



**FiveThirtyEight**

## **Americans Have Never Forgotten 9/11**

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I was in my eighth grade classroom in a small town in Ontario, Canada, when suddenly there was a flurry of activity in the hallway. An instructor popped her head in the door, her face drained of color, and beckoned our teacher out of the room. Soon after, all of the seventh and eighth graders — deemed old enough to understand the gravity of the situation — were ushered into a classroom where we watched a grainy broadcast of the news. The first plane had flown into the World Trade Center in New York City. We were sent home early.

There are so few moments in history that call for the question “Where were you when you heard the news?” But the Sept. 11 attacks are undoubtedly one, and most Americans can answer that question without missing a beat. Earlier this month, YouGov asked Americans if they could remember where they were, and 81 percent said they could. In a separate poll, Pew Research Center found that 93 percent of adults age 30 and over could remember.

Over the past two decades, as pollsters have surveyed Americans on issues around terrorism and the 9/11 attacks in particular, much of the sentiment has remained consistent, a pattern identified in a white paper published in August by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. In a review of public opinion polling since the 9/11 attacks, John Mueller, a senior fellow at Cato and a political scientist at Ohio State University, found that much of the public’s opinions about terrorism and safety have remained steady for two decades. In some cases, concerns spiked immediately following the attacks, then declined slightly before staying static for years. In other cases, the rates of concern never declined.

“These findings are rather surprising because there is reason to have expected that concerns and anxieties about terrorism would erode over time,” Mueller wrote.

For example, Americans have remained convinced that a terrorist attack is likely. A series of polls from The Economist/YouGov conducted from 2013 to 2021<sup>1</sup> asked what Americans think are the chances of a terrorist attack in the U.S. in the next 12 months. Those who thought an attack was “very” or “somewhat” likely rarely dipped below 50 percent and often spiked

following major terrorist attacks in the U.S. or Europe. (Any time the responses rose about 70 percent, it was following a major attack.)

Similarly, Pew's annual survey of policy priorities has found Americans rank terrorism at or near the top of the list year over year. As recently as 2020, 74 percent of Americans said defending against terrorism should be a top priority for the president and Congress, making it the number-one policy issue. Even in 2021, as the pandemic altered priorities, 63 percent of Americans still rated terrorism as their top issue, making it fourth overall, behind the pandemic, the economy and jobs.

Americans also consistently say that 9/11 has had a lasting impact on this country.

In Washington Post/ABC News polls from 2001, 2002, 2011 and 2021, the proportion of Americans who said the attacks "changed this country in a lasting way" has never fallen below 83 percent, with 86 percent saying so in a survey conducted within the past month. Notably, though, the feelings on whether this is a change for the better or worse has shifted: In 2002, 67 percent of Americans said that the 9/11 attacks changed America for the better. That number has declined since, with only 33 percent saying so in 2021.

That 9/11 still rests so heavily on our collective consciousness is no surprise. For those of us who lived through it, we just have to cast our minds back to that day.

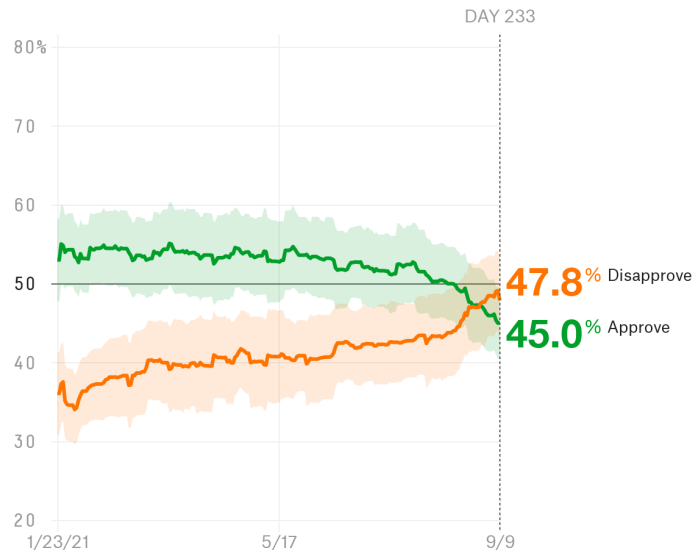
### **Other polling bites**

- Abortion rights remain top of mind for many Americans in the wake of the Supreme Court allowing a Texas law that effectively bans abortions in the state to go into effect. The percentage of Americans who say "abortion, contraception and equal pay"<sup>2</sup> are their top voting concern has risen since the decision, according to a Morning Consult poll from Sept. 4-6. Overall, 6 percent of voters said this was their top issue after the decision, compared with 4 percent before, while support among Democrats doubled, fueled by a 6-percentage-point jump among Democratic women.
- Canada and Germany are heading to the polls to vote for new leaders and parliaments this month. In Germany, the center-left Social Democratic Party is leading the polls, sitting at an average of 25 percent, ahead of the center-right Christian Democratic Union (outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel's party), at 21 percent, according to Politico's poll tracker. And in Canada, the center-right Conservative Party has edged ahead of current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party, with their respective polling averages at 33.5 percent and 31.6 percent, according to CBC's poll tracker. However, the Liberals are still favored to win the most seats — though another minority government is likely, regardless of who wins.
- Though Americans overall have somewhat mixed feelings about the decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, when you ask Americans who were deployed in that war, there's a higher level of consensus. An Aug. 17-Sept. 2 Morning Consult poll of veterans of the war in Afghanistan found 58 percent supported President Biden's decision to withdraw troops, with 53 percent still supporting the decision even if the

Taliban is in control of Afghanistan, and 53 percent supporting even if it creates an opportunity for terrorists in Afghanistan.

- The decision to get vaccinated against COVID-19 has become an increasingly partisan issue in the U.S., and it can sometimes make for some cognitive dissonance between a person's political identity and their personal health choices: A Harris/USA Today poll conducted between Aug. 27-29 found that 11 percent of vaccinated Americans said they would keep their vaccination a secret from some people, and 6 percent said they didn't plan to tell anyone. Shy Trump voters are out. Shy vaxx-getters are in.
- Lastly, it seems we're all a bunch of thieves: According to a YouGov poll from Sept. 9, 58 percent of Americans take those tiny bottles of shampoo with them when they leave a hotel, including 35 percent who say they do so even if they did not open the bottle. Personally, I think that's fine, but if you steal hotel towels, I'm judging you. Not because it's morally wrong, but because why would you want a towel used by 5,000 other people?

### Biden approval



According to FiveThirtyEight's presidential approval tracker,<sup>3</sup> 45 percent of Americans approve of the job Biden is doing as president, while 47.8 percent disapprove (a net approval rating of -2.8 percentage points.) At this time last week, 46.1 percent approved and 48.1 percent disapproved (a net approval rating of -2 points). One month ago, Biden had an approval rating of 50.4 percent and a disapproval rating of 43.3 percent (a net approval rating of +7 points).