

By Marjorie Connelly and Sarah Dutton

# Bearing the Brunt

*New Yorkers react to 9/11*

**“One in every five New Yorkers interviewed said that a relative or close friend was missing, injured or killed.”**



White House photo by Paul Morse

**I**n August 2001, New Yorkers held a sunnier view of their city and its future than they had in nearly a quarter of a century. Only 25% in a *New York Times* poll said they believed the city would become a worse place to live in the next 10 or 15 years, the lowest percentage since *The Times* had first asked the question 28 years earlier.

*Marjorie Connelly is staff editor, news surveys, for The New York Times. Sarah Dutton is deputy director of surveys, CBS News.*

## A Drop in Refusal Rates

CBS News and *The New York Times* have been conducting telephone surveys together since 1975, most often with national samples. Occasionally, they will survey the opinions of other populations, frequently in the New York metropolitan area. Several statewide polls have been conducted, particularly in New York during Hillary Rodham Clinton's historic run for the United States Senate.

*The Times* has a great deal of experience doing surveys in its hometown—close to twenty in the past two decades. Although the polling unit of CBS News has worked with *The Times* on several occasions for the network's local affiliate, WCBS-TV Channel 2, the New York City poll conducted in October 2001 represented the first time CBS News joined *The Times* in a city poll on behalf of the national news network.

Because of this extensive experience conducting local polls, there weren't many major hurdles to overcome. Many of the trend questions had already been translated into Spanish, and any weighting and sampling issues had been worked out in previous polls. In fact, about a month before the attacks on the World Trade Center, *The Times* had conducted a citywide poll to get a sense of the state of the city as the mayoral election grew close. (The Democratic primary was originally scheduled for September 11.)

Still, conducting a poll among residents of New York City was a challenging prospect. New York's many immigrants make for a diverse population, but they speak a variety of languages, and a sizable number speak little or no English. Polls of New York City residents are always translated into Spanish; although other languages are spoken in the city, there is no obvious third language to use.

In addition, New Yorkers tend to refuse more often to participate in polls and can be more abrupt than Americans in general, and a few days of dealing with disagreeable potential respondents can wear away at interviewer morale. The circulation department of *The Times* calls residences in the New York metropolitan area in an effort to sell subscriptions. Frequent contacts by *The Times*' subscription salespeople could well be the basis of much of the difficulty experienced by the survey interviewers; they often have to interject, "We're not selling anything."

A local poll is further hampered by the fact that there is only one time zone to call, so interviewing hours per day are limited, and the entire poll can take more days in field than a national poll does.

In October 2001, there was also a possibility that the random-digit dialing method might sample a household that had lost someone from the attacks. As was the case with the national polls conducted just after September 11, interviewers were instructed to be more sensitive than usual to respondents' emotional reactions to the questions. There was no desire to upset people further while delving into painful topics. The interviewers were told to use their own judgement as to whether or not to continue the interview if someone started crying or seemed on the verge of doing so.

But, as it turned out, people seemed to want to express their feelings about what had happened. In fact, city residents were more willing to respond than usual.

Refusal rates for New York City polls, calculated as refusals divided by number of residences called, were consistently around 42 to 49% for the two years prior to the October 2001

Other questions in the survey revealed that residents viewed New York as a better, safer place. The police were seen more favorably than they had been in many years, and for the first time, a majority of New Yorkers described race relations as "good."

Then came September 11. In the city that bore the brunt of the tragedies, the whole scene was changed, and an entirely new set of questions demanded answers. How were the residents coping? How did this event change New Yorkers' opinions about their neighbors, their safety, their city? How were their responses to the crisis similar to those of other Americans, and how did they differ?

CBS News and *The New York Times* (along with most other large polling organizations) conducted a number of polls exploring national reactions to the attacks, and views on what the US response should be. It was not possible, though, to investigate the opinions of those closest to the disaster through a regular national survey—there weren't enough New Yorkers in the sample to examine them separately.

And so, the two organizations decided to poll the people in their own backyard. Two surveys of New York City residents were conducted, one on October 6-9, 2001, and a second June 4-9, 2002.

In early October, New Yorkers took a reflexive, almost defiant position about their besieged city. Sixty-five percent thought New York had handled the attacks better than any other big cities would, and 60% were confident their neighbors would help them in an emergency. Fifty-four percent predicted New York City would be a better place in 10 or 15 years—up from 34% who had said so in August.

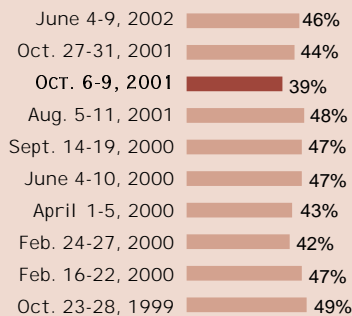
But New Yorkers' civic allegiance was tempered by awful memories and worries about future attacks. One in every five interviewed said that a relative or close friend was missing, injured or killed in the attacks. And three in five

poll. That figure fell to 39% for the poll following the terrorist attacks. This was not a huge difference, but it was significant, especially when compared to the poll immediately preceding—the refusal rate for the August 2001 poll was 48%.

However, this effect was short-lived. By June 2002, the refusal rate had climbed back to where it had been before the attacks—46%.

A similar trend occurred in national polls conducted by CBS News and *The Times* just after September 11. Overall,

### Refusal Rates for New York City



Note: The refusal rate is calculated by dividing the number of refusals by the number of residential numbers called.  
Source: Surveys by CBS News/*New York Times* latest that of June 4-9, 2002.

Americans were more willing to participate, and, in some cases, were eager to share their feelings about the terrorist attacks. In a national *Times*/CBS News poll conducted September 20-23, the refusal rate was 36%—lower than the 44% found in a CBS News national poll conducted in August.

As in New York City, nine months later the national refusal rate had gone back to its previous level. In fact, these refusals returned to normal levels fairly quickly; the most drastic declines occurred within the first few weeks after September 11. The rate for the New York City poll, conducted one month after the attack, was slightly higher than that of the September 20-23 national poll.

Interviewers record into the CATI system any comments made by potential respondents who refuse to take part in the survey. Surprisingly, very few in the New York City polls made mention of the attacks. Most gave the usual reasons for refusing—they weren't interested, they didn't have time, they didn't trust we were who we said we were. Many just hung up, or swore at the interviewers—business as usual. But we did encounter some people who gave heartbreaking reasons why they didn't want to be included in the poll.

One woman was “grieving the loss of her grandson who was killed in the attack.” Another said she had been “at the World Trade Center, and the attack was making her too nervous to talk.” Some told us that, like this woman, they were just too upset to talk: “She lives close to the World Trade Center,” reported the interviewer, “and she has been terribly upset about it all.” Another said she didn't want to participate, but that we should “remember the story of David and Goliath.” And one man told the interviewer that “he was a NYC firefighter and buried three of his own, so please call another house.”

While there is usually an attempt to convert refusals into completes, these cases were not called back.

*The authors wish to commend the CBS News/*New York Times* interviewers, many of whom live in Manhattan, for their professionalism during this difficult period for all New Yorkers. They made an important contribution to understanding public opinion at an important time in the city's history.*

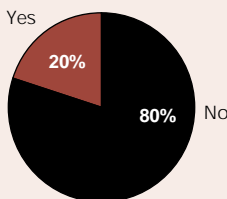
said that someone in their circle of friends and relatives knew someone who was missing, hurt or killed (see Figure 1). Eighteen percent of New Yorkers in the labor force reported they had lost their jobs or a substantial portion of their income as a result of the attacks (a figure that had changed little by June).

Other aftereffects cited by some re-

Figure 1  
**Hitting Home**

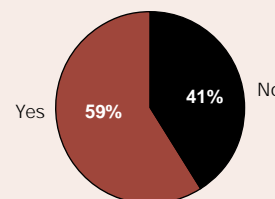
**Question:**

Do you personally have a close friend or relative who is missing, hurt, or killed in the terrorist attack?



**Question:**

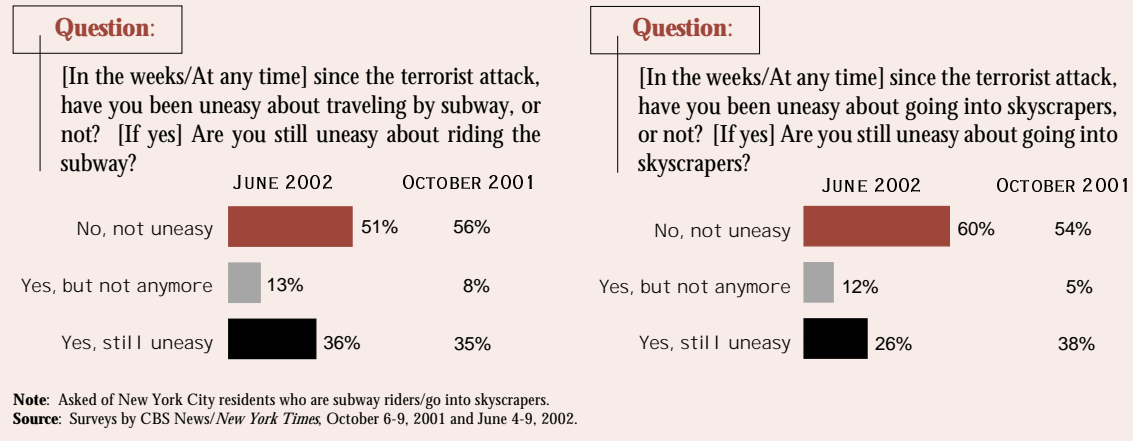
Do you or any of your friends or relatives know someone who is missing, hurt, or killed in the terrorist attack?



Note: Asked of New York City residents.  
Source: Survey by CBS News/*New York Times*, October 6-9, 2001.

Figure 2

## Many Still Fearful



spondents ranged from the loss of television service to the loss of peace of mind. Thirteen percent mentioned problems with transportation and traffic; an equal number spoke of depression and other forms of anxiety.

Nine months after the destruction of the World Trade Center, the “rally around the city” effect had dissipated somewhat. The proportion of those who said they had a lot of confidence their neighbors would help them in an emergency had dropped to 50%, and 41% now felt their city would be a better place in 10 or 15 years. Still, these indicators remained higher than they had ever been prior to the attacks.

36% of subway riders continued to be uneasy riding the subways. Twenty-six percent of people who went into skyscrapers were also uneasy about doing so (see Figure 2).

In both polls, almost three out of four residents said they were personally very concerned that their city would be struck with another terrorist attack. In June, 60% said they thought the threat of a terrorist attack in New York City was greater than in any other big city.

Another indication of the eroded sense of security was that in August 2001, nearly 60% said they thought New York City was safer than it had been four years earlier. Ten

months later, barely 40% said that. Although that question was originally intended to measure fear of crime, it had clearly come to include the fear of being a victim of terrorism as well.

Despite those fears, most had no intention of moving away. About two-thirds in both October and June said that, given a choice, they would prefer to be living in New York City four years from now than anyplace else.

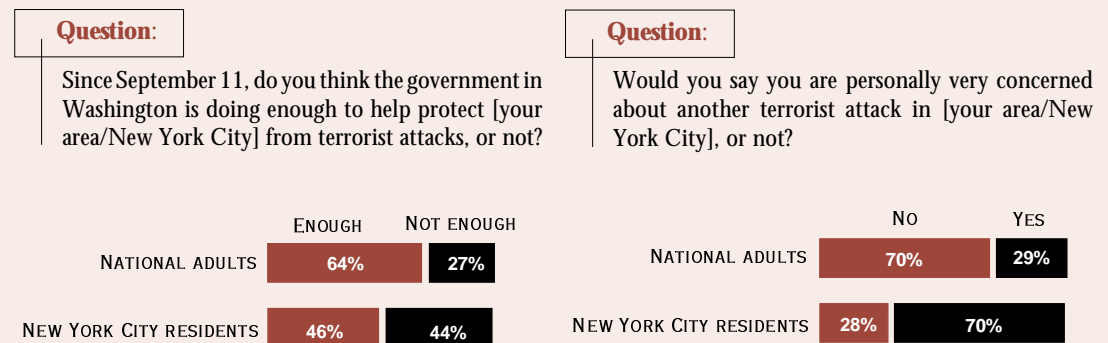
Both surveys offered a portrait of a city going through traumatic times. Optimism and hope for the future were combined with fearfulness. New Yorkers expressed deep confidence in their city, with nearly 85% of respondents

Continued on page 38

Most people in the June survey said life had pretty much gotten back to normal, and many of the transportation and traffic issues had been addressed. However, the number dealing with fear and anxiety remained about the same. Forty-one percent were still uncomfortable going to some places in New York City, and

Figure 3

## On the Lookout



**Source:** Surveys by CBS News/*New York Times*, June 18-20, 2002 (national adults) and June 4-9, 2002 (New York City residents).

ported feeling more tired than usual, having an upset stomach, and not feeling like eating, while about two-fifths reported smoking, having headaches, losing their tempers, and forgetting things more than usual.

Overall, people experienced an average of 5.0 symptoms in 1963 and 4.3 in 2001. After both tragedies, women had many more symptoms than men did (men 3.9 and women 5.9 in 1963; men 3.3 and women 5.1 in 2001). Likewise, at both times the middle-aged reported more symptoms than the young or old (30 to 39 year olds were the highest in 1963 with 5.4, and 40 to 49 year olds topped others with 5.0 in 2001).

Similarly, in both years Jews and Catholics suffered more than Protestants did, and symptoms decreased with level of education (but not significantly in 2001). Race made a difference, with blacks having more symptoms than whites did in 1963 (6.9 versus 4.7) but marginally fewer than whites in 2001 (4.2 versus 4.3). Paul B. Sheatsley and Jacob J. Feldman, in their 1964 *Public Opinion Quarterly* article, argued that blacks had more symptoms in 1963

because they were more pro-Kennedy as a result of his civil rights initiatives.

**H**ow do we explain the apparently greater negative impact of the Kennedy assassination on the minds and emotions of the American people? One reason may lie in the feelings experienced right after the event. While, as we have seen, respondents in 2001 cited anger most frequently as their deepest initial feeling after the attacks, people in 1963 compounded their anger with an even higher measure of shame.

Why were more people ashamed in 1963? In part, it was because Kennedy's assassin was a fellow American rather than foreign terrorists. Some evidence shows that many also thought our internal divisions had somehow led to the crime.

The role played by anger in 1963 may also have made feelings of distress more difficult to bear in the earlier tragedy. After the terrorist attacks, the country was immediately galvanized by efforts of rescue and recovery and the launching of the war on terrorism, imperatives that allowed the anger to be directed and become productive. People

grieving over Kennedy's death, on the other hand, had no useful way to direct and dissipate their anger once Lee Harvey Oswald had been killed.

Finally, it may be significant that the vast majority of Americans learned about the shooting of President Kennedy and the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon within a half hour of the respective events. Perhaps because the Kennedy assassination occurred during the midday hours, while the terrorists struck as the workday was beginning in New York and Washington, slightly more people (68% to 59%) reported being with someone else in 1963 than on September 11 when the news broke.

Perhaps this last finding explains why one way in which the 2001 reaction was more intense was the need to reach out to others on the day of the event. More people said they felt like talking to others (74% to 54%), reported being contacted by others (49% to 38%) and contacted others (67% to 37%). This appears to reflect a need to overcome the greater isolation that comes with being alone at the moment one learns that tragedy has struck the nation. ●

## Bearing the Brunt

Continued from page 28

in October and June positive about the ability of New York's economy to recover from the terrorist attacks.

**A** comparison of the results from the New York City polls to those of national polls provides some informative context for these findings. The following are based on the June 2002 New York City poll and a CBS News national poll conducted from June 18-20, 2002:

- While New Yorkers' expectations of another terrorist attack weren't that different from those of Americans overall, the fear among New Yorkers hit closer to home. Seventy percent were personally very concerned about a ter-

rorist attack in their area, with 28% not concerned. In the national poll those figures were reversed—29% of Americans were very concerned, and 70% were not (see Figure 3, page 28).

- New Yorkers were more critical than Americans overall of the government's efforts to prevent future attacks. Forty-six percent said the federal government was doing enough to help protect their city from terrorist attacks, and 44% said it was not. Nationally, 64% said the government was doing enough in the area in which they lived; 27% said it was not.

- Life went on, for New Yorkers and for Americans overall. In both polls,

66% said their lives were back to normal following the events of September 11.

**O**ne change that may last—at least for awhile—is that Americans now have a much more positive view of New York City than they have ever had before. The June national poll showed that 82% had a good image of the city—not much different from views last October, and a significant increase from previous polls.

And, as the nation's perception has brightened, New Yorkers continue to express a broad sense of pride in their troubled city. In October 2001, 93% said they had a good image of New York. In June 2002, 86% still did. ●