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PUBLIC APATHETIC ABOUT NUCLEAR TERRORISM

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PUBLIC APATHETIC ABOUT NUCLEAR TERRORISM

Most Americans acknowledge the fact that terrorists could strike a U.S. city with a nuclear, chemical or biological weapon, yet few worry about the possibility, according to the findings of a recent nationwide Pew Research Center survey. The poll confirms the lack of public engagement on this issue experienced by Senator Richard Lugar, who made this the central issue of his unsuccessful Republican presidential campaign.

The nationwide survey found 72% believe there is a chance that terrorists *could* use a weapon of mass destruction to attack a U.S. city, but only 13% worry a great deal about this and 27% are somewhat worried. Fully 59% profess to be not worried about such dangers. But indifference to a nuclear threat is part of a broader pattern, the survey revealed. One year after the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City, the public is not particularly concerned about *any kind* of terrorism within the United States. Two out of three (66%) Americans said they are not much or not at all worried about terrorism in public places.

A plurality of respondents (49%) believe the greatest terrorist threat to the country comes from *inside the country*, while 39% see it originating outside. This result is similar to a Los Angeles Times poll one year ago (40% inside, 33% outside). But considerably more respondents take a position on the question now (88% vs. 73%) compared to April 1995 in the immediate wake of the Oklahoma City tragedy. A strong majority (56%) believe anti-terrorism laws on the books now are too weak, which is almost exactly the same result as in last year's poll (57%).

But sentiment has reversed itself on whether civil liberties will have to be curbed in order to combat terrorism in this country. By a two-to-one margin, Americans believe now that it *will not* be "necessary for the average person to give up some civil liberties" in the fight, 65% to 30%. Last year, however, a plurality of 49% said they thought some sacrifice of civil liberties would be required, compared to 43% who did not.

Trends in Attitudes on Terrorism

	-LA Times- <u>April '95</u>	<u>March '96</u>
	%	%
<i>Greater Threat From:</i>		
Outside U.S.	33	39
Inside U.S.	40	49
Neither/Both/DK	<u>27</u>	<u>12</u>
	100	100
<i>Anti-Terrorism Laws:</i>		
Too Strong	3	3
Too Weak	57	56
About Right	21	29
DK	<u>19</u>	<u>12</u>
	100	100
<i>To Curb Terrorism:</i>		
Need to Give up Some		
Civil Liberties	49	30
Not necessary	43	65
DK	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>
	100	100

These numbers, while remarkable in themselves, mask significant differences within the populace on many of the questions. Most striking is the way in which the races perceive the threat. Perhaps reflecting their fear of home-grown racism, non-whites were much more worried about terrorism in public places than were whites (51% vs. 31%) and less convinced that the source of the threat is external (33% vs. 41% of whites). On the other hand, fewer non-whites saw some chance of nuclear terrorism than did whites (62% vs. 74%). Another notable difference was that Independents and Republicans saw the terrorist threat as primarily internal to the country, while Democrats were evenly divided on whether it was mainly internal or external.

Young Worry Less

Young American adults were less worried about the threat of attack by nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction than were older respondents, perhaps because their generation did not grow up with the Cold War fears of nuclear holocaust and radioactive fallout from nuclear testing. Almost two out of three (65%) of 18 to 29 years olds said there was a chance of nuclear-chemical-biological terrorism, compared to 77% among the 30 to 49 year olds and 74% among 50 to 64 year olds. The younger people also worried considerably less about the danger of such an attack: 36% of the 18 to 29 year olds worried somewhat or a great deal compared to 44% of those 65 years old and older.

High school graduates were more worried (47% worried somewhat or a great deal) than college graduates (33%) about nuclear terrorism. Among regions, westerners saw more chance of nuclear attack, but southerners expressed the most worry of the regional respondents (19% worry a great deal vs. 9% in all other regions). Also surprising is that respondents who followed foreign news stories most closely saw no greater chance and had no greater worry of nuclear terrorism than those who followed domestic stories very closely.

A one-third minority of Americans say they are worried about terrorism in public places (21% somewhat and 13% a great deal). Women were much more concerned than men, older people more than younger ones, as well as the less educated and the poorest ones. More worried than average were regular listeners to talk radio shows (41%) and southerners (40%, with westerners least concerned at 28%).

A Threat From Within

Much as with perceptions of the nuclear threat, sharp age differences were found on *where* the threat comes from. While the population divided 49% internal vs. 39% external on the question, fewer than one in three respondents (29%) 65 years old and older considered the threat internal, while majorities (over 50%) of all younger age groups saw it that way. Regular talk show listeners were more convinced the threat was internal (59%) rather than external, as were Independents (57%) and Republicans (49%), with Democrats split evenly (43% and 43%) on the point.

An age division appeared again on the question of whether laws are too weak or not. Most Americans (56%) said they were, but only 48% of those 18 to 29 years old felt that way. Midwesterners, more than respondents in other regions, also believe the laws are inadequate.

Attitudes on Terrorism & Nuclear Attack By Race and Age

	---Race---			-----Age-----			
	<u>Total</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Non-White</u>	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Worry About Terrorism:							
Great Deal	13	10	32	10	10	14	25
Somewhat	21	21	19	19	22	22	21
Not much	27	28	17	24	27	24	29
Not at all	39	40	32	47	41	39	24
DK	<u>*</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Greater Threat From:							
Outside U.S.	39	41	33	42	38	28	51
Inside U.S.	49	49	51	51	55	53	29
Neither/Both/DK	<u>12</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	(N=751)	(N=619)	(N=126)	(N=165)	(N=310)	(N=142)	(N=126)
Chance of Nuclear Attack:							
Yes	72	74	62	65	77	74	67
No	25	24	32	33	23	19	26
DK	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>7</u>
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Worry About Nuc. Attack:							
Great Deal	13	12	22	11	12	16	16
Somewhat	27	28	26	25	29	25	28
Not much	32	32	27	35	30	35	28
Not at all	27	28	23	29	28	23	27
DK	<u>1</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	(N=749)	(N=596)	(N=147)	(N=158)	(N=328)	(N=133)	(N=127)

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

The survey results are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among a nationwide sample of 1,500 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period March 28-31, 1996. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on either Form 1 (N=751) or Form 2 (N=749), the sampling error is plus or minus 4 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE PRESS
MARCH 1996 NEWS INTEREST INDEX
-- FINAL TOPLINE --
March 28-31, 1996
N=1,500

Hello, I am _____ calling for Princeton Survey Research Associates in Princeton, New Jersey. We are conducting a telephone opinion survey for leading newspapers and TV stations around the country. I'd like to ask a few questions of the youngest male, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home. [IF NO MALE, ASK: May I please speak with the oldest female, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home?]

**ASK Q.'s 14, 14a, 15, 15a OF FORM 1 ONLY: [N=751]
ON ANOTHER SUBJECT...**

Q.14F1 How much, if at all, do you worry about terrorism when you're in public places here in the United States...
(READ)?

13 A great deal

21 Somewhat

27 Not much OR

39 Not at all

 * Don't know/Refused
100

Q.14aF1 These days, do you think the greater threat to America from terrorism comes from people outside this country or from people inside this country?

Los Angeles Times
April 1995

39 Outside 33

49 Inside 40

1 Neither (VOL) 1

9 Both (VOL) 21

 Don't know/Refused
100 100

Q.15F1 Do you think the federal anti-terrorism laws currently on the books in this country are too strong, too weak or about what they need to be?

Los Angeles Times
April 1995

3	Too strong	3
56	Too weak	57
29	About what they need to be	21
<u>12</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>19</u>
100		100

Q.15aF1 In order to curb terrorism in this country, do you think it will be necessary for the average person to give up some civil liberties, or not?

Los Angeles Times
April 1995

30	Necessary	49
65	Not necessary	43
<u>5</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>8</u>
100		100

ASK Q.16 AND Q.16a OF FORM 2 ONLY: [N=749]

Q.16F2 Do you think there is much of a chance that terrorists could use a nuclear, chemical, or biological weapon to attack a U.S. city, or don't you think there is much of a chance of this?

72	Yes, chance
25	Not much of a chance
<u>3</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

Q.16aF2 How much, if at all, do you worry about this...(READ)?

13	A great deal
27	Somewhat
32	Not much OR
27	Not at all
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	