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# 15 Years After 9/11, a Sharp Partisan Divide on Ability of Terrorists to Strike U.S.

*Remembering Sept. 11*

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# 15 Years After 9/11, a Sharp Partisan Divide on Ability of Terrorists to Strike U.S.

## Remembering Sept. 11

As the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11 approaches, partisan differences over the ability of terrorists to launch a major attack on the United States are now as wide as at any point dating back to 2002.

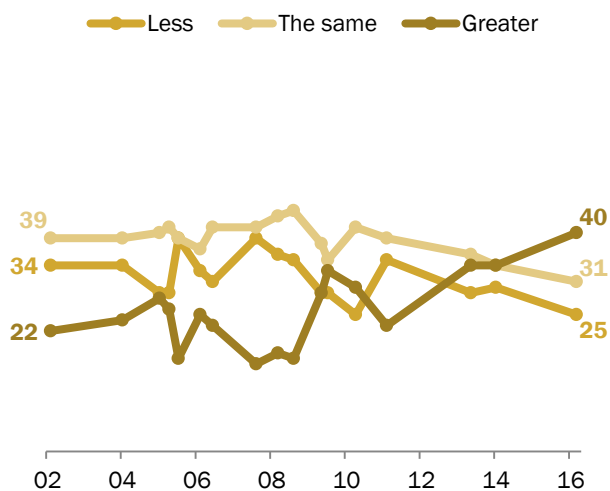
Currently, 40% of the public says that the ability of terrorists to launch another major attack on the United States is greater than it was at the time of the 9/11 attacks, which is the highest share expressing this view over the past 14 years. About a third (31%) say terrorists' abilities to attack are the same as at the time of 9/11, while just 25% say their ability to initiate a major attack is less than at that time.

The latest national survey by Pew Research Center, conducted Aug. 23-Sept. 2 among 1,201 adults, finds that the growth in the belief that terrorists are now better able to launch a major strike on the U.S. has come almost entirely among Republicans. Today, 58% of Republicans view the ability of terrorists to attack as greater than at the time of 9/11, up 18 percentage points since November 2013.

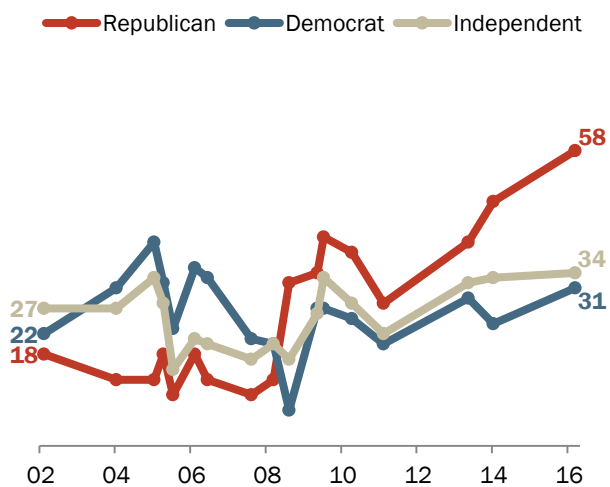
Only about a third of independents (34%) and 31% of Democrats say terrorists are now better able to strike the U.S. than they were then, and these views are similar to three years ago (32% of independents, 29% of Democrats).

### Growing belief that terrorists are more able to attack, driven by Republicans

*% who say ability of terrorists to launch another major attack on the U.S. is \_\_\_ than it was at Sept. 11 attacks*



*% who say ability of terrorists to launch major attack on the U.S. is greater than it was at time of Sept. 11 attacks*



Note: Don't know responses not shown.  
Source: Survey conducted Aug. 23-Sept. 2, 2016.

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Opinions about terrorists' capabilities to attack the U.S. have long been divided along partisan lines: During George W. Bush's presidency, Democrats were often more likely than Republicans to say the ability to terrorists to launch a major strike was greater than at the time of 9/11, while the reverse has been true during Barack Obama's administration. But this marks the first time in the past 14 years that a majority in either party has expressed this view.

The widening partisan gap in these attitudes is consistent with other recent measures of opinions on the government's ability to deal with terrorism. In April, for instance, 75% of Democrats said the U.S. government was doing very or fairly well in reducing the threat of terrorism; just 29% of Republicans said the same.

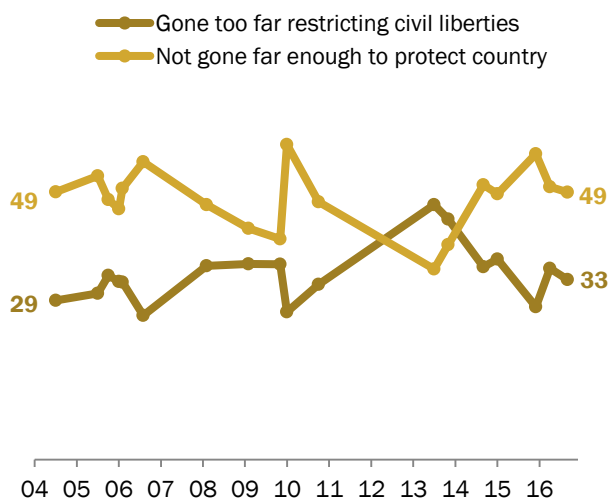
The current survey also finds that partisan differences in views about the tradeoff between protection from terrorism and civil liberties are about as large as at any point in more than a decade.

Currently, 49% of Americans say their bigger concern about the government's anti-terrorism policies is that they have not gone far enough to protect the country, while 33% say their bigger concern is that those policies have gone too far in restricting civil liberties.

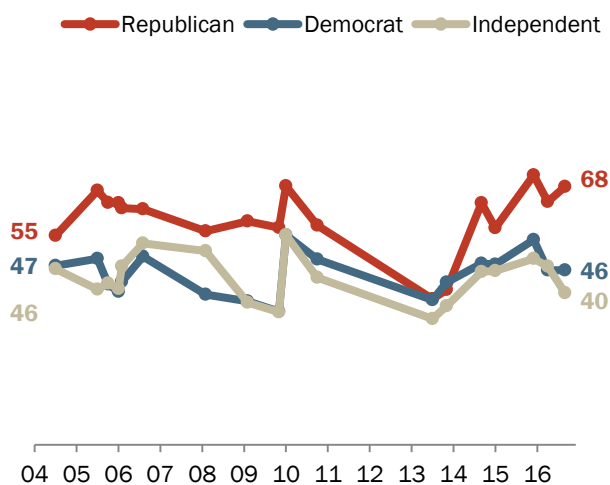
These views are little changed from April, but in December, after the terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California, somewhat more (56%) said their greater concern was that anti-terrorism policies had not gone far enough in protecting the country.

### More concern about protection from terrorism than civil liberties

% who say bigger concern about government's anti-terrorism policies is that they have ...



% who say bigger concern about gov't's anti-terrorism policies is they haven't gone far enough to protect U.S.



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Aug. 23-Sept. 2, 2016.

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**In July 2013**, following the revelations of the government’s telephone and digital surveillance programs, more Americans expressed concern that anti-terrorism policies had infringed on civil liberties (47%) than said they had done too little to protect against terrorism (32%) – the first time this had occurred in more than a decade of polling. Nearly identical percentages of Republicans (43%) and Democrats (42%) said their bigger concern was that polices had gone too far in restricting civil liberties.

But since then, following the emergence of ISIS and terrorist attacks in this country, opinions have shifted, especially among Republicans. The share of Republicans who say their bigger concern is that government policies have done too little to protect against terrorism has risen 30 percentage points since July 2013 (38% then, 68% today), while showing much less change among Democrats (38% then, 46% today).

## Remembering Sept. 11

Nearly 15 years after 9/11, the attacks of that day continue to be a powerful memory for most Americans. Fully 91% of adults today say they remember exactly where they were or what they were doing the moment they heard news about the Sept. 11 attacks.

The share of the public that say they have a memory of the moment today is little changed from what it was one year, five years and **10 years** after the terrorist attacks.

Wide majorities across all age groups recall exactly where they were or what they were doing when they heard the news. Even among those under 30, who were between the ages of three and 13 at the time, 83% today say they know exactly where they were or what they were doing when they heard. Older members of this age group, in particular, have a vivid memory from the day of the attacks (94% of those who are now 23 to 29).

Most adults also correctly recall 2001 as the year in which the Sept. 11 attacks occurred: 68% now say the attacks occurred in 2001, roughly unchanged from the share that correctly recalled the year in 2006 (70%).

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### 9/11 attacks remain an enduring memory for most

*Do you happen to remember exactly where you were the moment you heard news about Sept. 11 attacks?*

	Yes %	No %	DK %
Total	91	9	1=100
18-29	83	16	1=100
30-49	95	4	*=100
50-64	94	5	*=100
65+	87	13	1=100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Aug. 23-Sept. 2, 2016.

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As was the case 10 years ago, nearly three-quarters of those under 50 today identify 2001 as the year of the attacks today (74%). About half of those 65 and older today correctly recall the year of the attacks (53%). This share also is unchanged from that of five years after the attack, when 51% of those ages 65 and older were able to identify the year as 2001.

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### Majority recalls 2001 as year of 9/11 attacks

*% who correctly recall 2001 as the year of Sept. 11 attacks*

	<b>Aug 2006</b>	<b>Sept 2016</b>
	%	%
Total	70	68
18-29	79	75
30-49	72	74
50-64	72	63
65+	51	53

Note: Respondents were asked if they know what year the 9/11 attacks occurred. Those who said yes were asked which year, in an open-ended format.

Source: Survey conducted Aug. 23-Sept. 2, 2016.

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## Acknowledgements

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

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## Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted August 23-September 2, 2016 among a national sample of 1,201 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (301 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 900 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 536 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted under the direction of Abt SRBI. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see

<http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/>

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2014 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cell phone only, or both landline and cell phone), based on extrapolations from the 2015 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. The margins of error reported and statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, a measure of how much efficiency is lost from the weighting procedures.



The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

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*Survey conducted August 23-September 2, 2016*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	1,201	3.2 percentage points
Republican	347	6.0 percentage points
Democrat	382	5.7 percentage points
Independent	379	5.7 percentage points

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Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

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 undertakes all polling activity, including calls to mobile telephone numbers, in compliance with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act and other applicable laws.

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## Appendix: Topline questionnaire

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
LATE AUGUST 2016 SURVEY  
FINAL TOPLINE  
AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 2, 2016  
SURVEY DESIGN C N=1,201**

### ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

**ASK ALL:**

On a different subject, I have a few questions about the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon...

Q.17 Do you happen to remember EXACTLY where you were or what you were doing the MOMENT you heard the news about the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks?

Aug 23-Sep 2 2016		TREND FOR COMPARISON		
		Aug 17-21 2011 <sup>1</sup>	Aug 2006	Late Aug 2002
91	Yes, remember where they were/ what they were doing	97	95	97
9	No, don't remember	3	5	3
1	Don't know/Refused	0	*	*

**ASK ALL:**

Q.18 Do you happen to recall in what year the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks occurred? **[IF "YES"**  
**PROBE: Which year? DO NOT READ RESPONSES]**

Aug 23-Sep 2 2016		Aug 2006
3	Yes, 2000 or earlier	7
<b>68</b>	<b>Yes, 2001</b>	<b>70</b>
8	Yes, 2002 or later	9
21	No, don't remember/Refused	14

**ASK ALL:**

Q.19 Overall, do you think the ability of terrorists to launch another major attack on the U.S. is greater, the same, or less than it was at the time of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks?

	Greater	The same	Less	(VOL.) DK/Ref
Aug 23-Sep 2, 2016	40	31	25	5
Jul 8-14, 2014	34	34	30	2
Oct 30-Nov 6, 2013	34	36	29	2
Aug 17-21, 2011	23	39	35	3
Oct 13-18, 2010	30	41	25	4
Jan 6-10, 2010	33	35	29	3
Oct 28-Nov 8, 2009	29	38	29	4
Feb 4-8, 2009	17	44	35	4
Mid September, 2008	18	43	36	3
Late February, 2008	16	41	39	4

<sup>1</sup> In August 17-21 survey, the question asked as part of a list of things that have happened in the U.S. and around the world over the last 50 years.

**Q.19 CONTINUED...**

	<u>Greater</u>	<u>The same</u>	<u>Less</u>	<u>(VOL.) DK/Ref</u>
December, 2006	23	41	31	5
August, 2006	25	37	33	5
January, 2006	17	39	39	5
Late October, 2005	26	41	29	4
July, 2005	28	40	29	3
July, 2004	24	39	34	3
Late August, 2002	22	39	34	5

**ASK ALL:**

Q.20 What concerns you more about the government's anti-terrorism policies? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE OPTIONS 1 AND 2]**

	<u>They have gone too far in restricting the average person's civil liberties</u>	<u>They have not gone far enough to adequately protect the country</u>	<u>(VOL.) Both/Neither/ Approve of policies</u>	<u>(VOL.) DK/Ref</u>
Aug 23-Sep 2, 2016	33	49	13	5
Apr 12-19, 2016	35	50	11	4
Dec 8-13, 2015	28	56	11	5
Jan 7-11, 2015	37	49	8	6
Sep 2-9, 2014	35	50	9	6
Oct 30-Nov 6, 2013	44	39	9	7
Jul 17-21, 2013	47	35	11	7
Oct 13-18, 2010	32	47	11	10
Jan 6-10, 2010	27	58	8	8
Oct 28-Nov 8, 2009	36	40	13	11
Feb 4-8, 2009 <sup>2</sup>	36	42	9	13
Late February, 2008	36	47	9	8
August, 2006	26	55	11	8
February, 2006	33	50	10	7
January, 2006	33	46	12	9
Late October, 2005	34	48	10	8
July, 2005	31	52	10	7
July, 2004	29	49	11	11

**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

<sup>2</sup> In February 4-8, 2009, the question asked whether the policies "go too far in restricting the average person's civil liberties" or "do not go far enough to adequately protect the country."

**ASK ALL:**

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?

**ASK IF INDEP/NO PREF/OTHER/DK/REF (PARTY=3,4,5,9):**

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	(VOL.) No preference	(VOL.) Other party	(VOL.) DK/Ref	Lean Rep	Lean Dem
Aug 23-Sep 2, 2016	27	32	33	5	*	3	11	16
Aug 9-16, 2016	27	32	35	2	1	2	13	16
Jun 15-26, 2016	24	33	37	4	1	2	16	16
Apr 12-19, 2016	25	32	37	3	1	2	16	17
Mar 17-26, 2016	25	31	38	3	*	2	15	20
Jan 7-14, 2016	24	30	38	5	1	2	14	17
Dec 8-13, 2015	26	31	37	4	*	2	16	15
Aug 27-Oct 4, 2015	24	29	41	4	*	2	17	17
Sep 22-27, 2015	26	30	40	2	*	2	15	16
<b>Yearly Totals</b>								
2015	23.7	30.4	40.1	3.6	.4	1.8	16.4	17.3
2014	23.2	31.5	39.5	3.1	.7	2.0	16.2	16.5
2013	23.9	32.1	38.3	2.9	.5	2.2	16.0	16.0
2012	24.7	32.6	36.4	3.1	.5	2.7	14.4	16.1
2011	24.3	32.3	37.4	3.1	.4	2.5	15.7	15.6
2010	25.2	32.7	35.2	3.6	.4	2.8	14.5	14.1
2009	23.9	34.4	35.1	3.4	.4	2.8	13.1	15.7
2008	25.7	36.0	31.5	3.6	.3	3.0	10.6	15.2
2007	25.3	32.9	34.1	4.3	.4	2.9	10.9	17.0
2006	27.8	33.1	30.9	4.4	.3	3.4	10.5	15.1
2005	29.3	32.8	30.2	4.5	.3	2.8	10.3	14.9
2004	30.0	33.5	29.5	3.8	.4	3.0	11.7	13.4
2003	30.3	31.5	30.5	4.8	.5	2.5	12.0	12.6
2002	30.4	31.4	29.8	5.0	.7	2.7	12.4	11.6
2001	29.0	33.2	29.5	5.2	.6	2.6	11.9	11.6
2001 Post-Sept 11	30.9	31.8	27.9	5.2	.6	3.6	11.7	9.4
2001 Pre-Sept 11	27.3	34.4	30.9	5.1	.6	1.7	12.1	13.5
2000	28.0	33.4	29.1	5.5	.5	3.6	11.6	11.7
1999	26.6	33.5	33.7	3.9	.5	1.9	13.0	14.5
1998	27.9	33.7	31.1	4.6	.4	2.3	11.6	13.1
1997	28.0	33.4	32.0	4.0	.4	2.3	12.2	14.1
1996	28.9	33.9	31.8	3.0	.4	2.0	12.1	14.9
1995	31.6	30.0	33.7	2.4	.6	1.3	15.1	13.5
1994	30.1	31.5	33.5	1.3	--	3.6	13.7	12.2
1993	27.4	33.6	34.2	4.4	1.5	2.9	11.5	14.9
1992	27.6	33.7	34.7	1.5	0	2.5	12.6	16.5
1991	30.9	31.4	33.2	0	1.4	3.0	14.7	10.8
1990	30.9	33.2	29.3	1.2	1.9	3.4	12.4	11.3
1989	33	33	34	--	--	--	--	--
1987	26	35	39	--	--	--	--	--

**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**