

UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion Terrorism and Security Survey September 6-12, 2013

N=1000 American adults
Sampling error +/- 3.8 percentage points for all respondents

See <http://uml.edu/polls> for full questionnaire/topline results and detailed methodology disclosure.

Survey design and analysis by Joshua J. Dyck, Ph.D., Co-Director of the Center for Public Opinion and Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Massachusetts Lowell

HIGHLIGHTS

In conjunction with the launch of the new UMass Lowell Center for Terrorism and Security Studies, the UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion surveyed 1,000 American Adults on their attitudes about terrorism and security. The survey was conducted in early September, and the field window coincided with the 12th Anniversary of 9/11/01.

The survey paints a rich and interesting portrait of Americans' complex views of the threat of terrorism, on responses to the Boston Marathon Bombings, as well as their views on military intervention in Syria. Respondents were also asked a series of questions about their views on the trade-off between security and privacy, and about their attitudes of individuals who have chosen to divulge classified government documents in the name of transparency.

Terrorism Attitudes

- A majority of Americans (62%) believe that the threat of terrorism has increased in the last decade, with Republicans (71%), older voters (82%), and Evangelical Protestants (72%) most likely to hold this belief.
- Only 21% of American adults agree that the media accurately portrays the threat of terrorism, with Independents the most skeptical (13%) compared to Republicans (18%) and Democrats (23%)
- The Boston Marathon bombings left a strong impression on Americans, heightening their concern about another attack and questioning the purpose of US involvement around the world
 - 59% agree that they are more concerned, after the Marathon Bombings, about a terrorist attack happening within the United States.

- 51% agree that the bombings made them think the United States is too involved in the affairs of other countries revealing a surprisingly isolationist position held by the majority of American adults.
- While concern is heightened, very few Americans report altering their behavior after the marathon bombings.
 - Only 8% of Americans reported decreasing attendance at public gatherings
 - Only 20% are paying closer attention to media coverage of terrorism around the world, compared to 71% of respondents who have not altered their behavior
- Were the marathon bombings an act of domestic or international terrorism? This is a complicated question given that it is believed that Marathon bombing suspects Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev were radicalized by Anwar al-Alwaki. Yet, the brothers also both spent over a decade in the United States and the younger Tsarnaev became an American citizen in 2012.
 - More Americans classify the Marathon bombings as domestic terrorism (75.2%) than international terrorism (60.2%). Republicans and Evangelical Christians are much more likely to view the attack as “international” terrorism; 75% of Republicans view the bombings as international terrorism, compared to 56% of Democrats, while 77% of Evangelicals view the bombings as international terrorism, compared to 53% of non-religious respondents.

Military Intervention in Syria

Note: Our poll was fielded in the week just prior to the revelation that a diplomatic option existed regarding Syria’s chemical weapon stores. Our last field day was September 12, and the U.S. and Russia announced a negotiated deal on Syria chemical weapons disarmament on September 14, 2013. The poll, therefore, reflects the time period during which the President was seeking the authorization of Congress to begin military airstrikes in Syria.

- Only 18% of Americans favor airstrikes in Syria based on the intelligence that the Syrian government has used chemical weapons, compared to 61% who oppose airstrikes (21% are unsure); opposition is strongest amongst Republicans (71% oppose) compared to Democrats (51% oppose). However, Democrats still oppose airstrikes by a 2 to 1 margin (51% oppose to 27% favor)
- 56% of Americans believe that the Syrian government used chemical weapons, 37% don’t know, and only 6% think it is not true. Among those who report that they “don’t know,” only 3% favor the airstrikes. Not a single person who said that it is “not true” favored the airstrikes. However, among those who believe this statement is true, a majority (50.3%) still oppose airstrikes, compared to 31% who favor military airstrikes. Even though there is widespread acceptance that the Syrian government used chemical weapons against its own people, Americans still oppose military airstrikes by a 3 to 1 margin.

- Opposition to an airstrike is strongest amongst respondents who agree that the “The Boston Marathon Bombings made me concerned that the United States is too involved in the affairs of other countries around the world.” Among those who strongly agree with this statement, 76% oppose airstrikes, while among those who strongly disagree with this statement, only 42% oppose airstrikes – a difference of 34 percentage points!!

Security vs. Privacy

- Respondents were asked to place themselves on a 7-point visual scale with one end being “afraid of invasion of privacy” and other being “afraid of terrorist attacks.” Near even numbers of Americans report being more concerned more about privacy (42%) than security/preventing terror attacks (38%); Republicans (46%) and Independents (51%) are more concerned about privacy than Democrats (32%), and those aged 18-29 (43%) and 30-39 (50%) are also more concerned about privacy than those 65 and up (32%).
- Respondents were also asked: What do you think is more important right now: “The federal government should investigate possible terrorist threats, even if that intrudes on personal privacy,” OR (2) “The federal government should not intrude on personal privacy, even if that limits its ability to investigate possible terrorist threats?”
 - 52% chose investigating terrorist threats as more important, while 48% thought it was more important not to intrude on privacy. Using the trade-off question wording, interestingly, partisan differences fade away, suggesting that privacy concerns are at the top of people’s minds right now and are strongly influenced by partisan predispositions.
 - We also see a large age gap on this question, with 70% of respondents over 65 and 60% of 50-64 year olds saying that investigating terror threats is more important, while only 41% of 18-29 year olds and 38% of 30-39 year olds agree; 40-49 year olds split nearly evenly on the question (49% terrorist threats, 51% privacy intrusions)
- So much of the privacy/security debate in the United States was framed this Spring when Edward Snowden, a contractor with the federal government who had access to a secret US government computer system that could track the activity of every person in the United States, decided to share the existence of that classified government program with the media and foreign governments. Respondents were asked if they have a generally favorable or unfavorable view of Edward Snowden, along with Julian Assange, the creator of Wikileaks and Bradley Manning, the US Army soldier who posted classified information to Wikileaks. Additionally, they were asked if they viewed each individual more as a “Hero” or more as a “Criminal” using a 7 point scale.
 - Julian Assange is viewed favorably by 13% of respondents and unfavorably by 33% of respondents. Those 18-29 are almost 3 times as likely to view Assange favorably as those 65 and up, and men are twice as likely as women to view him

in a favorable light. Of those identifying as “Very Liberal,” Assange has a net favorable rating of +5%. 47% of respondents see Assange’s actions are more criminal, while 24% view his actions as more heroic.

- Bradley Manning is viewed favorably by 13% of respondents and unfavorably by 34% of respondents. We see similar trends to Assange in the age, gender and ideology gaps. Manning is viewed most unfavorably by respondents who oppose the service of gays and lesbians in the US armed forces.
- Edward Snowden, not surprisingly, is the most recognized name in this trio. He is viewed favorably by 24% of respondents, and unfavorably by 39% of respondents. In contrast to Assange and Manning, Snowden is viewed more favorably by Republicans (26%) than Democrats (17%). Those 18-29 give Snowden a neutral net favorably rating (30-fav, 30-unfav), while those 65 and up give Snowden a -36 percentage points (19-fav, 54-unfav).

US Military Service by gays and lesbians

- A strong majority of Americans favor the open service of gays and lesbians in the US military (52% strongly agree, 15% somewhat agree). There is a large partisan gap on this question, with 82% of Democrats agreeing, compared to 55% of Republicans. Somewhat surprisingly, there are not pronounced differences in age (as have been widely reported on the issue of same-sex marriage), with 64% of those age 18-29 falling in the strongly agree/somewhat agree categories, compared to 65% of those age 65 and up. This polls largely as a settled issue, with majorities in most sub-populations favoring open service in the US military.