

## Perceptions of the United States and Support for Violence Against America

**Project Title:** International Survey Capability

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### **Overview:**

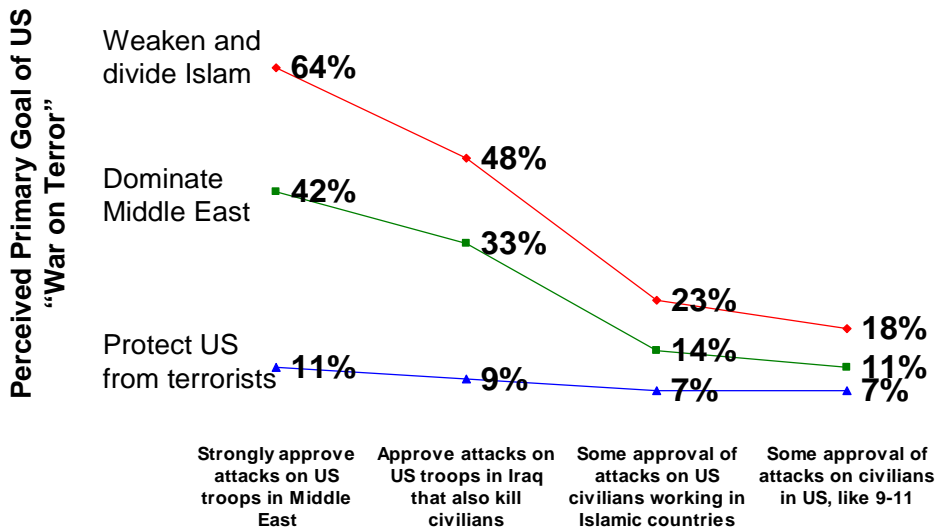
A pilot survey was fielded online with panel respondents from Indonesia, Pakistan, and a number of Arab countries (3,000 respondents in all). Analyses of these pilot data strongly suggest that those respondents most likely to support attacks directed at civilians are characterized by beliefs rooted in religious, not political, conflict, while anti-Americanism that is rooted in political conflict is more likely to be associated with a rejection of the targeting of civilians.

### **Interim Findings:**

Pilot results were analyzed only for the strength of relationships between attitudes: The online samples were non-representative, drawn from an international marketing panel, and typically upper-income and bilingual. However, the data from the pilot do reveal important trends regarding support for terrorism.

#### **1. Attitudes and perceptions rooted in religious, rather than political, conflict are among the strongest indicators of support for attacks on American military as well as civilian targets.**

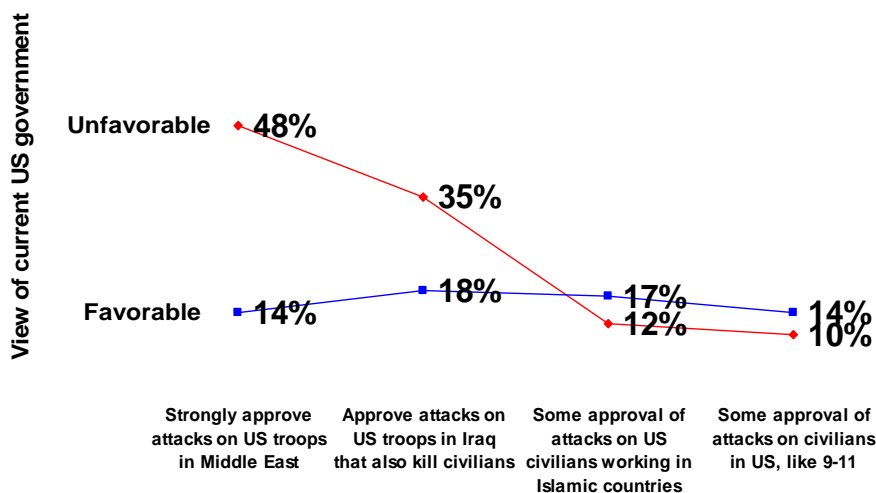
For instance, among Arab respondents, the small group which thought that the U.S.'s primary goal in the war on terrorism was to weaken and divide Islam were more likely to approve of attacks and indicate approval of extreme groups than were the much larger number who thought instead that the U.S.'s primary goal was to dominate the Middle East. Similarly, the roughly one in four respondents who thought that it is a goal of the U.S. government to spread Christianity in the Middle East were more supportive of attacks and of jihadist groups than were the much larger number who did not think that spreading Christianity was a U.S. goal. These were very robust results in the online sample.



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**2. Negative views of the U.S. government and concerns about hegemonic domination by the U.S. correlate with support for anti-American actions, but not with support for attacks on American civilians.**

For instance, those with an unfavorable view of the current U.S. government are considerably more likely to approve of attacks on U.S. troops in the Middle East; but they are not more likely to approve of attacks on American civilians. Similarly, those who believe that jihadist groups hold the secular goal of “put[ting] pressure on the U.S. to remove its bases and its military forces from all Islamic countries” were more likely to approve of attacks on U.S. troops, but not more likely to approve of attacks on civilians. This suggests that secular versions of anti-Americanism should not be assumed to include support for terrorist attacks on civilian targets.



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**Methods:**

The online samples in Islamic countries have important limitations: they are unrepresentative of their national populations and they are made up of individuals who volunteered to be marketing panelists. Further research is necessary to confirm whether the patterns found in the pilot

extend to general-population attitudes. It should be noted that this approach also provides data on a narrow stratum which is already online and is higher in income, education, and access to the internet and to news in general. This stratum has its own importance in the broader research problem of understanding sources of support for terrorist activities against American civilians.

### **Project Background:**

The primary purpose of the study is to locate and analyze, in Islamic-country populations, attitudes that contribute to an environment of passive support for groups that target American civilians. Thus the focus is not on majority attitudes, but on the attitudes of a minority that expresses approval of terrorist attacks and makes some low-risk gestures of support toward groups in the Muslim world that attack American civilians. The questionnaire is a group effort that reflects expertise from criminology, communications, social psychology and political psychology and will be fielded with national population samples this fall in Morocco, Egypt, and Indonesia.

### **Future Directions:**

The analyses from the pilot study have helped to refine the field questionnaire, which we are now readying for fielding in samples representative of national populations. Fielding is planned for Morocco, Egypt, and Indonesia. We expect to test the hypothesis (among others) that the constellation of attitudes that support attacks against civilians is much more limited than the constellation of attitudes that support attacks on the U.S. military.

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The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terror (START) is a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence, tasked by the Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate with using state-of-the-art theories, methods, and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics, and social and psychological impacts of terrorism. START, based at the University of Maryland, College Park, aims to provide timely guidance on how to disrupt terrorist networks, reduce the incidence of terrorism, and enhance the resilience of U.S. society in the face of the terrorist threat.

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