45.7%	51.4%	45.8%
...talking about joining terrorist group	41.4%	41.7%	45.6%	40.6%
...reading material from terrorist group	20.6%	20.1%	23.3%	20.7%

## PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO PREVENT TERRORISM IN THE UNITED STATES

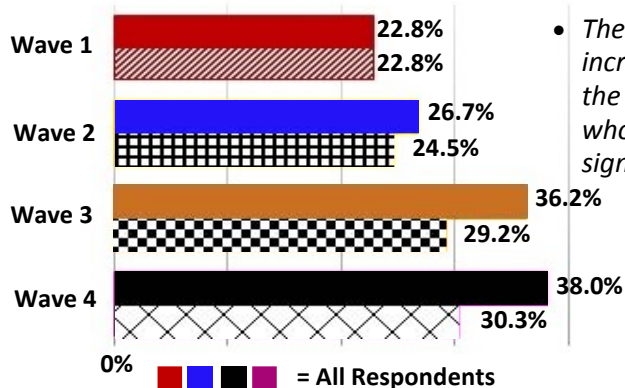
There was a marginally significant decline in the (high) proportions of respondents who said that the government has been very or somewhat effective at preventing terrorism in the United States.

There was no change in the (slightly lower) proportions who said that terrorists will always find a way to carry out major attacks in the United States. The responses to this item could be indicating either a lack of faith in the government or reasonable expectations about what the government can accomplish.



## “IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING” CAMPAIGN

### Percentage of Respondents Who Had Heard of Campaign, by Wave



- The proportion of those who said they had heard of the campaign increased across all waves. Some of this may have been artificial since the question was repeated with each survey, but, even among those who completed the survey for the first time (new cases), there was a significant increase in awareness.

- Respondents with the highest education (college degree or above) showed the greatest awareness in wave 1 and the sharpest increase in awareness across all four waves.

## TRENDS IN AMERICAN ATTITUDES

- Results demonstrated considerable stability in American attitudes toward terrorism and government responses to it.
- The most evidence for change appeared in select responses before and after the Boston Marathon bombings and in the proportions of respondents who had heard of the “If You See Something, Say Something” campaign.

## Implications

- The public may be more willing to help authorities counter terrorism in the wake of a highly publicized terrorist event, such as the Boston Marathon bombings.
- Results also suggest it is possible to increase awareness for specialized programs like the “If You See Something, Say Something” campaign, evidenced by growth in the proportion of people who were familiar with it.

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More information about this project, as well as findings and reports from each wave, can be found at <http://www.start.umd.edu/research-projects/us-attitudes-towards-terrorism-and-counterterrorism>.

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