

Poll Looks at Safety, Possible Terror Attacks, Security, 10 Years After 9/11

Ten years ago life in the United States changed when for the first time Americans were attacked by foreign terrorists within the borders of the U.S. Afterward it became “normal” to take shoes off before boarding an airplane, to see heavily armed soldiers in airline terminals and to think about the phrase “if you see something, say something” when on public transportation.

In this new environment, one-third of Americans (32 percent) say they are more concerned for their personal safety now than they were before Sept. 11, 2001; one in 10 (9 percent) are less concerned; and three in five (60 percent) say their level of concern is about the same. In November 2001, right after the attacks, more than two in five Americans (42 percent) said they were more concerned about their personal safety; just 1 percent said less concerned; and about three in five (57 percent) said their level of concern over their personal safety was about the same as it was before the attacks.

These are some of the results of The Harris Poll of 2,073 adults surveyed online between Aug. 23 and 25 by Harris Interactive.

Hatred towards the “American way” was one reason for the attacks and 10 years later, seven in 10 U.S. adults (71 percent) believe there is more hatred towards the United States of America around the world today compared to what there was before 9/11, while just one in 10 (11 percent) say there is less hatred today.

It could be for this reason that large majorities of Americans believe the U.S. will experience a terrorist attack in the

next decade. More than four in five U.S. adults believe it is likely the U.S. will experience a terrorist attack by a foreign citizen (84 percent) or a foreign organization (84 percent) in the next 10 years, while almost two-thirds say it is likely there will be an attack by a foreign country (64 percent).

But it's not just foreign entities Americans are worried about. Eight in 10 U.S. adults (79 percent) say it is likely there will be a terrorist attack by a U.S. citizen associated with an organization and seven in 10 (70 percent) say there will be an attack by a lone U.S. citizen not associated with an organization.

Reducing terrorism in the U.S.

When it comes to reducing terrorism in the United States since 9/11, many individuals and organizations have been involved. Four in five Americans give a lot or some credit to the FBI (81 percent) and the CIA (79 percent) for helping to reduce terrorism in the United States, while seven in 10 give a lot or some credit to the Cabinet office formed after the attacks, the Department of Homeland Security (71 percent). Two-thirds of U.S. adults give a lot or some credit to local and state police (67 percent) while almost three in five give a lot or some credit to the Transportation Safety Administration (58 percent).

Finally, looking at the two presidents since September 2001, over half (55 percent) give a lot or some credit to President George W. Bush for helping to reduce terrorism in the United States while just under half (48 percent) give a lot or some credit to President Barack Obama.

Since 9/11, there have been a lot of changes in the way law enforcement agencies deal with people suspected of terrorist activity. As it has been since the attacks, strong majorities favor each of the following: expanded under-cover activities

to penetrate groups under suspicion (86 percent); expanded camera surveillance on streets and in public places (70 percent); stronger document and physical security checks for travelers (69 percent); closer monitoring of banking and credit card transactions, to trace funding sources (65 percent); adoption of a national ID system for all U.S. citizens (61 percent); and law enforcement monitoring of Internet discussions in chat rooms and other forums (55 percent).

Right after the attacks, a majority of Americans (54 percent) favored expanded government monitoring of cell phones and email to intercept communications. That number dropped to 44 percent in March of 2002 and February of 2003 and currently just 38 percent would favor government monitoring of cell phones and email while 62 percent oppose it.

While Americans may favor most of the government's expanded powers, there is still a question of whether U.S. law enforcement is using its expanded surveillance powers in a proper way or not. One-third of Americans (34 percent) believe they are using it in a proper way; one in five (20 percent) say they are not using it in a proper way; almost half (46 percent) are not at all sure.

So What?

Almost everyone (95 percent) says they remember clearly where they were when they heard about the events on Sept. 11, 2001, for the first time, with 84 percent saying they remember very clearly. For many Americans, it was a phone call or someone running into a room saying, "turn on the TV" as the images of that day played on and on.

And two-thirds of U.S. adults (68 percent) say the events of 9/11 changed their behavior in some lasting way. In fact, two in five (38 percent) say they appreciate life more and that number jumps to almost half of those who were in New York City or Washington on the day of the attacks (46 percent).

With the passing of 10 years, there are many other events that now frame how we approach this anniversary. Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the presidential election of 2008, and watching the events unfold in the Middle East this past spring are some, but the largest is probably the death of Osama bin Laden just a few short months ago. While each anniversary since 2001 has been poignant, there is always something notable about looking back a decade.