Perhaps one of the most shocking things about the terrible events of September 11 was the total lack of precedent. Never before had so many civilians been murdered on or above American soil in a span of less than two hours. Never before had a horrified nation sat in front of its television sets and watched, in color and in real time, as icons of United States industrial prowess and commercial might literally disintegrated into clouds of debris and lost lives.

Certainly, Americans had been attacked—and even killed—by international terrorists before. But as awful as they were, those disasters were usually somehow far away—in the air over Scotland, on the tarmac in Beirut, in the waters off Yemen.

The questions public opinion researchers asked in the aftermath of those events are haunting in their repetition: Would better security have helped? Should we retaliate, against the criminals, against their nations? Are we afraid to go out in public?

And then there are the questions that we now most surely are asking ourselves. As the years went by, marked by new assaults, did we take the threat seriously enough? Did the government? Did the polling industry?

On February 26, 1993 a terrorist attack took the lives of six Americans and injured over a thousand. A search of the Roper Center's iPOLL database reveals that out of 14,550 questions asked that year, a grand total of eight dealt with this event. The event was the bombing of the World Trade Center.

—Lisa Ferraro Parmelee
**Question:**

[...For each, please tell me if you agree, disagree, or if perhaps you have no opinion on that statement.] ... There is nothing the United States can do to prevent such acts of terrorism [like the hijacking of a TWA plane by Arab terrorists and the holding of American hostages].


**Question:**

When this crisis is over, should the United States take military action to punish the people it feels are responsible, or do you think taking military action would be a mistake?

- Take military action: 35%
- Military action would be a mistake: 50%
- Depends if hostages are killed (vol.): 5%


**Question:**

[...For each, please tell me if you agree, disagree, or if perhaps you have no opinion on that statement.] ... Once the hostages are safe, the U.S. should take military action in retaliation for their capture and the killing of one American.


**Question:**

Even if we cannot identify all those responsible for the current skyjacking, once it is over, some people think the United States should retaliate militarily against any group with a clear connection to the hijackers to discourage future terrorism. Others oppose this kind of response because it might kill innocent people and trigger more violence against the United States. Which comes closer to your view?

- Retaliate militarily: 40%
- Oppose retaliation: 50%
- No opinion: 10%


**Question:**

Do you think bomb attacks such as the one that caused the Pan Am crash can be prevented by tighter security?

- Yes: 71%
- No: 17%
- Don't know: 13%


**Question:**

Do you think retaliating militarily against those responsible for the Pan Am bombing will make it more likely or less likely that there will be future terrorist attacks?

- More likely: 52%
- Less likely: 35%
- No difference: 8%

**New York City, New York**

**Question:**
Do you personally feel any sense of danger from terrorist acts where you live and work, or not?

[Circle graph]
- Yes: 12%
- No: 87%
- Don't know/Refused: 1%


**Question:**
Do you personally worry about terrorism when you are in public places?

[Circle graph]
- Yes: 28%
- No: 71%
- Not sure: 1%


**Question:**
Do you worry more about being the victim of a street crime or about being the victim of a terrorist attack?

[Table]

| Street crime | 78% |
| Terrorist attack | 3% |
| Both equal (vol.) | 3% |
| Neither (vol.) | 15% |


**Question:**
Considering the World Trade Center bombing, do you believe that the bombing was the act of a few terrorists or is part of a wider conspiracy involving a foreign nation?

[Table]

| Act of a few terrorists | 32% |
| Conspiracy involving a foreign nation | 33% |
| Other (vol.) | 2% |
| Not sure/No opinion | 33% |


**June 25, 1996**

**Dhahran, Saudi Arabia**

**Question:**
Is terrorism something a president can do a lot about, or is that something beyond any president's control?

[Circle graph]
- President can do a lot: 42%
- Beyond control: 49%
- Don't know/No answer: 9%


**Question:**
How much confidence do you have that the airlines that fly in this country are adequately protected from terrorist attack—a great deal of confidence, a moderate amount, not much, or no confidence at all?

[Circle graph]
- A great deal of confidence: 17%
- A moderate amount: 20%
- No confidence at all: 11%
- Not much: 50%
- Don't know/Refused: 2%

Thinking about last week’s bombing at the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which of these statements is closer to your own opinion about what will happen? In the next year or so, there will be more terrorist acts against the United States, or… the embassy bombings were random acts and are not likely to be repeated in the near future.


Do you think there is anything the United States government can do to significantly reduce terrorist attacks that affect American citizens, or is this something the United States government can’t do much about?


How much, if at all, do you worry about terrorism when you’re in public places here in the United States? … A great deal, somewhat, not much, or not at all?


If law enforcement officials were given the tools they need, do you think they would be able to prevent all future terrorist attacks here in the United States, or many of them, or only a few of them, or would they be able to prevent none of them?

Source: Survey by the Los Angeles Times, August 22, 1998.