



**National Center for  
Disaster Preparedness**

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**Mailman School of Public Health  
Columbia University**

# **The American Preparedness Project:**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Where the US Public Stands in 2011 on Terrorism, Security, and Disaster Preparedness**

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

**Survey administered by the Marist Institute for Public  
Opinion**

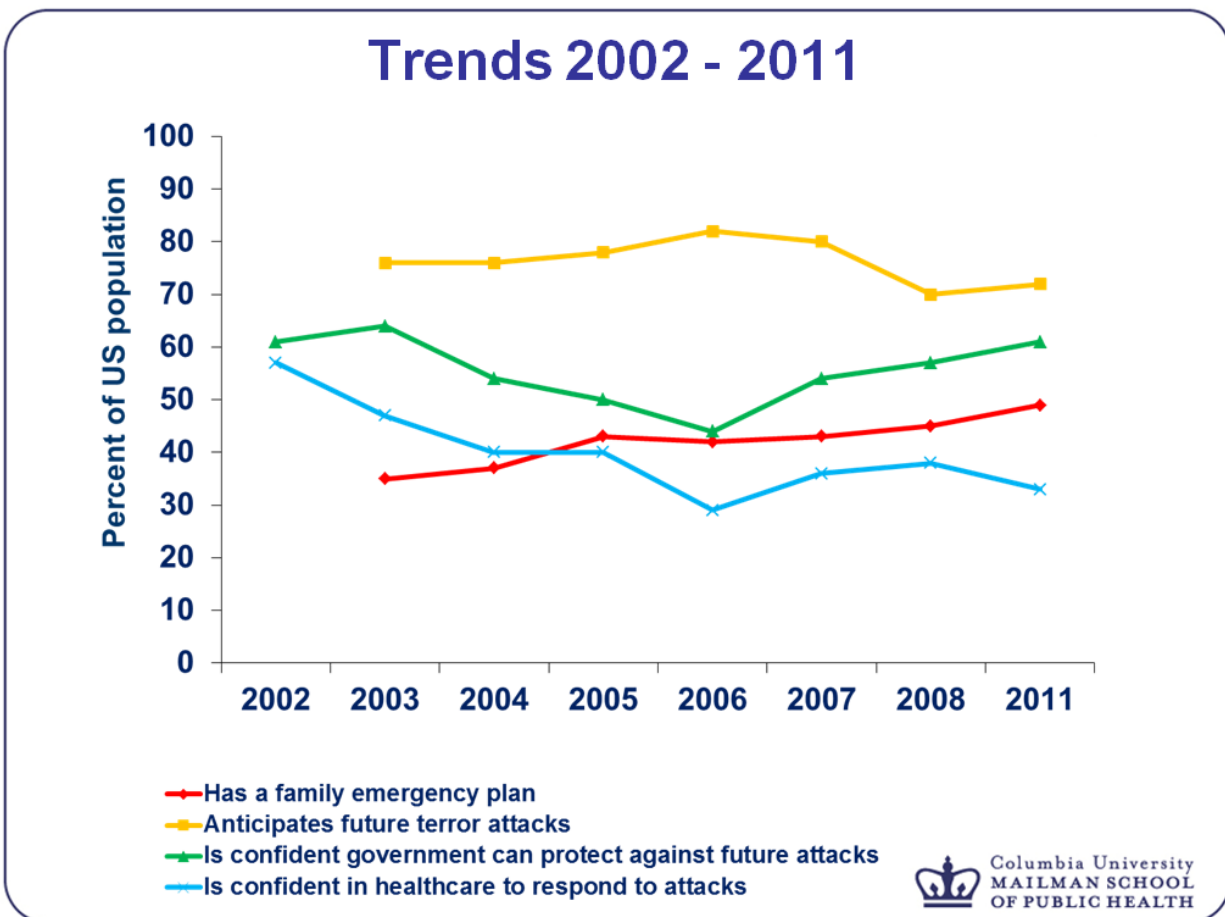
Direct all correspondence to:

National Center for Disaster Preparedness  
Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health  
215 West 125<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 303  
New York, NY 10027  
(646) 845-2300

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

Ten years after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, America is, in some aspects, a different country. Significant portions of the federal budget over the past decade have been spent on enhancing preparedness and security on the home front, and prosecuting terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. As part of its American Preparedness Project, which has tracked US attitudes on domestic preparedness and terrorism over the last ten years, the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health recently surveyed the US population to determine their current attitudes and behaviors regarding disaster preparedness and the prospect of domestic terrorism. NCDP and the Children's Health Fund had conducted this survey annually from 2002 to 2008. As in prior years, the Marist Institute for Public Opinion (MIPO) executed a survey designed by NCDP and CHF. Also as before, the 2011 survey included a mix of previously-asked questions and new questions inspired by recent world events. Trended questions asked about confidence in government; extent of personal and family preparedness; and perceptions of community preparedness. All questions are shown in Table 1.



## **Findings**

Based upon the responses that MIPO received from a nationwide telephone survey of 1,000 adults in early August, NCDP is able to report the following:

### **SECURITY AND CONFIDENCE**

Since inception, the surveys have sought to gauge Americans' level of concern that another 9/11 type attack may occur and their confidence that if another terrorist attack or major natural disaster happened, government would be ready and able to assist them.

- About two thirds of Americans think the US is safer now than on 9/11, up from a little more than one half 3 years ago when the question was first asked.
- Yet almost the same percentage of Americans are still worried about the possibility of another domestic terrorist attack today (72%) as in 2003 (76%), although concern has declined from its peak after the invasion of Iraq (83%).
- Americans' confidence in government to protect them from a terrorist attack, which declined sharply for five years after 9/11, has recovered to about the same level as immediately after the attacks. Today, 60% are confident in government's ability to protect them.
- Nationally, almost the same percentage (62%) expects that in the event of a terrorist attack, catastrophic natural or other major disaster, first responders would arrive to help them within several hours. Nearly one in three think it would take an hour or less.
- But they don't feel the same way about the health care system's ability to respond effectively to a biological, chemical or nuclear attack. Today, barely one third of Americans think the health system is up to the challenge, way down from nearly three-fifths after 9/11.

### **CITIZEN PREPAREDNESS.**

Also since inception, the surveys have inquired about both community level and individual preparedness to deal with the aftermath of a disaster. People have been asked about their communities' and schools' response and evacuation plans, and about their own family emergency plans.

- Less than half of Americans feel that their community has an adequate response plan for a disaster that gave no advance warning, such as an earthquake or a terrorist event.
- Since 2003, the proportion of families lacking an emergency preparedness plan has declined from nearly two thirds, but one half of American families still do not have a plan and 30% of those with plans still lack a critical item such as a flashlight or emergency food and water
- Likewise, although the proportion of parents unfamiliar with the emergency and evacuation plans at their kids' schools has come down from 45% four years ago, still more than one third do not know how their schools would be handling their children in an emergency.
- Latino respondents lag other racial and ethnic groups on all measures of family preparedness in the survey.

### **IMPACT OF MAJOR INTERNATIONAL NEWS EVENTS ON PERCEPTIONS OF TERRORISM RISK IN THE UNITED STATES**

This year, we asked whether the killing of Osama Bin Laden has made a terrorist attack in the United States more or less likely. In the light of the March nuclear power plant accident in Japan, we also asked for the first time if terrorists are more or less likely to attack nuclear power plants than other targets.

- Half of Americans seem to think that the death of Osama Bin Laden will not affect the likelihood of another terrorist attack in the United States, one third are worried it will increase the chance of another attack and one sixth believe that Bin Laden's death makes another attack less likely.
- Only one quarter of Americans think that nuclear power plants are more attractive terrorist targets than other kinds of facilities.
- Black Americans are more concerned than other groups that Bin Laden's death will lead to more terrorism in the U.S. and that terrorists will find nuclear power plants more attractive targets.

### **Methodology**

Between August 2 and August 4, 2011, MIPO interviewed by telephone 1000 adults 18 years of age and older, living in the continental United States. Telephone numbers were selected based upon a list of telephone exchanges from throughout the continental United States. The exchanges were selected to ensure that each region was represented in proportion to its population. To increase cover, this land-line sample

was supplemented by respondents reached through random dialing of cell phone numbers. The two samples were then combined. Results are statistically significant with  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points. The sample included 395 households with children and 345 households with school-aged children. Results for these subsets are statistically significant within  $\pm 4.9$  and  $\pm 5.3$  percentage points. The error margin increases for cross-tabulations.

### **About NCDP**

Established in 2003, the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health works to understand and improve the nation's capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. NCDP has four focus areas: system readiness, disaster recovery, citizen engagement, and vulnerable populations. NCDP carries out research and policy analysis in these areas, and provides education, training and technical support to public health workers, local and regional governments, and public health, hospital, and community partners.

[www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu](http://www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu)

### **About the Marist Institute**

The Marist Institute for Public Opinion (MIPO) is a survey research center at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York. Founded in 1978, MIPO is home to the Marist Poll and regularly measures public opinion at the local, state, and national level. The Marist Poll is highly respected and is often cited by journalists and analysts around the globe.

<http://maristpoll.marist.edu/the-marist-institute-for-public-opinion/>

**Table 1. US Attitudes and Behaviors Regarding Preparedness and Terrorism (n=1,000)**

		Percentage of National Adults
In the event of a major disaster where there was NO WARNING such as a terrorist attack or earthquake, do you think your community has an adequate emergency response plan currently in place, or not?	Yes, is adequate	44%
	No, is not adequate	47%
	Unsure	9%
In the event of a major disaster in your community, such as a terrorist attack or a catastrophic natural disaster, how long do you believe it will take first responders, such as fire, police, paramedics, or others such as the National Guard to arrive and assist you if needed:	Under one hour	32%
	Within several hours	30%
	Within a day	19%
	Within several days	19%
	Never	0%
Are you very concerned, concerned, not very concerned, or not concerned at all about the possibility there will be more terror attacks in the United States?	Very concerned	23%
	Concerned	49%
	Not very concerned	19%
	Not concerned at all	9%
Overall, are you very confident, confident, not too confident, or not confident at all in the government to protect the area where you live from a terrorist attack?	Very confident	12%
	Confident	48%
	Not too confident	25%
	Not confident at all	13%
	Unsure	2%
In general, how confident are you that the health care system is ready to respond effectively to a biological, chemical, or nuclear attack: very confident, confident, not too confident, or not confident at all?	Very confident	5%
	Confident	28%
	Not too confident	43%
	Not confident at all	23%
	Unsure	2%
Do you think the country is safer now than it was on September 11th, 2001?	Yes	63%
	No	34%
	Unsure	3%
Do you have a family emergency preparedness plan that all family members know about?	Yes	49%
	No	51%
	Unsure	1%
Does your family emergency preparedness plan include all, some, or none of the following: at least two days of food and water, a flashlight, a portable radio and spare batteries, emergency phone numbers, and a meeting place for family members in case of evacuation?	All	35%
	Some	13%
	None	1%
	Does not have emergency preparedness plan	51%
<i>Among parents of school-aged children:</i> Thinking about your <oldest/youngest> child in daycare or school, are you very familiar, familiar, not very familiar, or not familiar at all with the emergency or evacuation plan at your child's school?	Very familiar	25%
	Familiar	39%
	Not very familiar	18%
	Not familiar at all	18%
When considering air travel, are you concerned a great deal, a good amount, not very much, or not at all about a terrorist bomb or attack?	A great deal	13%
	A good amount	18%
	Not very much	40%
	Not at all	28%
Have you flown on a commercial airplane in the past year?	Flown in past year	44%
	Not flown in past year	56%
When you hear official announcements in public places or on mass transit urging you to be alert and report suspicious activity, do you pay a great deal of attention to them, a good amount, not very much, or none at all?	A great deal	33%
	A good amount	41%
	Not very much	17%
	Not at all	7%
	Unsure	2%
Do you think the killing of Osama Bin Laden has made a terrorist attack in the United States more likely, less likely, or has it not made any difference?	More likely	32%
	Less likely	15%
	Not made any difference	51%
	Unsure	2%
Compared to other potential targets of a terrorist attack, do you think nuclear power plants are more likely, less likely, or just as likely to be attacked?	More likely	25%
	Less likely	15%
	The same	57%
	Unsure	3%