



### U.S. ATTITUDES TOWARD TERRORISM AND COUNTERTERRORISM: REPORTING TERRORISM-RELATED ACTIVITY

#### AUTHORS

**GARY LAFREE**

Director, START Consortium at the University of Maryland

**AMY ADAMCZYK**

Associate Professor, John Jay College, New York

**STANLEY PRESSER**

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

**ROGER TOURANGEAU**

Vice President, WESTAT Corporation

#### BACKGROUND

This research highlight examines results from a survey of 1,392 American adults conducted in January and February of 2014, and specifically focuses on responses to questions regarding reporting terrorism-related activity to law enforcement. When possible, it also compares findings to an earlier wave of the same survey conducted in the spring of 2013 before the Boston Marathon bombings.

#### MAJOR FINDINGS

##### Reporting Terrorism-related Activity

Respondents were presented with several terrorism-related situations and asked how likely they would be to call the police in each circumstance. (See table below.) In general, respondents were:

- ◆ **Most likely** to say they would call the police if they overheard **talk about planting explosives**.
- ◆ **Least likely** to say they would call the police if they became aware of an individual **reading material from a terrorist group**.

#### PURPOSE

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

**EXAMINE** public perspectives on reporting terrorism-related activity.

**INFORM** government engagement with the public on terrorism-related issues.

#### LIKELIHOOD OF CALLING THE POLICE, BY SCENARIO

If Aware of Person(s)	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not too Likely	Not at all Likely
Talking about Planting Explosives	80.4	12.6	4.7	2.2
Traveling Overseas to Join a Terrorist Group	59.4	21.7	14.8	4.2
Distributing Handouts Supporting Terrorism	51.4	28.7	15.7	4.2
Talking about Joining a Terrorist Group	45.6	30.4	19.7	4.3
Reading Material from a Terrorist Group	23.3	28.0	37.8	10.9

#### Before and After Boston Marathon Bombings

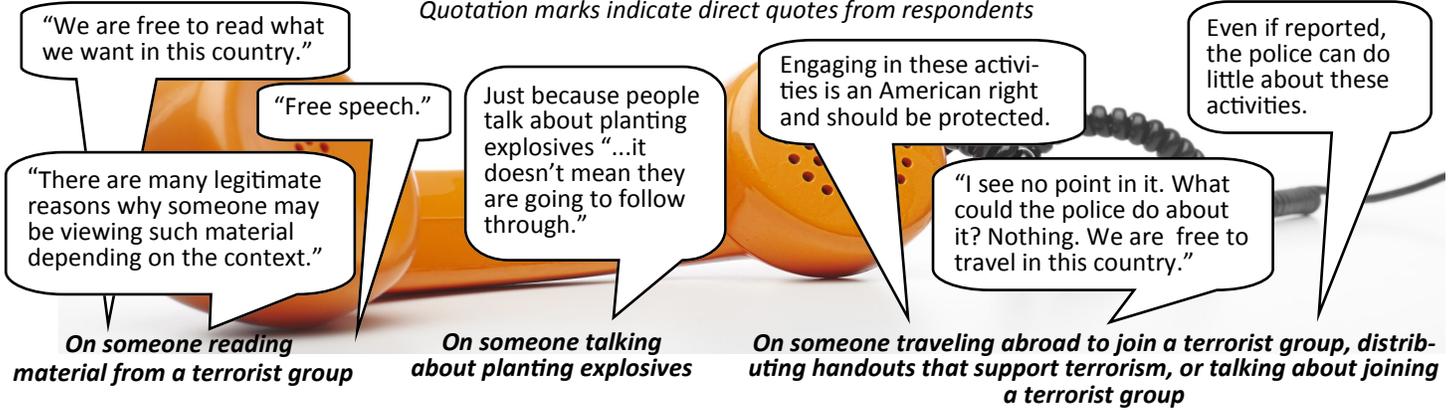
Respondents were also **more likely** to say they would call the police if they became aware of terrorism-related situations **after (versus before) the Boston Marathon bombings**.\*

- ◆ After the bombings, all five scenarios showed a significant increase, ranging from 3% to 8%, in those saying they would be *very* or *somewhat likely* to call the police.

\*Many events besides the Boston Marathon bombings occurred between April 2013 and February 2014, so we cannot know with certainty that respondents' attitudes were only--or even mainly--affected by the bombings.

Of respondents who said they were **NOT too likely** or **NOT at all likely** to call the police, we asked, **“Why not?”** Here are some common themes in responses:

Quotation marks indicate direct quotes from respondents



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

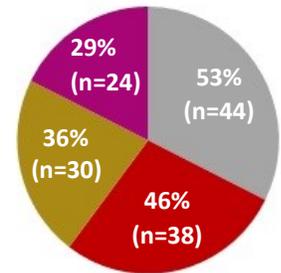
- **36 %** of respondents said they had heard of the campaign.
- **18 %** of respondents said they were not sure if they had heard of the campaign
- **4 in 5** of respondents who had previously heard of the campaign said they thought it would be **“very”** or **“somewhat”** effective.

Although the proportion of respondents who said they had heard of the campaign was higher after the Boston Marathon bombings than before, we believe that this may be due to the fact that many respondents had been asked the question in the earlier surveys.

Respondents who said that the campaign would be *not too effective* or *not effective at all* were asked to indicate why they felt that way. The chart to the right displays their responses. Of the “other reasons” offered by those who responded, most had to do with concerns about **individual rights and privacy**. A few, however, mentioned their fear of retribution from terrorists.

- One respondent said, “I think many think the government is too intrusive right now.”
- Another person noted that “(They) need to implement an anonymous tip line. No one wants their name on a list that can get leaked to those crazy idiots.”

Reasons why some felt the campaign would not be effective



- “Many people do not care enough to get involved”
- “People will report things that aren’t related to terrorism”
- “Terrorists will avoid being noticed”
- Other reason

\*Respondents could choose more than one response.

## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- ◆ Following the Boston Marathon bombings, respondents expressed a significantly greater willingness to call the police, which suggests that the public might become an even more important resource in responding to future terrorist threats in the wake of a widely publicized terrorist event.
- ◆ When respondents indicated that they would not call the police in response to terrorism-related situations, it was most often out of concerns that citizens should be able to speak and act freely.
- ◆ Public education on the criminality of behaviors such as joining a terrorist group, which would constitute material support for a designated terrorist organization, may help highlight the significance of those activities and result in higher reporting levels in the future.

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 2010-ST-108-LR0004 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.

**START**

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