



NATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR THE
STUDY OF TERRORISM AND RESPONSES TO TERRORISM

**House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency
“Why Can’t DHS Better Communicate with the American
People?”**

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21 May 2013





Chairman McCaul, Subcommittee Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Barber, and esteemed members of the committee, I would like to thank you on behalf of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, known as START,¹ for inviting us to speak with you today.

I've been asked to discuss the START Consortium's findings on U.S. attitudes toward terrorism and counterterrorism and to provide recommendations on steps the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can take to better engage with the American people.

This testimony is based primarily on a national panel survey and the resulting analytical report² authored by investigators from START and the Joint Program on Survey Methodology (JPSM),³ and sponsored by the Resilient Systems Division of the DHS Science and Technology Directorate.⁴

The survey was developed by two leading survey methodologists following a thorough review of past surveys on attitudes toward terrorism and counterterrorism, consultations with a research team of experts who study the dynamics of terrorism and counterterrorism, as well as consultations with officials from the homeland security community.

The questions were administered to members of a national panel by the on-line survey firm Knowledge Networks, and a second wave of the survey has been deployed six months after the first wave to allow for analysis of attitudes over time. The first wave of the questionnaire, which included approximately 60 items, was completed from September 28, 2012 to October 12, 2012 by 1,576 individuals 18 years of age and older.⁵

¹ START is supported in part by the Science and Technology Directorate Office of University Programs of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through a Center of Excellence program based at the University of Maryland. START uses 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.

² LaFree, Gary, and Stanley Presser, Roger Tourangeau, Amy Adamczyk, "U.S. Attitudes toward Terrorism and Counterterrorism," Report to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Science and Technology Directorate's Resilient Systems Division. College Park, MD: START, 2013.

³ www.start.umd.edu/start/publications/START_USAttitudesTowardTerrorismandCounterterrorism_March2013.pdf. I am especially grateful for the generous support of Dr. Amy Adamczyk in running additional analyses on survey results specific to the "If You See Something, Say Something" campaign (see Table 3). However, any errors or omissions within this testimony are mine alone.

⁴ The Joint Program in Survey Methodology (JPSM) is the nation's oldest and largest program offering graduate training in the principles and practices of survey research. It is sponsored by the Federal Interagency Consortium on Statistical Policy. Its faculty is drawn from the University of Maryland, the University of Michigan, Westat and other organizations.

⁵ Award Number 2010ST108LR0004. This testimony reflects the opinions of the author and not necessarily those of the START Consortium or the Department of Homeland Security.

⁶ The first wave of the study involved providing self-administered questionnaires to a random sample of computer users from the national panel created by Knowledge Networks (KN). The KN national panel consists of a probability sample of non-institutionalized adults residing in the United States. (Members of the sample who did not own a computer were given one when they joined the panel.) Of the panel members invited to participate in our survey, 62 percent completed it. To account for nonresponse and noncoverage, the estimates presented in this report were weighted to 2012 totals from the Census Bureau's Current Population

To provide preliminary information about the results of the survey, we have divided the responses into three broad sections. In the first section respondents were asked whether they had thought about terrorism, how much it worried them and how likely they thought it was to occur in the future. The second section of the questionnaire posed questions about how likely respondents would be to call the police in response to various actions potentially related to terrorism. It then assessed respondents' awareness, and evaluation, of government efforts related to terrorism in the United States. In a final section, we asked about two specific programs focused on increasing communication between members of the public and the government on topics related to terrorism.

Thinking about Terrorism

About 15 percent of the sample said they had thought about the prospect of terrorism in the preceding week, more than the fraction who said they had thought about hospitalization (10 percent) and violent crime victimization (10 percent), but about the same fraction as those who said they had thought about job loss (16 percent). Just over 20 percent of those who had thought about terrorism in the preceding week said they had done something differently in the past year due to the possibility of an attack compared to 4 percent of those who had not thought about it.

Among all respondents, about 5 percent said a terrorist attack was extremely or very likely to happen in the United States in the next year.⁶ Slightly fewer respondents said it was extremely or very likely that they would experience hospitalization (3 percent), violent criminal victimization (2 percent) or a job loss (3 percent). Even fewer respondents assigned these chances to a terrorist attack in their own community (1.5 percent).

Toward the end of the questionnaire we measured whether respondents had direct experience with the more personal negative events. Fourteen percent of those who had not been victims of violent crime had thought about terrorism in the last week, whereas 31 percent of the violent crime victims had thought about terrorism. The very small number of people who reported such victimization (4 percent) means that it cannot explain most of the variation in whether people said they thought about terrorism. Thus, we next considered whether where respondents lived was related to reporting such thoughts.

Surprisingly, we found no evidence that living in a metropolitan area increased the odds of having thought about terrorism. And although metropolitan area residents were three percentage points more likely to say a terrorist attack was extremely or very likely in the next year, they were also six percentage points more likely to say it was extremely or very unlikely to occur. Likewise, although we have too few cases in the metro Washington, D.C.

Survey (CPS) for seven variables: age, sex, region, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, and income. This standard survey procedure ensures that the distributions of these background variables for the 1,576 cases match those in the CPS and is likely to improve the survey estimates to the extent the survey variables are related to the background variables.

or New York areas to make inferences about their residents, there was little sign that respondents in the States of New York, New Jersey or Connecticut differed from respondents living in other states in thinking about terrorism or in judging its likelihood.

Table 1 shows the relationship of thinking about terrorism and respondents' gender, age, education, and race/ethnicity. Men and women answered the question in a similar fashion. Likewise, education was largely unrelated to reports of having thought about terrorism. Blacks, Hispanics and Asians were all significantly less likely to have said they thought about terrorism. Finally, older respondents were more likely to say they thought about terrorism.

Table 1: Percent having thought about terrorism by gender, age, education and race/ethnicity	
Men	13.6% (745)
Women	15.8% (810)
18-29	7.4% (324)
30-44	13.2% (403)
45-59	15.7% (426)
60+	21.3% (402)
Less than HS	11.1% (186)
High School	15.8% (474)
Some College	14.1% (444)
BA or More	15.7% (451)
White	17.2% (1049)
Black	11.9% (176)
Hispanic	8.8% (223)
Other	5.7% (88)

Respondents' Views of Terrorism and Government Responses to Terrorism

In a second section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked how likely they would be to call the police in response to various actions potentially related to terrorism (see Table 2) and how concerned they felt the government should be about these actions. In general, responses to these two items were strongly correlated. Respondents indicated they would be more likely to call the police or think that the government should be very concerned about someone “talking about planting explosives in a public place” than any other activity.

As a benchmark for these items, we asked respondents how likely they would be to call the police if they overheard people talking about breaking into a house in their neighborhood. About 70 percent of the respondents said they would be very likely to call the police in this situation; a somewhat higher percentage said they would be very likely to call the police if they heard someone talking about planting explosives in a public place (76 percent). At the other end of the spectrum, about 21 percent of the respondents said they would be very likely to call the police if they heard about someone reading material from a terrorist group. Respondents who said they had thought about a terrorist attack in the last week were more likely than other respondents to say they were likely to call the police in response to the various situations described to them.

Table 2: Likelihood of calling police

	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Too Likely	Not at All Likely	Total
A Person					
...talking about breaking into a house	69.6%	18.9%	5.3%	6.2%	100% (1542)
...talking about joining a terrorist group	41.4%	28.7%	20.8%	9.1%	100% (1545)
...talking about planting explosives	76.1%	13.1%	4.6%	6.1%	100% (1543)
...reading material from terrorist group	20.6%	28.5%	35.4%	15.5%	100% (1544)
...stockpiling guns	38.7%	24.9%	23.4%	13.0%	100% (1542)
...traveling overseas to join terrorist group	52.0%	23.4%	14.7%	9.9%	100% (1547)
...distributing handouts in support of terrorism	46.2%	28.4%	17.4%	7.9%	100% (1540)

The questionnaire also included three items asking respondents about their overall views about the threat of terror, the effectiveness of the government counterterrorism efforts, and their confidence in the people running the executive branch of the federal government.

A large majority of the respondents said that the U.S. government has been very effective (33 percent) or somewhat effective (54 percent) at preventing terrorism; less than 13 percent characterized the government as not too effective or not effective at all. Despite this positive view of the government’s efforts to prevent terrorism, a large majority (69 percent) endorsed the view that “terrorists will always find a way to carry out major attacks no matter what the U.S. government does.”

“If You See Something, Say Something” and Willingness to Meet with Authorities

The survey also asked respondents about two specific programs focused on increasing communication between members of the public and the government on topics related to terrorism.

The first was the “If You See Something, Say Something” campaign.⁷ Most respondents (more than 56 percent) said they had not heard anything about this campaign, and a substantial number (more than 20 percent) were not sure whether they had heard anything about it. Of those who had heard something about the campaign, most thought it would be very (18 percent) or somewhat (67 percent) effective.

Table 3: Percent having heard anything about the “See Something, Say Something” campaign by gender, age, income, region and metropolitan statistical area

	Yes	No	Not Sure	Total
Men	26.6%	55.1%	18.4%	100% (817)
Women	21.9%	56.9%	21.2%	100% (735)
18-29	18.9%	58.0%	23.1%	100% (243)
30-44	24.4%	56.4%	19.3%	100% (353)
45-59	23.4%	57.8%	18.8%	100% (479)
60+	28.1%	52.6%	19.3%	100% (477)
Less than \$40k	21.6%	56.3%	22.2%	100% (487)
Between \$40k-\$75k	19.2%	60.4%	20.4%	100% (427)
Over \$75k	29.9%	52.7%	17.4%	100% (638)
Midwest	16.1%	67.5%	16.4%	100% (360)
Northeast	42.6%	37.9%	19.5%	100% (298)
South	20.9%	58.3%	20.9%	100% (542)
West	22.7%	55.7%	21.6%	100% (352)
Metropolitan Statistical Area	26.5%	53.4%	20.1%	100% (1303)
non Metropolitan Stat. Area	13.3%	69.1%	17.7%	100% (249)

⁷ In July 2010, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), at Secretary Janet Napolitano’s direction, launched a national “If You See Something, Say Something” campaign – a program to raise public awareness of indicators of terrorism and terrorism-related crime, and to emphasize the importance of reporting suspicious activity to the proper state and local law enforcement authorities.

The respondents least familiar with the campaign include the 18-29 year old demographic, those from the Midwest, and those from non-Metropolitan Statistical Areas.⁸ Those most familiar with the campaign include respondents from the Northeast, respondents over 60 years of age, those from Metropolitan Statistical Areas, and those who made over \$75,000 per year.

The survey also asked respondents whether they would be willing to attend a meeting with local police or with people from the Department of Homeland Security to talk about terrorism. Clear majorities of respondents said they would be willing to meet with people from DHS (57 percent) and with local police (58 percent) to talk about terrorism. Most people (88 percent) gave the same answer to the two questions; that is, the same people who were willing to attend a meeting with people from DHS were also willing to attend a meeting with local police to talk about terrorism. People who saw the government as very or somewhat effective in preventing terrorism were more likely to say they were willing to attend such meetings than those who saw the government as not too or not at all effective at preventing terrorism (see Table 4).

Table 4: Willingness to attend a meeting with local police or DHS, by perceived effectiveness of government in preventing terrorism

	Willing to attend meeting with local police			Willing to attend meeting with people from DHS		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Effectiveness of government at preventing terrorism						
Very effective	63.0%	37.0%	100% (510)	62.7%	37.30%	100% (515)
Somewhat effective	61.0%	39.0	100% (827)	58.6%	31.4%	100% (829)
Not too or not at all effective	36.8%	63.2	100% (191)	39.3%	60.7%	100% (194)
Total	58.5%	41.5%	100% (1537)	57.4%	42.6%	100% (1548)

⁸ “A geographic entity, defined by the Federal OMB for use by Federal statistical agencies, based on the concept of a core area with a large population nucleus, plus adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that core. Qualification of an MSA requires the presence of a city with 50,000 or more inhabitants, or the presence of an Urbanized Area and a total population of at least 100,000 (75,000 in New England). The county or counties containing the largest city and surrounding densely settled territory are central counties of the MSA. Additional outlying counties qualify to be included in the MSA by meeting certain other criteria of metropolitan character, such as a specified minimum population density or percentage of the population that is urban. MSAs in New England are defined in terms of cities and towns, following rules concerning commuting and population density. MSAs were first defined and effective June 30, 1983.” <<http://www.census.gov/geo/lv4help/cengeoglos.html>>.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This survey found that Americans think about the prospect of terrorism more frequently than they think about hospitalization or being the victims of violent crime, suggesting that Americans are not complacent regarding the threat of terrorism. These results suggest that Americans will perceive awareness campaigns like “If You See Something, Say Something” as relevant, a finding reinforced by the fact that 85 percent of respondents who had heard of the campaign indicated they thought it would be very or somewhat effective.

The survey results also revealed that respondents who said that they had thought about a terrorist attack in the last week were more likely than other respondents to say they were likely to call the police in response to various scenarios described to them, and were also more likely to indicate that they had altered their behavior over the previous year because of the possibility of an attack. These findings do not demonstrate causality, that priming people to think about terrorism results in a change in behavior, but do suggest that heightened awareness and security-conscious behavior of the citizenry may be correlated. Fewer respondents indicated that they would be “very likely” to call the police if they saw or heard about a person joining a terrorist group than if they saw or heard about a person planning to break into a house. 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.

Interestingly, there was no evidence that living in a metropolitan area increased the odds of having thought about terrorism in the previous week, despite the fact that 10 cities account for 40.6 percent of all U.S. attacks from 1970-2011.⁹ Given the greater frequency of terrorist incidents within cities, and the greater number of citizens available to engage with efficiently, DHS should continue to focus on metropolitan areas even though respondents were significantly more likely to have heard of “If You See Something, Say Something” in those areas.

Approximately 24 percent of respondents from the national sample indicated that they had heard of the “If You See Something, Say Something” campaign, a program created in 2002 by the Metropolitan Transit Authority in New York and adopted for roll out across the nation by the Department of Homeland Security in 2010. Awareness of this campaign in the Northeast, where a version of the program has been implemented on various forms of mass transit for over a decade, was significantly greater at nearly 43 percent. This suggests that continued implementation of the program over time may increase the public’s awareness of it in other regions of the country.

⁹ LaFree, Gary, and Laura Dugan, Erin Miller, “Integrated United States Security Database (IUSSD): Terrorism Data on the United States Homeland, 1970 to 2011,” Final Report to the Resilient Systems Division, DHS Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security. College Park, MD: START, 2012. The 10 cities include: New York City, NY; San Juan, PR; Los Angeles, CA; San Francisco, CA; Miami, FL; Washington, DC; Chicago, IL; Seattle, WA; Berkeley, CA; and Denver, CO.

It is not clear what a realistic expectation for awareness of the program should be, however. According to the most recent data available from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, only 4.99 percent of commuters in 2009 used mass transportation as their primary means of commuting to work.¹⁰ This suggests that while mass transportation infrastructure provides an efficient marketing platform to capture a percentage of Americans, increasing awareness of "If You See Something, Say Something" is not simply a matter of more marketing on buses and subways. It is likely that this commuter population is already highly represented in the current awareness figures given the centrality of mass transit to the campaign, and reaching significantly higher percentages of atomized Americans outside of aggregators like mass transit infrastructure may be costly.

Trying to increase awareness of the program in a cost-effective manner is a worthwhile goal, however. To address the communities least familiar with the "If You See Something, Say Something" campaign, DHS can consider focusing on population centers in the West, Midwest, and South, focusing on marketing material that will reach those Americans making less than \$75,000 per year, and increasing its use of social media¹¹ and its presence on college campuses to reach younger citizens.

A large majority of the respondents said that the United States government has been very effective (34 percent) or somewhat effective (53 percent) at preventing terrorism, and a majority indicated a willingness to meet with federal and local authorities to discuss terrorism. Respondents were more likely to indicate the willingness to meet when they also indicated a higher opinion of the government's effectiveness at preventing terrorism. While a majority of respondents opined that terrorist groups will eventually succeed in carrying out an attack despite government efforts, the respondents did not see this as a failure of the government. These are powerful indicators of societal resilience, as well as evidence that Americans do not expect the government to interdict every plot on its own.

DHS and its federal, state, local and tribal-level partners should take advantage of the opportunity to meet with Americans to raise awareness of "If You See Something, Say Something," to educate Americans about criminal behaviors related to terrorism, and to engage in a dialogue on how the government can improve upon the already high-levels of trust with respect to counterterrorism. Governmental authorities across the spectrum should be cautious of adopting "zero tolerance rhetoric" with respect to counterterrorism lapses, as eroding the public's trust in the government or intimating that the government should be able to thwart every terrorist plot alone may decrease the public's willingness to engage with government through community outreach and awareness programs.

¹⁰ "Transit Commuting Reported in the American Community Survey," American Public Transit Association summary document. December 22, 2010.

http://www.apta.com/resources/statistics/Documents/2009_ACS_Transit_Commuter_Data.pdf.

¹¹ For a discussion of the efficacy of social media with respect to a different government awareness effort, see the forthcoming START case study: Fraustino, Julia Daisy, and Liang Ma. "If You're Ready for a Zombie Apocalypse, then You're Ready for Any Emergency": The CDC's use of Social Media and Humor in a Disaster Preparedness Campaign," College Park, MD: START, 2013.

The willingness of DHS to fund an independent research project that gives voice to the opinions of American citizens and serves as an objective assessment tool to help federal, state, local and tribal leaders allocate finite resources more effectively is one final example of what DHS should continue to do.¹² Not giving the department credit for the level of introspection evidenced through this research project may have a chilling effect on the self-appraisal and research and development efforts that are so essential for professional organizations seeking to improve.

¹² For example, after publishing the results of this survey, START received a phone call from a state homeland security advisor from the Midwest who informed us of his plans to work with local media to raise awareness of the campaign based on these research findings.