



### 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

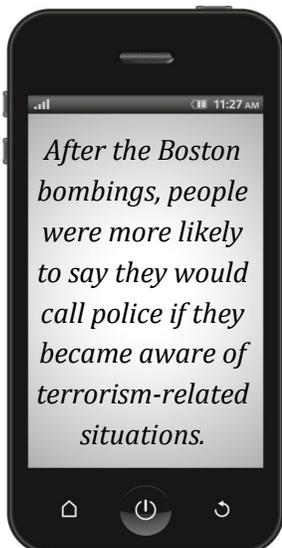
This study examines differences in U.S. attitudes about terrorism and government countermeasures before and after the Boston Marathon bombings by comparing the responses of American adults who completed a survey immediately before the bombings with the responses of a similar group of Americans who completed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

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