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Americans troubled more by governmental abuse than terrorism

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Police and private security personnel monitor security cameras at the Lower Manhattan Security Initiative on April 23, 2013 in New York City. (AFP Photo / John Moore)

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New polling numbers suggest that United States citizens are on average more afraid of their own government than the threat of another terrorist attack.

Even after a pair of **bombings** in Boston two weeks ago injured hundreds, more Americans say they are unwilling to sacrifice constitutional liberties for security than those who are.

A handful of polls conducted in the days after the **Boston Marathon bombings** show that US citizens are responding much differently than in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks that killed roughly 3,000 people. Not only are Americans more opposed now to

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giving up personal freedoms for the sake of security than they were after 9/11, but other statistics show that distrust against the federal government continues to climb.

Just one day after the April 15 Boston Marathon bombing, pollsters with Fox News asked a sample of Americans, *“Would you be willing to give up some of your personal freedom in order to reduce the threat of terrorism?”* Forty-three percent of the respondents said they would, while 45 percent said no. Comparatively, 71 percent of Americans asked a similar question in October 2001 said they’d be willing to give up personal freedoms, while only 20 percent opposed at the time.

In the dozen years since 9/11, frequent polling conducted by Fox has suggests that the majority of Americans have all the while said they’d give up their freedoms for the sake of security. Only with the latest inquiry though are those answers reversed: the last time a majority of Americans opposed giving up privacy for security was May 2001.

“Whether or not the government overreacted in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 (and, given the information available at the time, reasonable people can disagree), Americans then broadly supported a vigorous domestic counterterrorism policy,” Alan Rozenshtein writes for Lawfare Blog. *“This time around, a rights-restrictive approach might not garner the same public support — if indeed that’s the road the government intends to go down.”*

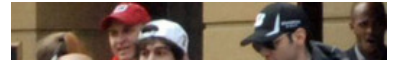
Indeed, a number of cities across the country have already asked for **more surveillance cameras** and other tactics that could be used to allegedly prevent acts of terror in the wake of the Boston bombing, but lawmakers in Washington have yet to impose the sort of restrictions on constitutional liberties that came in the aftermath of 9/11 — named the PATROIT Act and the establishment of the US Department of Homeland Security and other agencies, including the Transportation Security Administration.

A separate poll conducted by the Washington Post just three days after the Boston Marathon bombing reveals that nearly half of those surveyed say that the government will go too far in trying to prevent future acts of terrorism. The Post asked a random national sample of 588 adults, *“Which worries you more: that the government (will not go far enough to investigate terrorism because of concerns about constitutional rights), or that it (will go too far in compromising constitutional rights in order to investigate terrorism)?”* Days after the Boston bombing, 41 percent of respondents said the government will not go far enough, compared to 48 percent saying they’ll go too far. When similar questions were asked in

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2006 and 2010, 44 percent and 27 percent said the government will go too far, respectively, signaling that for the first time in years Americans are overly concerned about a misuse of power on the part of Washington.

That isn't to say that the Boston attack is necessarily inspiring Americans to question authority, though. Two months before **Tsarnaev** brothers allegedly detonated a pair of explosives near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, 53 percent of Americans polled by the Pew Research Center said the federal government is threatening their personal rights and freedoms. In November 2011, that statistic was only 30 percent.

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