

**America Rebounds:
A National Study of Public Response to the September 11th Terrorist
Attacks**

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Prepared by
Tom W. Smith
Kenneth A. Rasinski
and Marianna Toce

N O R C
*A national organization for research
at the University of Chicago*

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On September 11th America had the tragic misfortune of being the target of the largest terrorist attack in history. In the span of a few minutes more than 5,000 people were murdered. Americans watched in disbelief as two commercial airplanes commandeered by terrorists rammed into the World Trade Center buildings, and shuddered as the two structures—still filled with people—crumbled to the ground. What did Americans do, think, feel? Were our views of the world and our own personal safety affected? How has this affected our feelings about being American?

To answer these questions, NORC at the University of Chicago received generous funding from the National Science Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Russell Sage Foundation to conduct the National Tragedy Study (NTS), a random telephone survey of 2,126 U.S. residents, querying individuals about issues ranging from how they heard about the tragedy to any special steps they took to help others in need. This report examines responses of people across the nation and features a special examination of Americans living in the New York area.

General Trends

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11th, the American people have shown great resiliency. National pride, confidence in institutions, and faith in people and human nature all have gained ground, with positive assessments generally outnumbering negative judgments. As monumental as some of the changes in values were, these shifts were generally not accompanied by major alterations in the underlying demographic structure of support for these values. With some exceptions noted below, those factors that differentiated between people before the terrorist attacks continued to do so afterwards. Moreover, in those cases when change did occur, they both included instances of greater division among groups as well as declines in differences. There was no overall notable trend of people drawing together and of differences across groups disappearing.

National Pride

General Trends

Even before the attacks, America had one of the highest levels of national pride in the world (Smith and Jarkko, 1998). After the attacks, all measures of general pride increased (see Table 1). Fully 97 percent agreed that they would rather be Americans than citizens of any of other country (an increase of 7 percentage points), and 85 percent felt that America was a better country than others (up 5 points). Nearly half (49%) thought that the “world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like the Americans”—an increase of 11 points, while disagreement with the idea that there are aspects of America to be ashamed about jumped from 18 to 40 percent (up 22 points). Agreement with the idea that people should support their country even when it was in the wrong underwent little change, rising from 31 to 33 percent.

Table 1
**Changes in National Pride, Confidence in Institutions,
 Misanthropy, and World Views**

	GSS ^a	National	NTS 2001 NY
A. National Pride ^b			
General Pride:			
I would rather be a citizen of America than of any other country in the world. (Agree)	90.4	97.4	92.4
Generally speaking, America is a better country than most other countries. (Agree)	80.2	85.3	81.0
The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like the Americans. (Agree)	38.2	49.3	44.0
People should support their country even if the country is in the wrong. (Agree)	30.9	32.7	32.9
There are some things about America today that makes me feel ashamed of America. (Disagree)	18.4	40.0	46.4
Domain-Specific, Very Proud of America for...			
Its scientific and technological achievements	48.6	75.0	71.4
America's armed forces	47.1	79.5	75.7
Its history	47.1	68.3	58.1
Its achievements in the arts and literature	28.2	56.4	61.9
America's economic achievements	28.0	59.9	65.5
The way democracy works	26.8	60.6	54.7
Its political influence in the world	20.2	38.7	33.7
Its fair and equal treatment of all groups in society	16.8	34.4	40.8

B. Confidence in Institutions^c

Great Confidence in...	GSS	NTS 2001	
		National	New York
The Military	39.7	77.4	68.4
Major Companies	28.4	31.7	31.2
Banks and Financial Institutions	29.5	44.1	38.7
Organized Religion	27.6	47.3	38.6
Executive Branch of the Federal Govt	13.5	51.5	48.0
Congress	12.7	43.4	43.8

C. Misanthropy^d

People are...	GSS	NTS 2001 National	NTS 2001 New York
Fair	51.6	63.2	61.7
Helpful	45.7	66.9	68.7
Trustworthy	35.0	41.3	30.9

D. World Views^e

World View	GSS	NTS 2001 National	NTS 2001 New York
World filled with evil and sin (1-3)	15.0	18.1	16.7
Mid-point, don't know (4, 8)	26.8	19.8	25.7
There is much goodness in the world which hints at God's goodness(5-7)	58.0	62.1	57.8
Human nature is basically good (1-3)	55.4	54.4	53.6
Mid-point, don't know (4, 8)	25.7	18.1	19.6
Human nature is fundamentally perverse and corrupt (5-7)	18.9	27.5	26.8

Source: GSS 1996-2000; NTS 2001

^aData are from the most recent round of the GSS to include the question.

^bThe national pride questions were asked on the 1996 GSS.

^cThe confidence in institutions questions were asked on the 2000 GSS.

^dThe misanthropy questions were asked on the 2000 GSS.

^eThe world view questions were asked respectively on the 2000 and 1998 GSSs.

National pride in specific domains showed even more gains than the general pride measures. Leading the pride list in the 2001 NTS was the armed forces, with 80 percent very proud of this institution, up 32 points. Coming in second was pride in science and technology (75% very proud, up 26 points). This was followed by those very proud of America's history (68%, up 21 points), the way democracy works (61%, up 34 points), economic achievements (60%, up 32 points), achievements in the arts and literature (56%, up 28 points), political influence in the world (39%, up 19 points), and America's fair and equal treatment of all groups in society (34%, up 17 points). Pride was not only up for domains closely linked to the terrorist attacks (e.g., the military and democracy), but for domains with no direct connection (e.g., the arts). This indicates that a generalized tide of national pride tended to lift pride in all areas.

While still high relative to pre-attack levels, pride in America was mixed among New Yorkers. In the NTS sample, a smaller percentage of New Yorkers compared to the rest of the country agreed that they would rather be Americans than citizens of any other country (92%). However, New Yorkers remained on the same positive plateau as the rest of the nation in their agreement that the world would be a better place if others were more like Americans and with their judgment that American is a better country than most other countries. Their resilience during

adversity showed in that a greater percentage of them than the nation as a whole *disagreed* that there are some things about America that we should be ashamed of (46%).

With regard to specific elements of American society, the high level of pride found among the national sample after the attack was also notable among New Yorkers with a few exceptions. Fewer New Yorkers expressed a great pride in our history (58%) and our democracy (55%). However, more New Yorkers expressed great pride in our economic achievements (66%) and the fair and equal treatment of all groups (41%).

Demographic Changes

Not only in the United States, but in virtually all other countries, both general and domain-specific national pride is higher among older cohorts and lower among the young (Smith & Jarkko, 1998). For example, in 1996, 14 percent of those under 30, compared with 50 percent of those 65 and older, were very proud of America's democracy. By the 2001 NTS, 48 percent of those under 30 and 74 percent of those 65 and older were very proud. Similarly, in 1996, 68 percent of those under 30 and 90 percent of those 65 and older agreed that America was better than other countries, while in 2001, 78 percent of those under 30 and 90 percent of those 65 and older thought so.

One notable change among cohorts was for pride in the military. In 1996, pride in the military showed a curvilinear relation, being high among the under-30 Gulf-war cohort (45% very proud), low among the 40- to 49-year-old Vietnam-war cohort (35% very proud), and peaking among the 65 and older World War II cohort (70% very proud). In the 2001 NTS, this changed into the more typical pattern, with pride lowest among those under 30 (74% very proud) and then steadily growing to a high among those 65 and older (86% very proud).

Both before and after the terrorist attacks, general national pride was highest among the less educated and lowest among the better educated. For example, in 1996, 59 percent of those without a high school degree thought that other countries should be more like the United States, compared to only 26 percent of those with college degrees. In the 2001 NTS, this statement was endorsed by 76 percent of those without a high school degree, a 17 point increase, compared to 32 percent, or a six point increase, of college graduates.

Blacks and Whites also continue to differ in their level of national pride. Blacks have lower general and domain-specific pride than Whites do. For example, in 1996, 34 percent of Blacks and 51 percent of Whites were very proud of the military; in the 2001 NTS, 68 percent of Blacks and 81 percent of Whites were very proud. Similarly, in 1996, 87 percent of Blacks and 92 percent of Whites indicated they would rather be Americans than citizens of any other country; in 2001, 95 percent of Blacks and 98 percent of Whites felt this way.

Some convergence did occur between men and women on domain-specific pride. In 1996, men had more pride than women in all eight domains (seven being statistically significant). In the 2001 NTS, men and women did not significantly differ on four of the domains (democracy, the arts, history, and equal treatment of groups). Furthermore, women had greater pride than men did in America's political influence, although men still had more pride than women in economic achievements, science, and the military.

Partisan differences have not been notable on general pride, and the small differences have changed little. Independents and those without any partisan leaning consistently show the least national pride, and Democrats and Republicans differ little from each other. On domain-specific national pride, the nonpartisans also generally have the least pride. Both in 1996 and the 2001 NTS, Democrats led Republicans in being proud of the arts and in equal treatment of groups, while Republicans had more pride in America's democracy, political influence in the world, economic achievements, science, the military, and history. The partisan differences are generally moderate in size. For example, in 1996, 28 percent of Democrats and 34 percent of Republicans were very proud of the way American democracy was working, and in the 2001 NTS, 60 percent of Democrats and 71 percent of Republicans were very proud.

Confidence in Institutions

General Trends

Confidence in all institutions rose across the United States, with the largest gains for the military and governmental bodies. In the 2001 NTS, the highest confidence was in the military, with 77 percent having a great deal of confidence (up by 27 percentage points). This was followed by 52 percent with a great deal of confidence in the executive branch of the federal government (up 38 points—more than a tripling of those with a great deal of confidence). Then came those with a great deal of confidence in organized religion (47%, up 19 points), banks and financial institutions (44%, up 15 points), and Congress (43%, up 31 points, also more than tripling). The only institution showing no appreciable gain was major companies, with 32 percent having a great deal of confidence in these, up just 3 percentage points. It is likely that the slowing economy prior to the terrorist attacks had already eroded confidence in business, and that post-attack concerns about the economic repercussions notably dampened the general surge in confidence.

For all institutions, these were the highest confidence levels measured in nearly three decades. Confidence in religion, banks, and companies was slightly above previous highs, while confidence in the military, the Executive Branch, and Congress greatly exceeded all previous readings. Current confidence in the military surpassed the 61 percent who had a great deal of confidence in 1991 immediately following victory in the Gulf War; confidence in the Executive Branch of government and in the Congress were both almost double their previous highs set back in early 1973, when 29 percent had a great deal of confidence in the Executive Branch, and 23 percent, a great deal of confidence in Congress.

Compared to the nation as a whole, those in New York showed less confidence in America's banks and financial institutions (39%) and in America's military (68%). However, for major companies, organized religion, the executive branch of the federal government and Congress there were no differences between New York and the nation.

The gains found overall in national pride, confidence in institutions, and the especially large increases for the military and government all follow the well-established, "rally-around-the-flag" effect. During times of crisis, particularly those involving foreign threats, Americans consistently stand behind their country and its leaders and express more approval of them.

Demographic Changes

Confidence in institutions did not vary greatly by age, although different patterns exist for different institutions. In the 2001 NTS, confidence in banks, companies, and organized religion was highest among those 65 and older, while confidence in the Executive Branch, Congress, and the military was greatest among those under 30.

Prior to the terrorist attacks, confidence in economic institutions was higher among the better educated, confidence in the military was higher among the less educated, and confidence in religious and political institutions differed little by education. These patterns generally continued in the 2001 NTS. The one major switch was in confidence in business. In 2000, 15 percent of those under 30 and 40 percent of those 65 and older had a great deal of confidence. By September 2001, confidence among the young rose to 37 percent, while among those 65 and older it marginally fell to 35 percent, eliminating a strong, regular association of confidence in business increasing with age.

The terrorist attacks seem to have boosted the confidence of Whites more than of Blacks. In 2000, Whites had more confidence than Blacks only in economic institutions, but in the 2001 NTS, White confidence exceeded Black confidence on all institutions (although the White lead was not statistically significant for religion). For example, in 2000, 11 percent of Whites and 15 percent of Blacks had a great deal of confidence in Congress, but in 2001, 44 percent of Whites and 27 percent of Blacks had a great deal of confidence (a difference of 17 percentage points). Similarly, in 2000, 41 percent of Whites and 35 percent of Blacks had a great deal of confidence in the military (a nonstatistically significant difference of 6 percentage points). However, in 2001, 78 percent of Whites and 69 percent of Blacks had a great deal of confidence in the military (a 9-point statistically significant difference).

Men and women differed little in confidence in institutions either before or after the terrorist attacks. Men do have somewhat more confidence in business and the military than women; the male lead in military confidence narrowed slightly from 12 percentage points in 2000 to 7 points in the 2001 NTS.

Partisan differences regarding institutions are often large, and some have undergone major shifts. First, both in 2000 and the 2001 NTS, confidence has typically been lowest among the independents and the politically uncommitted. Second, Republicans have had more confidence in banks and businesses than Democrats in 2000 and 2001. For example, in 2000, 28 percent of Democrats and 33 percent of Republicans had a great deal of confidence in banks, and in 2001, 42 percent of Democrats and 50 percent of Republicans did so. Third, Republicans have led Democrats in confidence in the military both in 2000 (by 7 percentage points) and in 2001 (by 11 percentage points). Fourth, partisan differences on organized religion dissipated. In 2000, 27 percent of Democrats and 34 percent of Republicans had a great deal of confidence in religion. In 2001, 51 percent of both groups had a great deal of confidence. Fifth, partisan difference towards governmental bodies have shifted. In 2000, there was little difference in views towards Congress, with 12 percent of Democrats and 14 percent of Republicans having a great deal of confidence. In 2001, the partisan divide widened somewhat, with 43 percent of Democrats and 50 percent of Republicans having a great deal of confidence.

Notable changes occurred for confidence in the Executive Branch of government. In 2000, when the Democrats controlled the White House, 19 percent of Democrats and 11 percent of Republicans had a great deal of confidence in the Executive Branch. With the Republicans taking over the White House in 2001, one would expect the partisan alignment to flip over following the well-documented, party-in-power effect (Smith, Taylor, and Mathiowetz, 1980). This occurred, with 45 percent of Democrats and 72 percent of Republicans having a great deal of confidence. The large magnitude of the partisan difference (more three times greater than in 2000) indicates that pronounced differences still exist in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

Misanthropy and World Views

General Trends

More surprising than the growing national pride were the gains in faith in people in general. A standard measure of misanthropy that asks whether most people are fair, helpful, and trustworthy showed positive shifts (see Table 1). Two-thirds said that most people are helpful (an increase of 21 percentage points), 63 percent thought that people in general are fair (up 12 points), and 41 percent feel that most people are trustworthy (up 6 points). These increases suggest that judgments about people in general were not undermined by the acts of the terrorists, but probably buoyed by post-attack responses to the terrorism. The especially large gain in positive evaluations of helpfulness probably reflects both the well-covered rescue and relief efforts and the many personal acts of charity reported elsewhere in this study. The relatively small gains in trust may have been because of the covert nature of the terrorist attacks, and because heightened post-attack security measures raised questions about trusting people.

The current judgment that most people are helpful is the highest ever recorded, topping the 59 percent who thought so in 1978. The present evaluations of fairness are the second highest reading, just below the 64 percent thinking that most people were fair in 1978. Only trust was not notably higher than usual, being just slightly above the 30-year average of 40 percent saying that most people are trustworthy.

The changes in people's judgments about human nature and the world were more mixed. Most people continued to hold positive world views and judgments, but people did seem to become both more positive and more negative, with fewer who were unsure or held neutral positions. In regards to whether the world is "filled with evil and sin" or is a place of "much goodness," 62 percent were optimistic (up 4 points), 18 percent were pessimistic (up 3 points), and 20 percent were neutral or unsure (down 7 points). Regarding whether human nature is "fundamentally perverse and corrupt" or "basically good," 54 percent had a positive view of human nature (down 1 point), 28 percent had a negative perspective (up 9 points), and 18 percent were neutral or undecided (down 8 points). New Yorkers were much like the nation in their views about goodness in the world, human nature and their fellow human beings with one notable exception. Fewer New Yorkers (31%) indicated that they thought that most people could be trusted when compared to the rest of the nation.

Demographic Changes

Misanthropy is much higher among younger adults than older adults, and the terrorist attacks increased this difference on two of three measures (see Table 2). For trustworthiness, the effects were actually in the opposite direction, with trust falling for those under 30 and rising for all older groups. Younger adults also had more pessimistic views of the world and human nature than older adults both before and after the attacks.

Table 2.
Differences in Misanthropy by Age, 2000 and NTS 2001

	18–29	65+	Old – Young
% Fair			
2000	38.2	60.2	+ 22.0
2001 (NTS)	51.1	69.8	+ 18.7
% Helpful			
2000	31.1	53.7	+ 22.6
2001 (NTS)	49.1	82.1	+ 33.0
% Trustworthy			
2000	26.4	36.6	+ 10.2
2001 (NTS)	18.5	48.0	+ 29.5

Misanthropy is consistently higher among the less educated, and this basic relationship has not been changed by recent events. However, educational differences about helpfulness did narrow. In 2000, 35 percent of those with less than a high school degree and 57 percent of those with a college degree thought most people were helpful—a difference of 22 percentage points. In the 2001 NTS, 65 percent of those not finishing high school and 70 percent of the college graduates felt that most people were helpful, a difference of only 5 points. Likewise, the less educated have been more negative about human nature both now and in the past. Judgments about evil in the world have shifted, however. In 2000, 48 percent of the less educated and 69 percent of college graduates saw the world as showing God’s goodness. After the terrorist attacks, this belief rose among the less educated to 65 percent, while falling among the best educated to 63 percent, thereby reducing the educational gap from 21 to only 2 percentage points.

Blacks traditionally have much less faith in people than Whites do (Smith, 1997). The racial differences on whether people are trustworthy and fair have remained following the terrorist attacks (trust is 46% for Whites and 15% for Blacks, and fair is 67% for Whites and 46% for Blacks). However, differences on whether people are helpful disappeared. In 2000, 49 percent of Whites said people are helpful while 33 percent of Blacks did, a difference of 16 percentage points. In the 2001 NTS, 67 percent of Whites said people are helpful, while 63 percent of Blacks did, a difference of only 4 percentage points (not statistically significant). In addition, before the terrorist attacks, Blacks viewed the world and human nature more negatively than Whites; afterward, the racial difference on human nature remained. But while Blacks were less likely than Whites to see the world as showing God’s goodness in 2000 (53 and 60%, respectively), this reversed in the 2001 NTS, with 62 percent of Whites and 67 percent of Blacks seeing God’s goodness in the world.

Men and women differed little on misanthropy before and after the terror attacks. The only significant difference was that men appeared to be a little more trusting than women (a 5-point difference in 2000 and a 7-point difference in September 2001). Nevertheless, both before and after the terrorist attacks, women have had a more positive view of the world and of human nature than men have had. For example, in 2000, 61 percent of women and 54 percent of men saw God's goodness, a difference of 7 points. In the 2001 NTS, 68 percent of women and 56 percent of men did so, a difference of 12 points.

Finally, Independents and the politically unaligned are a little more misanthropic than either Republicans or Democrats. Before the terrorist attacks, Republicans were more likely to see people as helpful, fair, and trustworthy, but the difference between Republicans and Democrats was not statistically significant after the attacks. Republicans and Democrats differed little on their views of the world and human nature either before or after the terrorist attacks.

Actions Taken After the Terrorist Attacks

Many were moved by the outpouring of sympathy and attempts to donate blood reported by the media. Reports of citizens donating money to various relief funds were also reported, and many opportunities to donate were communicated or sponsored by the media. The NTS survey confirmed that the majority of Americans engaged in positive civic actions after the terrorist attacks (see Table 3). Almost half (49%) contributed to charities, 24 percent donated or tried to donate blood, and 8 percent did extra volunteer work for an organization. A full 59 percent did at least one of these actions (39% did one, 18% did two, and 2% did all three of these). Many Americans also took defensive actions. Seventeen percent stocked up on food, gas, or other necessities and 13 percent avoided going to certain places like government buildings or the downtown areas of large cities (21 percent did one of these and 5 percent did both). One-third did not engage in either any positive or defensive behaviors, 41 percent carried out only positive acts, 8 percent took only defensive steps, and 18 percent did both.

Citizens in New York differed from the rest of the nation in some actions that they took in response to the attack. While the percentage of New Yorkers stockpiling or giving money to charity did not differ from the rest of the nation, New Yorkers were more likely to donate or attempt to donate blood (35%), and more likely to report doing volunteer work (15%).

Positive actions were engaged in by more women than men (62% vs. 55%), by more younger people (67% of those under 30, vs. 42% of those 65 and older), by more of the better educated (64% of college graduates vs. 42% of those who did not finish high school), by more persons with higher incomes (62% of those earning over \$40,000 a year, vs. 55% of those with incomes below \$40,000), by more persons who had never married than those currently married or widowed (64% for never married, vs. 59% for married and 41% for widowed), by those with children under 18 (65% with children vs. 55% without), and by independents (63%) as opposed to Democrats (60%) and Republicans (54%).

Table 3
Behavioral Changes After the Terrorist Attack

	Nation	New York
Stocked up on gas, food, other necessities	17%	14%
Gave money, clothing, or other items to charity	49%	51%
Avoided going to a specific place like a government building or the downtown of a large city	13%	32%
Donated blood or tried to donate blood	24%	35%
Did extra volunteer work for an organization	8%	15%

Question Wording: Since last Tuesday/September 11th, did you do any of the following in direct response to the attacks in New York City and Washington DC?

**Comparison of Public Response
to the September 11th Terrorist Attacks and the John F. Kennedy Assassination**

Initial Reactions

In 1963 NORC conducted a national survey during the week after President Kennedy was assassinated (Sheatsley and Feldman, 1964). The 2001 NTS used many of the same questions asked in 1963 with the idea of being able to make comparisons in public response to the two tragic events. The vast majority of the public learned about the Kennedy assassination and the September 11th terrorist attacks within a half-hour of them happening. In 1963, about the same share of the public learned about Kennedy’s assassination from the mass media (47%) as from individual contact (49%) (see Table 4A). Television and radio each reached similar sized segments (24% and 23%, respectively), and among individualized contacts, face-to-face encounters outnumbered phone calls 36 percent to 13 percent. In the 2001 NTS, more people learned about the terrorist attacks from the mass media (59%) than from individualized contacts (30%). Among the mass media, television dominated, reaching 37 percent; radio came second with 21 percent, with the Internet being the initial source for only 1 percent. Among individualized contacts, phone calls and in-person messages each reached about 15 percent of the public. In the New York sample, more than twice the percentage than in the national sample (23% v. 11%) indicated that they heard about the event in a way *other* than those ways listed above. A further examination shows that half of those New Yorkers saying they had witnessed the event in some other way reported seeing the event directly.

In both 1963 and the 2001 NTS, about half of Americans learned about the events at home, just under one-third were at work, and about one-fifth were elsewhere (e.g., driving, shopping, at school) (Table 4A). In 1963, somewhat more people were with someone else when they first learned of the event than in 2001 (68% vs. 59%) (Table 4A). Perhaps to overcome the greater isolation that came from initially learning about the tragedies while alone, more people in 2001 reached out to others than in 1963. More people in 2001 said they felt like talking to other

people about the tragedy (74% vs. 54%), reported being contacted by others on the day of the event (48% vs. 38%), and contacted others on the day of the event (67% vs. 37%) (Table 4B).¹

More residents in New York (54%) than in the nation reported that they had received telephone calls, email, or that someone had come to talk to them about the attack on the day of the attack, even though neither group reported making more contacts. One possible explanation is that friends and relatives, perhaps from out of town, called to check in. As with others in the nation, many New Yorkers wanted to talk to others about the event, but the desire to talk was no greater than in the rest of the nation

After learning about Kennedy's assassination, most people (54%) did not continue their normal activities; 25 percent carried on as usual, but found this difficult; and 20 percent continued pretty much as usual (Table 4C). The reaction in 2001 was similar; 49 percent stopped their usual activities, 27 percent carried on with difficulty, and 24 percent continued as normal. The level of disruption of daily activities felt by residents in the New York area surpassed that of the rest of the nation, likely due at least in part to the evacuations and other situational difficulties due to the attack. In New York, only 10 percent said that they could carry on their usual activities without difficulty. Seventy-one percent of New Yorkers said that they were *not* able to continue with their usual activities, compared to 49 percent of the rest of the country.

In terms of initial emotional response and feelings, the public reacted similarly to these two tragedies. In 1963, 30 percent saw themselves as more upset than others were, 60 percent as equally upset, 8 percent as less upset, and 2 percent did not know (Table 4C). In 2001, 24 percent were more upset, 64 percent as upset, 8 percent less upset, and 3 percent did not know. Significantly more residents (27%) in the New York area reported that they believed they were *very much* more upset than other people when they heard the news. Their frame of reference is unknown, but their response is an indication that they were affected deeply.

Also, after both events, about half of the public could remember another time when they had the "same sort of feelings" as when they learned of the tragedies (47% in 1963 and 49% in 2001) (Table 4C). However, more of those in New York were *not* able to recall a time when they had felt this way before (60%) when compared to the rest of the nation.

People did differ slightly in turning to prayer. In 1963, 75 percent said "special prayers" in the aftermath of the events; this was topped in 2001 by 84 percent offering prayers. In spite of the depth of their response overall, fewer residents of New York (78%) reported saying a special prayer when they heard the news about the attacks.

People also differed greatly in the nature of the feelings and concerns they had (see Table 5). After the assassination in 1963, the most common feeling was being ashamed that such an event happened (50% saying it was among their very deepest feelings). This was followed closely by anger (44%). The next most common feeling was worry about how the political situation in the country would be affected (19%), confusion over how to feel (18%), and worries about international relations (16%). Relatively rarely mentioned were concerns "if anybody could really

¹The initial terrorist attack occurred almost 5 hours earlier than Kennedy's assassination so this longer time period to make or receive contacts might also help to explain the greater contact in 2001.

be safe in this country these days” (10%), how one’s own life would be affected (9%), and whether Kennedy had brought his death on himself (2%).

In 2001, the dominant reaction was anger (65%, up 21 percentage points). This was followed by worries about how one’s own life would be affected (28%, up 19 points) and whether anyone was safe (27%, up 17 points), feeling ashamed (22%, down 28 points), concerns about foreign relations (20%, up 4 points) and domestic politics (17%, down 2 points), and confusion (16%, down 2 points). The idea that the nation brought this on itself was felt by only 6 percent (up 4 points). In sum, anger and concerns about personal repercussions were up sharply compared to reactions after President Kennedy’s assassination. Feelings of being ashamed were down notably. Most other concerns were at similar levels after both events.

The anger was intensified among New York residents. More than 73 percent of New Yorkers reported experiencing angry that someone would do such a terrible thing, compared to 65 percent nationally. A higher percentage of New Yorkers than those in the rest of the country expressed concerns about how their own lives would be affected by the attack (40%). Similarly, more worried about their safety (37%). They were not any more likely than the rest of the country to express shame that such an event could take place in this country. However, a greater percentage of those in New York (24%) than in the rest of the nation were concerned about how the attack would affect the relationships that the United States has with other countries. In addition, a higher percentage reported being so confused and upset that they did not know how to feel (27%).

Effects on Psychological Well-Being

After Kennedy’s assassination, all measures of positive affect were at record lows (see Table 6).² Reports of being proud over a compliment, feeling that things were going their way, and having been pleased about an accomplishment were all 15 to 20 percentage points lower than experiences during more normal times from the 1960s to the 1990s. Feelings of being “on top of the world” were less than half most typical readings, down about 30 points. Negative affects (feelings of being restless, lonely, bored, depressed, and upset by criticism) appeared little affected by the President’s assassination. Feelings of depression/unhappiness were slightly higher than at other times, but most negative affect measures generally fell within the normal range.

In the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks, positive affect differed little from typical readings, but was slightly stronger than usual. Being proud of a compliment, being praised for an accomplishment, and feeling that things were going your way were all at record highs, although only being proud at being complimented was significantly greater than usual. Negative affect also was close to long-term norms. Reports of being bored and being upset by criticism were at record highs, but still less than 5 points above the norm.

However, when compared to the rest of the country, New Yorkers displayed more general negative emotion. Fewer New Yorkers indicated that they had been excited or interested in

²The 10-item affect balance scale was developed by Norman Bradburn (Bradburn, 1969). It consists of five measures of positive affect and five measures of negative affect. An affect balance scale is calculated by subtracting the number of negative affects from the total of positive affects.

something over the last few weeks (59%). Similarly, they were more likely than the rest of the nation to say that they felt loneliness (31%) and depressed or unhappy (39%), and less likely to report feeling “on top of the world” (28%). Their responses in these areas resemble those reported after the Kennedy assassination.

Emotionally, Kennedy’s assassination seems to have had a larger impact on psychological well-being than the terrorist attacks. Positive affect was down notably in 1963, but was actually somewhat higher than normal after the terrorist attacks. Along with the gains in national pride, confidence in institutions, and faith in people, this points to the resiliency of the American people after this tragedy. Negative affect seems to be little changed by national tragedies. After neither Kennedy’s assassination nor the terrorist attacks did reports of negative affect vary much. It is likely that levels of negative affect are largely shaped by the mundane experiences of people’s personal lives and how individuals interpret and respond to the events of their everyday lives.

Table 4
Initial Public Response the Kennedy Assassination
and September 11th Terrorist Attacks

	Kennedy Assassination	Nation	Terrorist Attacks NY
A. Learning			
How did you first hear the news?			
Television	24%	37%	30%
Radio	23	21	14
Phone Call	13	15	19
Personal Contact	36	15	14
Internet	0	1	0
Email	0	0	0
Other	4	11	23
Where were you at the time—at home, at work, or somewhere else?			
Home	50%	53%	32%
Work	29	30	27
Other	22	18	21
Were you alone when you first heard that the President had been shot/about the attack or was someone else with you?			
Alone	32%	41%	64%
With Someone Else	68	59	36
B. Communicating			
Did you feel like talking with other people about it, or did you feel more like being by yourself?			
Talking	54%	74%	77%
Being Alone/Don't know	46	26	23
Did anybody telephone you, email you, or come talk to you about the assassination/terrorist attacks on that day?			
Yes	38%	48%	54%
No	62	52	45
Did you yourself telephone, email, or go talk to anybody about it that day?			
Yes	37%	67%	71%
No	63	33	29

Table 4 (continued)

C. Direct Emotional Responses and Feelings

	Kennedy Assassination	Terrorist Attacks Nation	NY
Do you think you were very much more upset than most people when you first heard the news or a little more upset than most, or were you less upset than most people or do you think most people felt about like you did?			
Very much more upset	18%	15%	27%
A little more upset	12	9	9
Same as most people	60	64	58
Less upset	8	8	6

After you heard the news, did you continue your usual activities? IF YES: Were you able to carry on pretty much as usual, or did you find it more difficult?

Carried on much as usual	20%	24%	10%
Carried on, but difficult	25	27	19
Did not carry on	54	49	71

Can you think of any other time in your life when you had the same sort of feelings you had when you heard this news?

Yes	47%	49%	40%
No	53	51	60

Did you yourself say any special prayers at any time during this period?

Yes	75%	84%	79%
No	25	16	21

Table 5
Feelings When First Heard About Assassination/Terrorist Attacks:
Percentage Reporting Selected Feelings as Among “Very Deepest”

	Kennedy Assassination	Nation	Terrorist Attacks NY
Ashamed	50	22	26
Angry	44	65	73
Worried re: political situation	19	17	21
Confused	18	16	27
Worried foreign relations	16	20	24
Wondered if anyone safe	10	27	37
Worried how affect own life	9	28	40
Felt brought it on self	2	6	7

Question Wording: I'm going to read some ways that some people felt when they first heard that the President was dead/about the terrorist attacks and I'd like you to tell me whether the statement represents your very deepest feeling, a feeling that was quite deep, whether the statement crossed your mind, or whether it never occurred to you. Here is the first statement:

- a. Worried about how his death/the attack would affect the political situation in this country
- b. Worried about how his death/the attack would affect our relations with other countries
- c. Felt angry that anyone should do such a terrible deed
- d. Felt that in many ways the President/United States had brought it on himself/itself
- e. Felt ashamed that this could happen in our country
- f. Were worried about how this might affect your own life, job, and future
- g. Wondered if anybody could really be safe in this country these days
- h. Were so confused and upset that they/you didn't know how to feel

Table 6
Trends in Psychological Well-Being

(% reporting each affective state)

	11/63	6/65	11/72	1/81	4/84	5-6/90	Nation	9/01 NY
Excited/Interested.	52	54	62	70	68	68	66	59
Restless	45	53	60	36	35	35	39	39
Proud/Complimented	54	71	73	72	70	70	80	79
Lonely/Remote	28	26	29	16	17	19	26	31
Pleased/Accomplished	68	84	85	84	82	84	89	85
Bored	32	34	40	37	37	34	43	45
Top of the World	25	67	38	55	54	55	38	28
Depressed	36	30	32	28	28	21	33	39
Things Going Your Way	57	71	71	69	67	71	72	67
Upset/Criticized	17	18	23	22	21	17	24	21
<i>Sample Size</i>	<i>1,384</i>	<i>1,469</i>	<i>1,467</i>	<i>1,729</i>	<i>2,325</i>	<i>1,839</i>	<i>962</i>	<i>427</i>

Question Wording: Here are a few questions we have been asking people regularly during the last few years, and we'd like to get your answers now. [We are interested in the way people are feeling these days.] During the past few weeks, did you ever feel...

- a. Particularly excited or interested in something?
- b. Did you ever feel so restless that you couldn't sit long in a chair?
- c. Proud because someone complimented you on something you had done?
- d. Very lonely or remote from other people?
- e. Pleased about having accomplished something?
- f. Bored?
- g. On top of the world?
- h. Depressed or very unhappy?
- i. That things were going your way?
- j. Upset because someone criticized you?

Sentence in brackets [] not used in 2001.

Another important component of the National Tragedy Study involved querying respondents about a selection of 15 physical and emotional responses to the tragedy, which we display in Table 7 below. The percentages of individuals in the nation and in the New York area who reported these 15 symptoms were compared with responses from the survey using identical questions conducted in 1963 during the 4-day period following the Kennedy assassination. In general, Americans appear to have had a weaker physical/emotional response to the recent national tragedy than to the Kennedy assassination. In fact, significantly fewer people following the attack reported 7 out of the 15 symptoms; about the same proportion reported 6 of the symptoms, and a greater proportion of respondents in 2001 reported 2 of the symptoms. The four most commonly reported responses in 2001, however, were also the top four in 1963; these were (1) "felt very nervous and tense," (2) "felt sort of dazed and numb," (3) "cried," and (4) "had trouble getting to sleep." Each of these symptoms was reported by at least two-fifths of our samples.

The most commonly reported reaction was crying, confirmed by the majority of respondents. More than half the nation reported feeling very nervous and tense and having trouble getting to sleep, while a little less than half reported feeling dazed and numb. About one in three reported feeling more tired than usual, having an upset stomach, and not feeling like eating, while about two-fifths reported smoking much more than usual, having headaches, losing temper more than usual, and forgetting things.

Table 7.
Comparison of Physical/Emotional Symptoms

Symptom	1963	2001 NTS	New York
	Kennedy Assassination	Nation	
Felt very nervous and tense	68.0%	50.6%	63.0%
Felt sort of dazed and numb	57.0%	45.9%	42.6%
Cried	53.0%	60.0%	71.7%
Had trouble getting to sleep	48.0%	50.2%	62.0%
Didn't feel like eating	43.0%	29.3%	42.6%
Felt more tired than usual	42.0%	36.4%	48.0%
Kept forgetting things	34.0%	18.6%	24.2%
Smoked much more than usual	29.0%	21.4%	19.9%
Had rapid heart beats	26.0%	15.8%	24.0%
Had headaches	25.0%	20.4%	25.4%
Had an upset stomach	22.0%	35.4%	35.1%
Lost temper more than usual	19.0%	20.0%	25.9%
Hands sweat, felt clammy	17.0%	8.9%	13.2%
Dizzy at times	12.0%	8.4%	16.0%
Felt like getting drunk	4.0%	6.7%	12.4%
Felt none of these	11.0%	10.8%	4.1%

Respondents nationally experienced an average of 4.3 symptoms; women averaged significantly more of these—5.1—compared to 3.3 among men. In fact, women were more likely than men to report every symptom with the exception of feeling like getting drunk, losing their temper more than usual, and having sweaty or clammy hands. Age also appeared to have some influence on the national level, with adults aged 37 to 50 reporting the most responses—an

average of 5 symptoms; younger adults averaged 4.1 symptoms, and older adults averaged 3.1 of the physical and emotional responses we asked about. When individual symptoms were examined, these middle-adults were more likely than the other two age groups to report eight particular symptoms—headache, loss of appetite, upset stomach, feeling nervous or tense, feeling dazed and numb, losing temper more than usual, feeling more tired than usual, and rapid heartbeats.

Examining individual symptoms, it appears that far more people reported that they cried after the recent tragedy than reported crying after the Kennedy assassination; this was true for the nation as a whole in 2001, as well as for citizens in the New York area. In addition, far more people reported an upset stomach after the recent tragedy, both across the nation and in New York City. Individuals across the country, as well as in New York were about as likely to report having headaches, losing their temper more than usual, and feeling dizzy at times as those responding in 1963. On the other hand, a significantly smaller proportion of Americans, as well as citizens of New York, reported feeling "sort of dazed and numb" than in 1963, even though this symptom was among the three most commonly reported in the 2001 survey. These respondents were also significantly less likely to report repeatedly forgetting things and smoking much more than usual than the respondents reported following the Kennedy assassination.

New Yorkers stood out from the rest of the nation on a number of symptoms. First, New York more likely than the nation as a whole after the attacks to report feeling very nervous and tense and to report feeling like getting drunk. Second, when compared with 1963, respondents in New York did not differ from the 1963 respondent in their reports of feeling very nervous or tense, having rapid heartbeats, and having their hands sweat or feel clammy; significantly smaller proportions of respondents in the nation as a whole reported these symptoms in 2001 compared with 1963.

Not surprisingly, New Yorkers seem to have fared the worst following the tragedy with regard to the 15 physical and emotional symptoms assessed. In fact, a full 11 of these symptoms were reported by a significantly higher proportion of New York City residents than the rest of the nation. New Yorkers were more likely to have felt very nervous and tense, to have cried, to have had trouble getting to sleep, to not have felt like eating, to have felt more tired than usual, to have had rapid heartbeats, to have had headaches, to have lost their temper more than usual, to have had their hands feel sweaty and clammy, to have felt dizzy at times, and to have felt like getting drunk. In addition, New Yorkers reported experiencing a significantly higher average number of symptoms—5.2 overall, compared with the 4.3 average calculated for the typical American. Following the national trend, female New Yorkers experienced a greater number of symptoms than their male counterparts, averaging 6.2 of these responses compared with the average male's 4.2 symptoms. A slight tendency for younger people to report more symptoms, with adults 18 to 36 reporting an average of 5.5 symptoms; adults 37 to 50, 5.2 symptoms; and adults 51 and older, 4.9 symptoms, was also found, although these differences were not statistically significant.

New Yorkers also stood out in some respects when we compared the 2001 data with those from 1963. While in the nation as a whole, respondents in 1963 were significantly more likely to report that they did not feel like eating than were those in the 2001 national sample, this was not true for New York. New Yorkers in 2001 were as likely as the nation in 1963 to say they didn't feel like eating. In addition, significantly more New York City residents reported having trouble sleeping after the recent events than the rest of the nation, although the national percentages were

still comparable with those from 1963. This difference between New York in 2001 and the nation in 1963 may be due at least partly to the tangibility of the events to New Yorkers, who watched the sky become littered with debris and carnage and breathed the smoke and ash for days after. In fact, it is not unusual in cases of post-traumatic stress for individuals to experience difficulty sleeping and have trouble controlling their temper, among other such signs of arousal as reported in the survey.

Conclusion

Results from the National Tragedy Study indicate that the terrorist attacks on September 11th had a profound impact on Americans, but that it did not destroy confidence in America or elicit shame and national self denigration. To the contrary, anger was the most profound response. The event seemed to pull the country together in a way that no event has in recent times. This is evident from the results reported here and supports the anecdotal evidence shown on television and reported in newspapers. We learned from the press that Congress stood firmly behind the President, and that partisan interests were put aside. The NTS results show that the event also increased support for the President, Congress, America's military and the American way of life among the public.

Not all of the effects were positive. NTS results show that many people experienced worries and concerns about their own future and safety, and concerns about the country. In addition, many people experienced physical symptoms that one might expect to find among anyone who has undergone a tremendous shock. Those in the New York area were much more affected in this way. However, even New Yorkers, who bore the brunt of the attack, were able to rally around the President, the country, and the American way of life.

Where comparison data were available, it appeared that the overall effect of the attack on the nation was less than the effect of the Kennedy assassination. It is uncertain why this is the case. However the circumstances surrounding the two events were quite different. In the first case, we lost a popular, youthful, energetic leader, and, according to reports, the public grieved not only for themselves and for the country but also for Kennedy's young family (Sheatsley and Feldman, 1963). In addition, the assassination did not appear to be an attack from a foreign power, but rather an internal affair. Perhaps that is why the 1963 respondents felt more of a sense of national shame than respondents in the NTS. Perhaps, due to the graphic coverage of tragic events on television the country has become more used to trauma and tragedy. Nonetheless, it was clear that those near ground zero suffered at least as much as the nation in their reactions to the event. The extent to which this effect is long-lasting has yet to be determined.

Data

The National Tragedy Study was conducted between September 13th and September 27th, 2001, by the National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago. It was a telephone interview of adults (18+) living in households with telephones in the United States. The total sample size of 2,126 comprised a national sample of 1,013 households and additional samples in the New York City (406 additional households), Washington DC (206 additional households), and Chicagoland (502 additional households) areas. The overall response rate was 52 percent, with a 56-percent response rate for the national portion of the survey, 50 percent for New York, 41

percent for Washington DC, and 51 percent for the Chicagoland area. Responses from the Washington DC oversample were not analyzed separately because of its low response rate and small size.

The Kennedy Assassination Study was conducted between November 26 and December 3, 1963 by the National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago. It was an in-person interview of adults (21+) living in households in the United States and had 1,384 respondents. It used a modified probability sample.

The General Social Surveys (GSSs) have been conducted by the National Opinion Research Center 23 times from 1972 to 2000. The GSSs are in-person, full-probability samples of adults (18+) living in households in the United States. A total of 40,933 people have been interviewed. Response rates average above 75 percent. Core support for the GSSs comes from the National Science Foundation. For full, technical details on the GSS, see James A. Davis, Tom W. Smith, and Peter V. Marsden, *General Social Surveys, 1972–2000: Cumulative Codebook*. Chicago: NORC, 2001.

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