What are you afraid of? Examining belief in government agencies to protect against terrorism and trust in the honesty of the information they provide

**Background.** Emergency response to terrorism relies on the confidence the public has in government agencies to protect them which wanes over time, reducing emergency information exchange. Additionally, the public trusts emergency response actors differently and social distance from an information source affects cooperation. The objective of our study was to determine the association between trust that government information is honest about terrorism and the belief in government to protect against future terrorism by level of government.

**Methods.** We analyzed data from 2,032 adult participants (age range=18–98) in the National Survey of Disaster Experiences and Preparedness. Logistic regression was used to estimate the odds of believing the government could protect from future terrorism based on trust in the government to be honest about terrorism, after adjusting for covariates. The association was also assessed across local, state, and federal levels of government.

**Results.** After adjusting for covariates, the oddsof believing any level of government could protect against future terrorism were 23.2 times higher among those who trust the government to be honest about terrorism than those who do not. The association was strongest at the local government level (OR=5.78, 95% CI [3.89-8.59]) compared to state (OR=5.58, 95% CI [4.07-7.63]) and federal (OR=4.56, 95% CI [3.62-5.73]).

**Conclusions.** The association between trust in honest information and belief in protection decreased as social distance increased. The findings suggest that local government should be considered as a key communication avenue for effective emergency response to a terrorist attack.