



Snapshot 2005: Where the American Public Stands on Terrorism and Preparedness Four Years after September 11

Confusion, Loss of Confidence, and Unmet Challenges

**The 2005 Annual Survey of the American Public by the
National Center for Disaster Preparedness,
Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health**

Survey administered by The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion

National Center for Disaster Preparedness
Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health
722 West 168th Street, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10032
(212) 305-0338
<http://www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu>

Irwin Redlener, M.D.
Director, National Center for Disaster Preparedness
Associate Dean, Mailman School of Public Health

Dennis Johnson
Director of Policy and Public Affairs, Mailman School of Public Health

David A. Berman
Senior Policy Analyst, National Center for Disaster Preparedness

Roy Grant
Director of Research, Children's Health Fund

Overview

The National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) 2005 survey of the American public's attitudes and views on terrorism, preparedness, and associated issues is the latest in a series of national surveys administered annually beginning in the months after September 11, 2001. The survey was completed in July 2005, just after the London Underground bombings and just before Hurricane Katrina.

NCDP commissioned national and New York City public opinion polls in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001 to gauge the American public's views and attitudes on a wide range of topics germane to disaster preparedness and emergency events. Since the first polls which were completed 3 and 6-months after September 11, 2001, NCDP has annually commissioned a survey which goes to the field in July-August, just before the anniversary of September 11. The 2005 survey was the fourth annual. Each survey includes trended questions as well as "one-off" questions appropriate to the given time period. Trended questions include confidence in government; willingness and ability to evacuate; personal and family preparedness plans; personal sacrifice; community preparedness; perceptions and engagement of all-hazard preparedness; and other questions thematic with the afore listed.. All questions are cross-tabulated with a variety of demographics including race, age, gender, income, region, size of community, political affiliation, and education. Further, select questions establishing a division of respondent (e.g. those having personal and family preparedness plans versus those who do not) are cross-tabulated with other selected questions to observe correlations. (e.g. awareness of community preparedness plans). The surveys are developed by NCDP investigators in conjunction with Marist, who administers the survey, codes the data, and produces the frequency tables.

Full data and trend tables are available on request.

Major National Findings

- *Persistent, Pervasive Terror Fears*

More **than three-quarters (78%) of the U.S. public is concerned** there will be more terror attacks in the United States. This figure is virtually unchanged from 2004 (76%) and 2003 (76%). Nearly a third (31%) believes an attack will happen **within a year**.

Concern for the possibility of future terror attacks in the United States reveals **little difference between regions** with the East, Central, and South between 78% and 82% and the West at 72%.

This balance **holds across size of community**. Concern for the possibility of future terror attacks in the United States reveals little difference among areas with those in big and small cities, suburban, small towns, and rural communities all expressing concern between 77% and 80%.

- *Crisis of Confidence in Government*

For the first time since September 11, 2001, less than half of the American public (49%) has confidence in the government to **protect the area they live** from a terrorist attack. This figure has steadily decreased, from 53% in 2004 and 64% in 2003.

Other areas of concern include the government's ability to protect **nuclear power** facilities (50% are "confident" or "very confident," down from 52% in 2004 and 63% in 2003) and against **dirty bombs** (37% are "confident" or "very confident," down from 40% in 2004 and 49% in 2003).

- *The American Public is not Prepared for Emergency Events*

Less than half (43%) of the American public **reports having a family emergency preparedness plan that all members of the family know about**. However, this is an improvement from 37% in 2004 and 35% in 2003

Of those that report having a plan, less than half (43%) –only 29% of the total population including those that do not have a plan –report **having all or some of the major elements** that are part of an emergency plan (e.g. two days food and water, a flashlight, a portable radio and spare batteries, emergency phone numbers, and a meeting place). However, this too is an improvement from 36% in 2004 and 34% in 2003.

Those that have a complete family emergency plan are **more likely to be familiar with the emergency or evacuation plans at their children's schools** (71% vs. 28%); be familiar with their **community's evacuation plan** in the event of a natural disaster or emergency weather event (55% vs. 29%); and **feeling prepared for a terrorist attack** (62% vs. 24%).

- *Being Prepared for a Natural Disaster does not Translate to Preparedness for Terrorism*
While nearly six out of ten (59%) feel **personally** “very prepared” or “prepared” for a **natural disaster or emergency weather event in their community**, only about a third (36%) express being prepared when asked about a **terror attack**.

With respect to **community plans**, more than half of the American public (51%) thinks their community has an adequate response plan in place for **natural or emergency weather events** and 37% are “very familiar” or “familiar” with that plan. Conversely, only 37% believe their community has an adequate response plan in place for a **terror attack** and only 23% are “very familiar” or “familiar” with that plan.

- *The Public may not follow even the best formed Evacuation Plans*
Over half (57%) **would not evacuate their home or office to go to a distant location when ordered to do so** either because they would not leave or they would wait until concerns for children and loved ones are addressed. A quarter (25%) said they could not leave **without help** and just over a quarter (26%) said they could not leave because they **do not have transportation**. Stuningly, 38% said they would not leave if they **lacked confidence** in who is ordering them to evacuate.
- *Lack of Confidence in the Nation’s Healthcare System to Respond to an Attack using Chemical, Biological, or Radiological Weapons is Alarming*
Public confidence in the health care system’s ability to **respond effectively to a biological, chemical, or nuclear attack** remains at 39% -unchanged from 2004 –and down from 46% in 2003 and 53% in 2002.
- *Confidence in the Government’s Ability to Protect Public Transportation has Dropped Significantly*
The American public expresses decreasing confidence in the government’s ability to protect **public transportation**. Only 37% reported themselves “confident” or “very confident,” down from 43% in 2004.
- *African-American are Less Confident than Whites and Latinos*
Across nearly all areas of confidence and perception, **African-Americans have dramatically less favorable views versus those of Whites and Latinos**. Notable points include confidence in the **ability of the government to protect the area** they live (29% vs. 51% for Whites and 47% for Latinos); the **health care system to respond** to a biological, radiological, or nuclear attack (33% vs. 43% and 40%); and feeling that their community received less than a **fair share of money** to prepare for future acts of terror (56%, vs. 36% and 34%).

- *Political Affiliation and Perceptions on Homeland Security: As Different as Red and Blue*
Across nearly all areas of confidence and perception, **Republicans have significantly more favorable views versus those of Democrats and Independents.** Notable points include thinking the **United States is prepared for a future attack** (75%, vs. 49% and 57%); **confidence in the government to protect the area they live** (62%, vs. 40% and 43%); **feeling safer** than before September 11 (37%, vs. 12% and 18%); and feeling that their community received less than a **fair share of money** to prepare for future acts of terror (27%, vs. 52% and 39%).
- *Schools and Terrorism*
More than half (52%) think it is “very likely” or “likely” that **a school in the U.S. will be a target of terrorism.** However, six parents out of ten (59%) are **not aware of any plan or are not familiar** with emergency or evacuation plans at their children’s school. Three-fourths (76%) of **Latinos are not aware or unfamiliar**, an exceptionally high figure versus 55% of Whites and 59% of African-Americans.

Major New York City Findings

- *New Yorkers fear Future Terror Attacks in New York City*
More **than three-quarters (76%) of New Yorkers are concerned** there will be more terror attacks in New York City. Nearly a quarter (23%) believes an attack will happen **within a year**.
- *New Yorker's have even less Confidence in Government versus the American Public*
Only 39% of New Yorker's have confidence in the government to **protect the area they live** from a terrorist attack. This figure is unchanged from 2004. Nationally, 49% have confidence in the government to **protect the area they live** from a terrorist attack

Only 13% of New Yorker's believe their community has received **a fair share of money** to prepare for future acts of terror versus 25% nationally.
- *Concern about Terrorism does not imply Personal Preparedness*
Despite overwhelming concern that there will be future terror attack in New York City, only 29% of New Yorker's **feel personally prepared for a terror attack in their community**. Nationally, 36% describe themselves as prepared.
- *New Yorker's Lack of Confidence in the Healthcare System to Respond to an Attack using Chemical, Biological, or Radiological Weapons is Alarming*
A third (33%) of New Yorkers (36% in 2004) has confidence in the health care system's ability to **respond effectively to a biological, chemical, or nuclear attack**.
- *New Yorker's have low confidence in the Government's Ability to Protect Public Transportation*
A third (34%) of New Yorkers expresses confidence in the government's ability to protect **public transportation**. This figure remains virtually unchanged from 2004 (33%) despite the London Underground attacks of July 7, 2005 and increased security measures through the local and regional transit system.

Analysis and Recommendations

- *Personal Preparedness*

Americans are slowly becoming aware of the need to prepare plans for disasters and terrorism. Too few Americans have actually taken sufficient concrete steps to prepare for disaster. Especially in the wake of Hurricane Katrina coupled with the ongoing threats of terrorism and potential outbreak of pandemic avian flu, efforts need to be refocused to accelerate uptake of the public preparedness message.

- Preparedness messages should be simplified
- Consistent, trusted messengers should be relied on as the “face” of preparedness, locally and nationally
- The United States Surgeon General should be deployed as one of the several faces communicating the national public health and preparedness strategies
- Community preparedness programs should be expanded

- *Increasing Confidence in Government*

Lack of confidence in the government’s ability to protect communities, nuclear power plants, and public transportation is a major problem.

- Government should be required to evaluate effectiveness of current programs against national benchmarks

- *Increasing Confidence in the Health and Public Health Systems*

The public’s lack of confidence in the health and public health systems is generally well founded. Little progress has been made in this area, and the pace of progress needs to be substantially enhanced.

- Reauthorization of the bioterrorism bill (coming in 2006) should mandate establishing and measuring benchmarks and goals around hospital and public health readiness.
- Benchmarks must be established and validated by empirical research

Survey Methodology

The **2005 national survey** of U.S. residents was conducted from July 15-22, 2005. 1,315 adults 18 years of age or older throughout the 48 contiguous United States including the District of Columbia were contacted by telephone. Telephone numbers were selected based upon a complete list of telephone exchanges from throughout the nation. The exchanges were selected to ensure that each region in the country was represented in proportion to its population. The results of the entire survey are statistically significant at $\pm 2.7\%$. The margin of error increases for cross-tabulations. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.

The **July 2004** national survey was conducted from July 19th through 26th. In the national survey, 1,234 adults eighteen years of age or older within the continental United States were interviewed by telephone, of which 407 were parents with children age four through eighteen living in their household. There were 564 interviews with people employed by a company with 11 or more employees. Telephone numbers were selected based on a complete list of telephone exchanges from throughout the nation. The exchanges were selected to ensure that each region of the country was represented in proportion to its population. The results of the entire survey are statistically significant at $\pm 3\%$, $\pm 5\%$ for parents with children aged four through eighteen, and $\pm 4\%$ for employees. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish as necessary.

The **August 2003** national survey was conducted from August 5th through 14th, and 18th through 20th, 2003. In the national survey, 1,373 adults eighteen years of age or older within the continental United States were interviewed by telephone, of which 484 were parents with children age four through eighteen living in their household. There were 663 interviews with people employed by a company with 11 or more employees. In the New York City survey, 1,317 adults 18 years of age or older were interviewed, of which 456 were parents with children age four through eighteen living in their household. There were 640 interviews with people employed by a company with 11 or more employees. Telephone numbers were selected based on a complete list of telephone exchanges (nationally or within New York City) and selected for representation in proportion to the population. The results of the entire survey are statistically significant at $\pm 3\%$, $\pm 4.5\%$ for parents with children aged four through eighteen, and $\pm 4\%$ for employees. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish as necessary.

The **August 2002** survey was conducted from August 12th through 22nd, 2002. In the national survey, 1,215 adults eighteen years of age or older within the continental United States were interviewed, of which 363 were parents with children age four through eighteen living in their household. In the New York City survey, 1,313 adults 18 years of age or older were interviewed, of which 361 were parents with children age four through eighteen living in their household. Telephone numbers were selected based on a complete list of telephone exchanges (nationally or within New York City) and selected for representation in proportion to the population. The results of the entire survey are statistically significant at $\pm 3\%$ and $\pm 5\%$ for parents with children aged four through eighteen. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish as necessary.

Institutional Information

National Center for Disaster Preparedness

NCDP is an academically based, inter-disciplinary center focused on the nation's capacity to prevent and respond to terrorism and major disasters. NCDP's areas of expertise include disaster preparedness and response, mental health treatment, pediatric issues, and the socio-political dimensions of terrorism. NCDP is a national and international leader in disaster and terrorism readiness providing direct services to individuals affected by September 11, public health training, and applied research. NCDP produces curriculum on bioterrorism, develops mental health programs, provides training for public health professionals and other first responders, develops model programs, and has a wide-ranging research and public policy agenda. NCDP has collaborative relationships with faculty from Columbia University's schools of nursing, medicine, dentistry, journalism, Teacher's College, School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), and Union Theological Center as well with scholars at leading national and international universities, centers, and across all levels of city, state, and federal government

National Center for Disaster Preparedness
Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health
722 West 168th Street, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10032
<http://www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu>

Mailman School of Public Health

The only accredited school of public health in New York City, and among the first in the nation, Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health provides instruction and research opportunities to more than 800 graduate students in pursuit of masters and doctoral degrees. Its students and more than 200 multi-disciplinary faculty engage in research and service in the city, nation, and around the world, concentrating on biostatistics, environmental health sciences, epidemiology, health policy and management, population and family health, and sociomedical sciences.

Mailman School of Public Health
Columbia University
722 West 168th Street
New York, NY 10032
www.mailman.hs.columbia.edu

Marist College Institute for Public Opinion

Founded in 1978, the Marist Institute for Public Opinion (MIPO) is a survey research center at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York. The Marist Poll has conducted independent research on public priorities, elections, and a wide variety of issues including the economy, health care, foreign affairs, the environment, science, information technology, and lifestyles. Through the regular public release of Marist Poll surveys, MIPO has built a reputation of independence, reliability, and accuracy. Frequently cited by journalists, public officials, and policy experts, the

Marist Poll has been recognized for fairness, accuracy, and timeliness. Its results are featured in print and electronic media throughout the world including The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, and on radio and television news broadcasts. MIPO offers full service commissioned research for business, government, and nonprofits in all phases including study design, sample methodology, questionnaire construction, data collection, data analysis, report writing, and presentation. In all matters, MIPO, as a research organization, adheres to the current Code of the National Council on Public Polls and the Standards and Ethics of the Council of American Research Organizations (CASRO). MIPO also provides educational opportunities for students and is a public resource for information on survey methodology through internships, conferences, seminars, and coursework.

Marist College Institute for Public Opinion
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601
www.maristpoll.marist.edu