

20 years after 9/11 attacks, just half call US more secure: POLL

Nearly half say the U.S. has changed for the worse since the attacks.

By **Sofi Sinozich**

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Just 49% of Americans see the United States as safer from terrorism than it was before the terrorist attacks of [Sept. 11, 2001](#), down from 64% a decade ago, according to a new ABC News/Washington Post poll.

Forty-one percent instead say the United States has become less safe since 9/11, reflecting both renewed partisan divisions and the tumultuous withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan.

A vast 86% in this poll, produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#), also say the events of Sept. 11 had a lasting effect on the United States. But underscoring the public's sour mood on this issue, 46%, a new high, say it's been a change for the worse. That easily exceeds the 33% who see a change for the better, half as many as said so in spring 2002.

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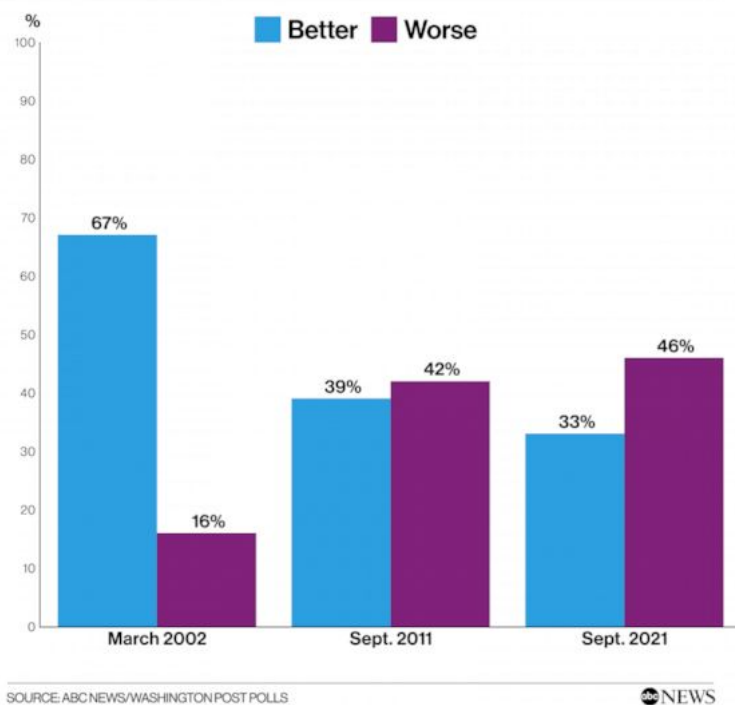
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Did 9/11 Change the U.S. for the Better or Worse?



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Shifts

Views of the country's security from terrorism have shifted sharply across the years, given both international developments and partisan U.S. politics. Confidence peaked in 2003 and 2004, fell steeply in 2005 after the London transit bombings, held especially high among Republicans during the Bush administration, plummeted among Republicans two years later under the Obama administration, then rose sharply across groups after the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011.

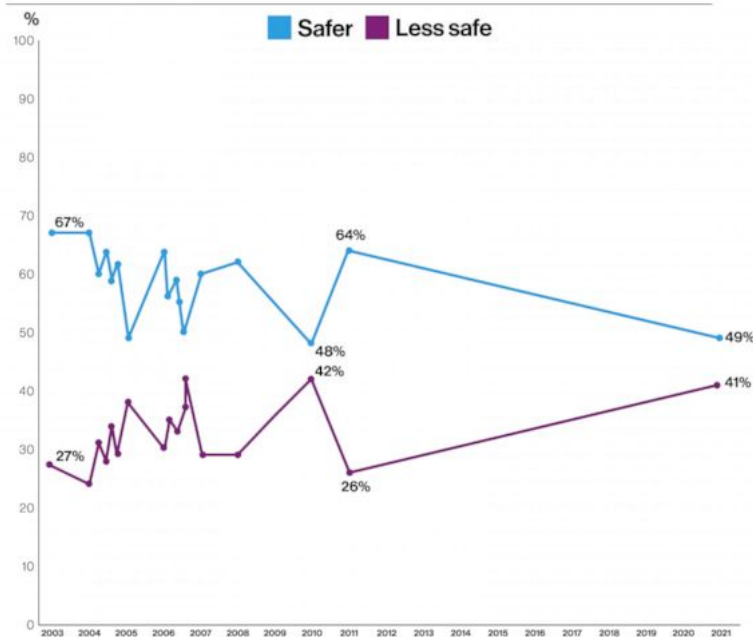


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Ten years later, the latest decline may reflect multiple factors, including pessimism after the fall of Afghanistan and Republican-led dissatisfaction with the Biden administration.

U.S. Security from Terrorism Since 9/11



SOURCE: ABC NEWS/WASHINGTON POST POLLS

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Specifically, compared with 2011, the sense that the country is safer from terrorism now than it was before 9/11 is down 28 percentage points among Republicans, to 41%, compared with a slight 9-point decrease among Democrats, to 57%. It's down 12 points among independents, to 52%.

The see-saws have been dramatic:

% Calling U.S. Safer from Terrorism Since 9/11

	2008	2010	2011	2021
All	62%	48%	64%	49%
Democrats	45%	49%	66%	57%
Republicans	83%	49%	69%	41%
Independents	64%	47%	64%	52%

SOURCE: ABC NEWS/WASHINGTON POST POLLS

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These patterns are mirrored in terms of political ideology, with 59% of moderates and 55% of liberals currently seeing improved safety, versus just 39% of conservatives.

Just 16% of Americans overall say the country is "much" safer from terrorism, again near all-time lows. An additional 33% of Americans call it safer, but just somewhat so. Those who see the country as less safe divide evenly, 21% somewhat less safe, 20% much less. There's another partisan split here, with 36% of Republicans saying the country is much less safe from terrorism than before 9/11, versus 15% of independents and 11% of Democrats.

Another result shows that 9/11 isn't unique in its perceived impact. About as many Americans, 82%, say the coronavirus pandemic will change the country in a lasting way as say this about 9/11. And, also similar to current views on 9/11, 50% call it a change for the worse.

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Groups

Partisan differences narrow when considering the lasting effects of the 9/11 attacks. Thirty-one to 36% of Republicans, Democrats and independents alike say the country has changed for the better, while 43% to 49% say it's changed for the worse.

But these gaps widen by ideology, with liberals most likely to say the country has changed for the worse, 59%, versus 44% of moderates and 45% of conservatives.



Chris Hondros/Getty Images

A relative of a victim of the Sept. 11th terrorist attacks looks for a name on a flag with na... [Read More](#)

Beyond partisan and ideological differences, 57% of older Americans say the country is less safe from terrorism post 9/11, versus 37% of those younger than 65. Men are more likely than women to say the country has changed for the worse, 53% versus 40%, as are college graduates compared with those without a degree, 55% to 41%.

Methodology

This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by landline and cellular telephone Aug. 29-Sept. 1, 2021, in English and Spanish, among a random national sample of 1,006 adults. Results have a [margin of sampling error](#) of 3.5 percentage points, including the design effect. Partisan divisions are 30-24-36%, Democrats-Republicans-independents.

The survey was produced for ABC News by Langer Research Associates with sampling and data collection by Abt Associates of Rockville, Maryland. See details on the survey's methodology [here](#).

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