

Civil Liberties and Security: 10 Years After 9/11



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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes results from the inaugural project of The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, a new joint research initiative created by The Associated Press (AP) and NORC at the University of Chicago. The Center will combine the expertise of NORC, one of the world's premier social science research organizations, with AP, the essential global news network whose news reports are seen every day over all media platforms and formats by more than half the world's population.

The two organizations, united in their commitment to conduct high-quality research in the public interest with a potential for social impact, established the Center to explore, analyze, and communicate the public's views and opinions on the key issues of our time. In its first effort, it tackles what arguably is one of the biggest public policy quandaries of the new century.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were a defining moment for a generation, and the decade that followed saw significant changes in government that had a direct impact on the lives of millions of Americans. The subject matter of this report, the intersection of civil liberties and security, is highly relevant to many aspects of American society today. The question of where to draw the line between civil liberties and security is a key point of contentious debate both inside and outside the U.S. capital.

This project explores the question of where the public wants their representatives to draw the line between freedom and security. It puts this question in the context of the tenth anniversary of the most devastating terrorist attack ever on U.S. soil, and the findings will inform policy makers, journalists, and the public on where public opinion stands on important policy issues.

A distinctive feature of the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research surveys is the capacity to build trend data into the analysis, providing a clear picture of change over time as opposed to a simple snapshot of current opinion. In the case of this study, for example, NORC researchers and analysts were able to compare American feelings and beliefs today with those reported in similar studies done soon after the events of 9/11 and during subsequent years.

METHODS/APPROACH

This AP-NORC survey was conducted from July 28 through August 15, 2011. AP and NORC staff collaborated on all aspects of the study. Telephone interviews were conducted with 1,087 adults age 18 or older by professional interviewers who were carefully trained on the specific survey for this study.

Interviews were conducted with 773 respondents on landlines and 314 respondents on cellular telephones, for a total of 1,087 respondents. Cellular telephone respondents were offered a small monetary incentive for participating, as compensation for telephone usage charges. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference. Cognitive testing was performed on a draft version of the questionnaire instrument to ensure understandability and validity of survey questions.

The final response rate was 20 percent, based on the widely accepted Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO) method. Under this method, our response rate is calculated as the product of the resolution rate (71 percent), the screener rate (64 percent), and the interview completion rate (44 percent). The overall margin of error was +/- 4.1 percentage points.

Sampling weights were calculated to adjust for sample design aspects (such as unequal probabilities of selection) and for nonresponse bias arising from differential response rates across various demographic groups. Poststratification variables included age, sex, race, region, education, and landline/cellular telephone use. The weighted data, which thus reflect the U.S. general population, were used for all analyses.

All analyses were conducted using STATA (version 12), which allows for adjustment of standard errors for complex sample designs. All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or less) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling.

A comprehensive listing of all study questions complete with tabulations of top-level results for each question is available on the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research website: www.apnorc.org.

KEY RESULTS

Broad societal context of the research study: Americans are dissatisfied and disillusioned

Consistent with other recent surveys and reports, the poll finds the swelling of patriotism and positive feelings which followed the 9/11 attacks have mostly faded, and Americans are generally dissatisfied with the course of the nation and with major institutions. For example, only 20 percent of Americans believe the country is headed in the right direction, compared with more than 70 percent who believed this immediately after the 9/11 attacks. Similarly, nearly 50 percent of Americans report having hardly any confidence at all in the executive branch of government, and that number rises to 60 percent having hardly any confidence in Congress. By comparison, in 2002 just 21 percent had little confidence in the executive branch, and 24 percent had little in Congress. In addition, 60 percent of Americans polled believe bipartisan cooperation in Congress has gotten a lot worse compared with ten years ago, and 20 percent believe that American patriotism has gotten a lot worse since that time.

Civil liberties and freedoms: Americans continue to believe in constitutional rights

In general, Americans tend to believe that the protection of rights and freedoms is a somewhat more important goal than ensuring their security. Further, most Americans are generally satisfied with how the government is protecting their rights and freedoms. That said, there are areas where Americans exhibit skepticism—the right to equal protection under the law (an area where 18 percent of those polled think the government is doing a very poor job) and the right to privacy (where 26 percent think the government is doing a very poor job).

Security: Americans are divided over the war on terrorism

Americans are split in their belief that the United States can win the war against terrorism (only slightly over 50 percent believe this), and have guarded views on whether U.S. efforts to date have been effective (36 percent believe the U.S. war on terrorism has been extremely or very effective in preventing terrorist attacks, 49 percent believe it has been somewhat effective, while only 15 percent believe it has not been effective). In terms of spending, the majority of Americans (53 percent) feel that increased spending on national security programs over the past ten years has been worth the cost.

The war on terrorism has resulted in Americans exhibiting feelings that seem incongruous; while 44 percent of Americans feel embarrassed by our country's image in the world as a result of the war on terrorism, 40 percent feel the war on terrorism has helped unite our country.

Americans continue to feel at risk from a terrorist attack. A considerable percentage of Americans (37 percent) believe they live in a region that is at moderate or high risk of being attacked by terrorists, and 32 percent of Americans are concerned that they or their families might be victims of such an attack (compared to 38 percent in 2004). Of those, 49 percent say that this concern over an attack has had a substantial impact on their lives, compared to 48 percent of those who responded in 2004.

As for the impact of the actual events of 9/11 on their lives (as opposed to concern over future attacks), 57 percent of Americans say the events of 9/11 have had some impact on the way they live their lives today, up from 50 percent in 2006. At the same time, 86 percent of Americans feel that those same events of 9/11 have had some impact on their individual rights and freedoms.

Beyond their sense of individual impact, 85 percent of Americans feel that the events of 9/11 have contributed to the amount of political conflict in the United States, and 89 percent feel the events have had an impact on the condition of the nation's economy. Figure 1 depicts these feelings and beliefs regarding the war on terrorism and the events of 9/11.

The intertwining of civil liberties and security: Americans are unsure about the way ahead

Americans are less uniform in their attitudes towards government policies and actions aimed at fighting terrorism and protecting Americans but that also impinge on civil liberties. There is a broad range of opinions in this area, ranging from strong feelings in favor of some policies and activities, to equally strong negative ones in other areas.

The study found 64 percent of Americans believe it is sometimes necessary to sacrifice some rights and freedoms to fight terrorism, while only 33 percent believe it is never necessary to make that sacrifice.

Yet when asked to choose the higher priority for government, protecting rights and freedoms or making sure that U.S. citizens are safe from being harmed by terrorists, a slim majority—54 percent—favors protecting rights and freedoms. Thirty-five percent favor keeping U.S. citizens safe from terrorist attacks, and 10 percent say both have to be equal priorities. Further, 54 percent feel that strengthening the freedoms of all people around the world helps defeat terrorism.

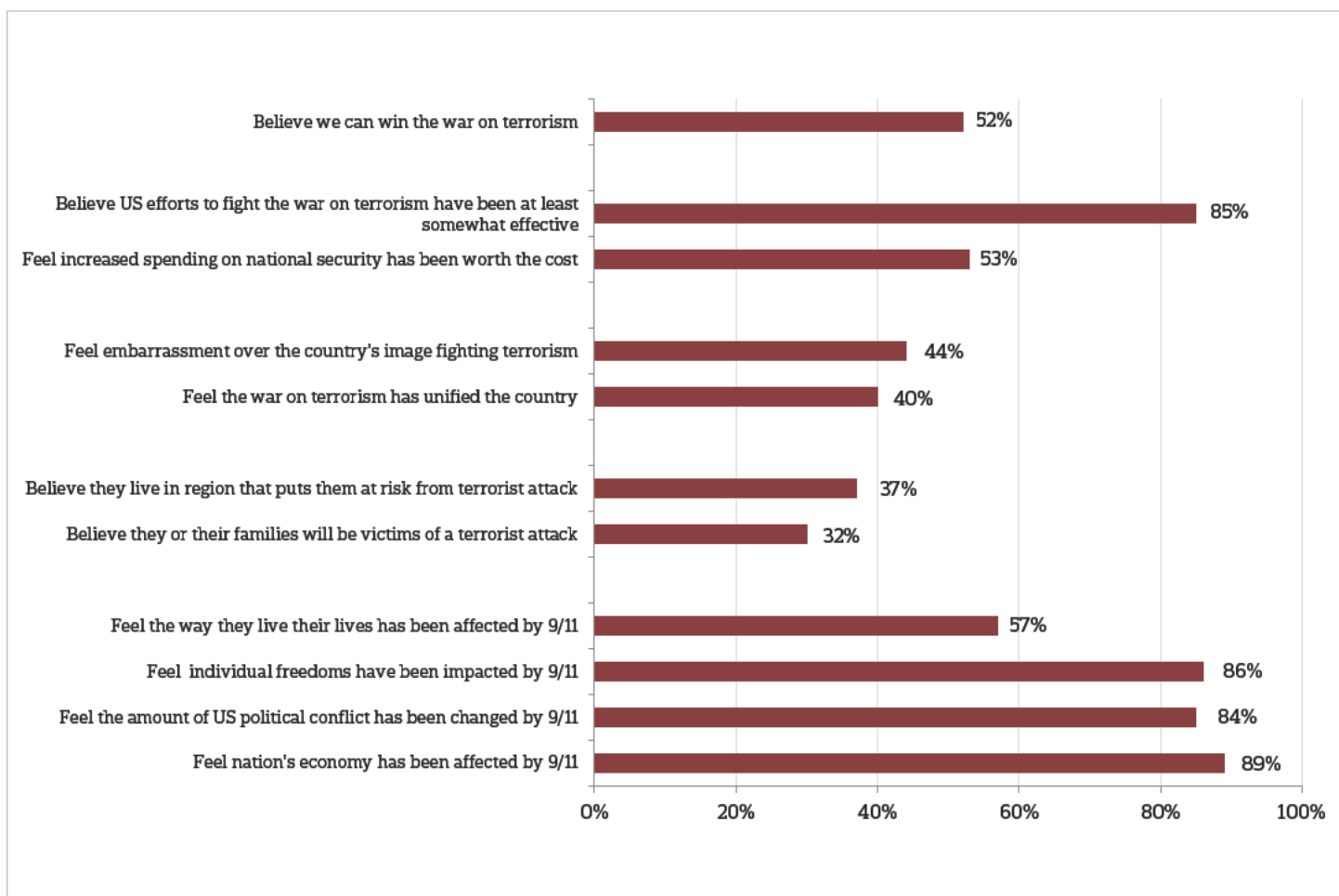
While 60 percent of Americans think the government is doing enough to protect the rights and freedoms of U.S. citizens, the number in favor of certain specific activities that may interfere with those rights in response to terrorist threats varies widely. For example, about 70 percent favor the use of surveillance cameras in various ways, but only 39 percent are in favor of random searches of public train and bus riders.

Similarly, Americans showed considerable support for a number of actions that could be taken in response to terrorist threats that involve potential infringement on freedoms and rights:

- 55 percent of Americans favor analysis of financial transactions processed by U.S. banks without a warrant, including those by U.S. citizens.

- 48 percent of Americans favor monitoring Internet searches without a warrant.
- Nearly 50 percent of Americans favor arrest and detention of suspected terrorists, who are not U.S. citizens, for extended periods of time without being charged in a court of law (that number dropping to 34 percent for suspects who are U.S. citizens).
- 51 percent of Americans favor using harsh interrogation techniques against suspected terrorists. Specific to torture, Americans are split on their feelings about the use of these invasive techniques on suspected terrorists; 52 percent say torture against suspected terrorists can sometimes or often be justified, while 46 percent feel torture can never or rarely be justified. These feelings have shifted over time, as measured by AP polls. In a 2005 poll, just 38 percent said torture against suspected terrorists could sometimes be justified, while 59 percent said it could not. In May 2011, just after the killing of Osama bin Laden, 60 percent said torture could sometimes be justified.

Figure 1. Security - Feelings & Beliefs Regarding the War on Terrorism and Events of 9/11

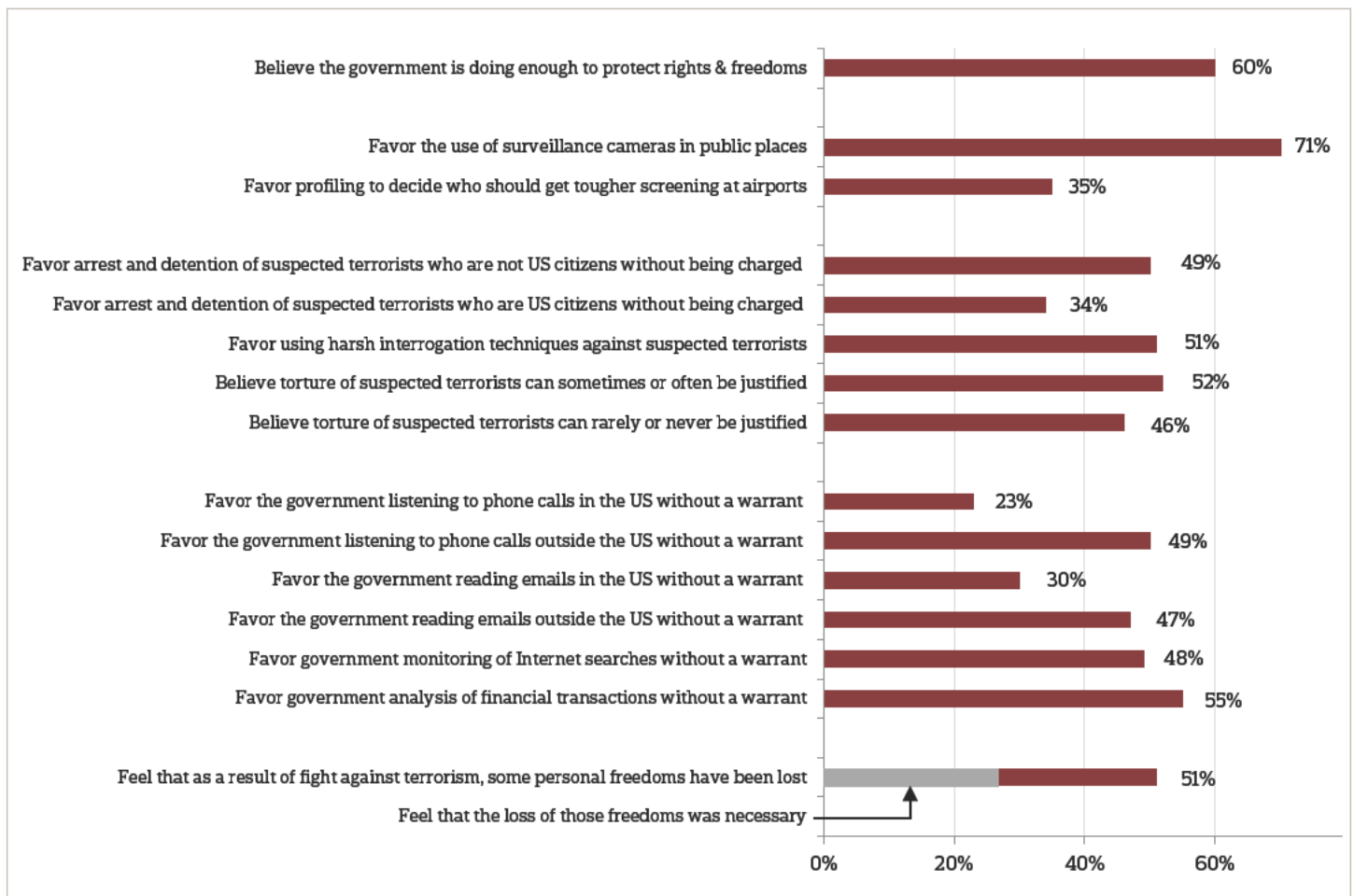


However, a number of other areas lacked that support from the Americans surveyed:

- Only 23 percent of Americans favor the government listening to phone calls in the United States without a warrant (this number increases for phone calls made in countries outside the United States to 49 percent).
- Only 30 percent favor the government reading emails in the United States without a warrant (this number rises for emails sent between people outside the United States to 47 percent).
- Only 35 percent favor racial and ethnic profiling to decide who should get tougher screening at airports.

Taken collectively, a slight majority of Americans (51 percent, compared to 45 percent in 2006) feel that as a result of steps taken by the government to fight terrorism, they have lost some of their personal freedoms; only about half of those who feel they have lost personal freedoms (or 27 percent of all respondents) feel that the loss was necessary. Figure 2 shows the intertwining of the American public's feelings and beliefs on the subjects of civil liberties and security.

Figure 2. Civil Liberties & Security - Intertwining of Feelings & Beliefs



Worry about being victimized by terrorism: Americans link this with higher level of support for more intrusive policies

Those who say they worry about their family becoming a victim of a terrorist attack are no more likely than those who do not worry much about becoming victimized to say that it is necessary to sacrifice some rights and freedoms in the name of security. That is true at least in the abstract.

But when asked to choose the higher priority for government, protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens or keeping citizens safe from terrorism, those who worry more about being victimized by terrorism are more likely to say government should prioritize security over civil liberties. Nearly half, 48 percent, of those who worry at least somewhat about being victimized by terrorism say the government should put security ahead of protecting civil liberties. Just 22 percent of those who don't worry much about being victimized say that security should be the higher priority.

And when it comes to specific policies, especially those where the broader public is divided or opposed, those who worry more about terrorism are willing to go further than those who do not.

For example:

- 59 percent of those who worry at least somewhat about being victimized by terrorist attacks say they favor using harsh interrogation techniques against suspected terrorists, while just 47 percent of those who do not worry much about being victimized favor such techniques.
- A majority, 56 percent, of those who worry about being victimized favor a national I.D. card, compared with 43 percent of those who do not worry much about being victimized.
- Most, 59 percent, of those who worry about being victimized are in favor of the arrest and long-term detention of non-citizen terrorist suspects without charge, while 45 percent of those who do not worry about being victimized favor that.
- And most, 54 percent, who worry about being victimized are in favor of government monitoring of Internet searches, compared with just 45 percent of those who do not worry much about being victimized.

NOTABLE DEMOGRAPHIC RESULTS

Key subgroups show few differences in opinion about rights and freedoms and attitudes towards the government's response to terrorism

Although the study revealed some important differences in attitudes and opinions between a few key demographic subgroups (detailed below), perhaps more interesting is the general lack of differences of opinion among various groups of the American public.

For example, although women show some tendency towards favoring greater safety and security, in general, there were no notable differences between men and women in this study.

Similarly, while active and retired military personnel and veterans were more comfortable with stronger enforcement and security measures, overall, they showed essentially no difference from the general population on most topics, including (notably) opinions about the effectiveness of the war on terrorism.

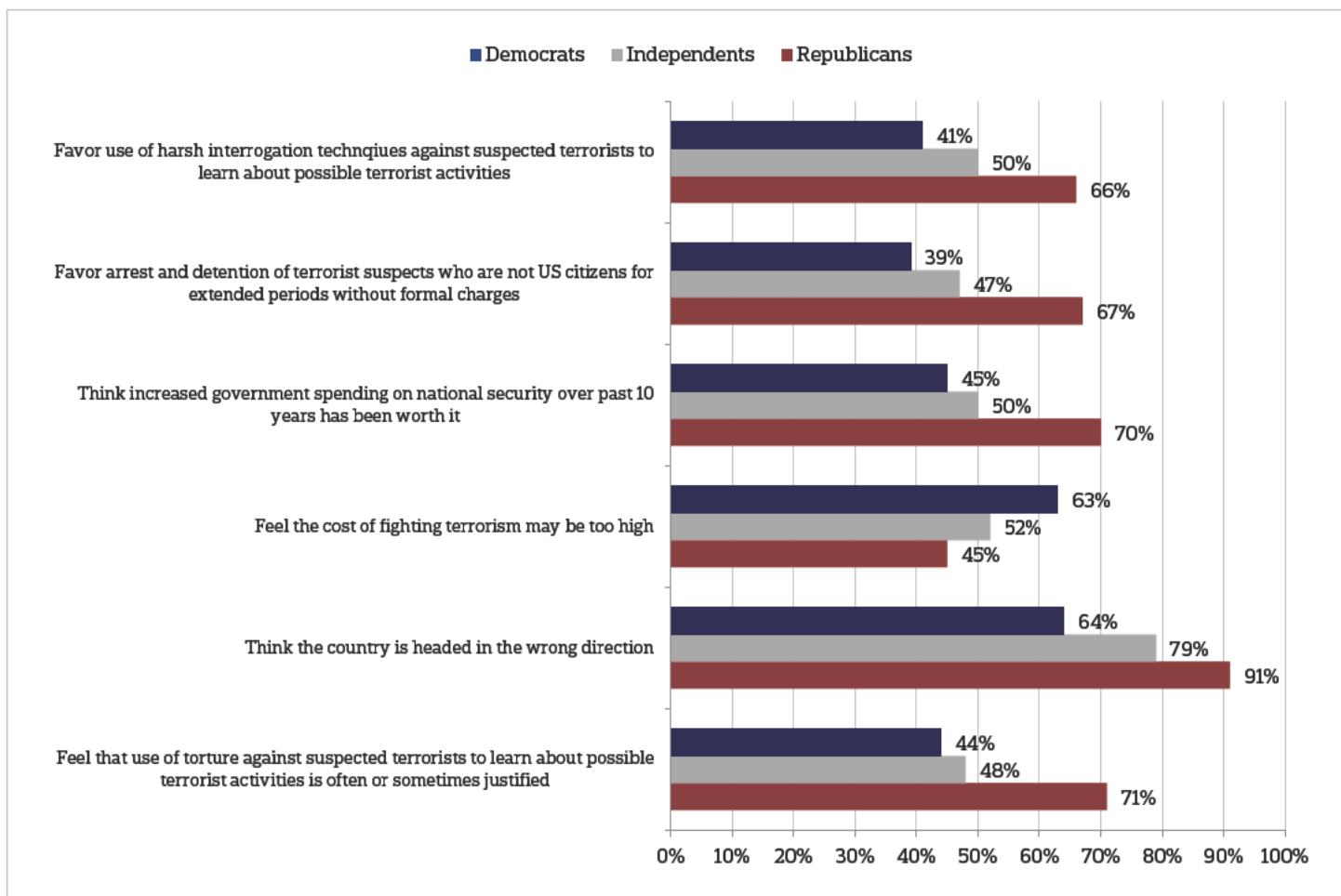
Frequent travelers (those who take three or more airplane trips per year) show no differences from the general population on any of the study's topics, including the degree to which the events of 9/11 have personally affected them.

Unsurprisingly, people who knew 9/11 victims personally were more likely to be concerned that the area in which they live could be the subject of a terrorist attack and to report that the events of 9/11 had an impact on the way they lead their lives today. However, in every other respect they were very similar to the general population in their responses, notably including topics such as protection of civil liberties.

Marked differences exist by political party affiliation on civil liberties and the war on terrorism

Among the subgroup differences we did find, some of the most notable results are the markedly different attitudes between Republicans and Democrats, reflecting larger national trends of strong polarization in attitudes between the parties. As shown in Figure 3, Republicans are more comfortable with intrusions into civil liberties in the interest of national security than are Democrats, Republicans are more positive about the spending and actions of the federal government with respect to the war on terrorism, and they are less positive about the overall direction of the country.

Figure 3: Differences in Opinion by Political Party Affiliation



Differences exist by level of income and education in opinions on government and its response to events of 9/11

More well-off Americans are generally more pessimistic about U.S. institutions. For example, 73 percent of higher income Americans (those earning \$75,000 or more annually) report having hardly any confidence at all in the U.S. Congress, compared with 63 percent for middle income Americans (those earning between \$40,00 and 75,000 annually) and 52 percent for lower income Americans (those earning less than \$40,000 annually).

In addition, Americans with higher incomes are more pessimistic about winning the war on terrorism: only 38 percent of upper income Americans who believe we have not won the war on terrorism think it is moderately to extremely likely the United States will win the war on terrorism, compared to 45 percent for middle income Americans, and 61 percent for lower income Americans. However, lower income Americans are more likely to believe the events of 9/11 have

had a negative impact on their personal finances (29 percent compared to 19 percent for the higher income group).

Compared to higher income Americans, lower income Americans also believe the United States is doing a poorer job at protecting rights and freedoms. For example, only 48 percent of lower income Americans think the U.S. government is doing a good job at protecting freedom from cruel and unusual punishment, compared to nearly 70 percent of middle and upper income Americans. Differences were similar, although not as large, for the right to equal protection under the law, as well as freedom from unreasonable search and seizure.

The differences by income level mirror closely differences seen by level of education—Americans with college degrees and graduate degrees (who also tend to have higher incomes) are very similar in their responses to those in the higher income group reported above.¹

¹It should be noted that a number of basic demographic variables are highly interrelated. For example, not only are education levels and income levels closely tied, but so are age and income levels (younger people tend to have less income). Similarly, younger people and African Americans are more likely to identify themselves as Democrats. These interrelationships make it inappropriate to attribute simple subgroup comparisons, such as the ones presented in this report, as the determining factor for the differences seen. Further analyses are planned to explore which demographic differences tend to dominate when there are similar results across interrelated demographic subgroups.

Foreign-born Americans are more upbeat about the nation as a whole

Foreign-born Americans are more optimistic about where the country is heading and more confident in U.S. institutions. For example, 33 percent of foreign-born Americans think the country is going in the right direction versus only 18 percent of U.S.-born Americans. Similarly, 69 percent of foreign-born Americans have some (or greater) confidence in the executive branch and 52 percent have some or greater confidence in Congress, compared to 48 percent (executive branch) and 37 percent (Congress) for U.S.-born Americans. Interestingly, foreign-born Americans show no differences from U.S.-born Americans in their attitudes about how well the government is doing at protecting rights and freedoms, and also with regard to the policy measures that the government may take in response to terrorist threats.

American parents with younger children are more concerned with safety

Parents with children aged 18 years and younger are more risk averse in their attitudes about safety, security, and civil liberties. For example, 45 percent of parents believe that making sure U.S. citizens are safe from being harmed by terrorists is more important than protecting rights and freedoms, 13 percent of parents are ambivalent between the two goals, and 41 percent believe protecting rights and freedoms is more important. For Americans without younger children, only 35 percent believe that the more important goal is making sure U.S. citizens are safe from being harmed by terrorists, 8 percent are ambivalent between the two goals, and 55 percent believe protecting rights and freedoms is more important.

Parents of younger children were also more comfortable with government activities aimed at monitoring and identifying threats: 54 percent of those with children under the age of 18 favor the government reading emails sent in the United States without a warrant compared to 44 percent of those without younger children. Similarly, parents with younger children were more favorably inclined toward installation of security cameras in public places (81 percent compared to 70 percent of Americans without younger children) and requiring random searches including full body scans or pat-downs of people boarding aircraft (65 percent of parents with younger children were supportive compared to 55 percent of those without younger children).

CONCLUSIONS

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, still have an impact on the daily lives of Americans even ten years later. While some of the emotions have subsided, other feelings—like patriotism and pride in the efforts of police officers and the military to fight terrorism, and concern about the risk of future attacks—remain strong in the minds of many.

Americans continue to believe in constitutional rights and generally tend to feel that their rights and freedoms continue, even in the face of their general dissatisfaction with the current workings of government.

But even with this confidence in their rights and freedoms, most Americans do believe it is necessary to give up some of them in exchange for security from terrorist attacks.

While most Americans believe that the protection of civil liberties should be a priority for government, a significant minority who worry deeply about having their families become victimized by terrorist attacks are more likely to favor actions that intrude on their civil liberties.

While Americans generally say they are supportive of their government's activities in fighting terrorism, there are some areas of policy that divide Americans and there are some other areas where strong majorities clearly draw the line.

Particularly controversial are policies that may intrude on the personal lives of individual Americans who are not suspected of any wrongdoing. Warrantless wiretapping, monitoring of emails and Internet searches, and ethnic profiling are seen as crossing the line.

In general, surveillance of public areas, monitoring of emails being sent abroad, and mass monitoring of financial transactions processed by U.S. banks are generally accepted. Americans are more conflicted over electronic monitoring overseas, harsh treatment and detention without charge of terrorist suspects, and monitoring of public library records.

There are marked differences by political affiliation on civil liberties and the war on terrorism. Despite the current austerity focus throughout the government and the economy writ large, there is strong support among Republicans for spending associated with the war on terrorism. Government intrusions into rights and freedoms, in the interest of national security, are seen as more tolerable by Republicans.

Looking ahead, few Americans think it's very likely that the war on terrorism will be won in the next ten years, and just over half of Americans expect they will see additional intrusions into their civil liberties in the name of protections against terrorism over the next decade.

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