

Terrorists fail to frighten the British

Contributed by YouGov

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If the terrorist who attacked London hoped to frighten Londoners - or the rest of Britain - into changing the way they lead their lives, then they failed dismally. This is one of the most striking findings to emerge from the first survey on the bombings.

YouGov/Daily Telegraph survey questioned more than 1800 people throughout Britain on Friday, the day after the attacks. 88% of the public (including 85% of Londoners) do not expect to change anything much about their day-to-day lives. Only 1% (both nationally and in London) say they will change things "a lot".

In fact, despite the horror that was inflicted on London, 7/7 was quite unlike 9/11 in its impact. After 9/11, stock markets around the world fell sharply and stayed down; and the war against terrorism dominated the public mood. After 7/7, an initial fall in share prices was largely reversed later the same day, and had recovered completely by the end of the following day.

Likewise, YouGov's survey, conducted as the stock market was recovering its composure, found only a light increase in the number of people who said that terrorism was one of Britain's key issues. YouGov repeated a pair of questions it had previously asked in October 2004. We showed people a list of 16 issues, and asked them to tick up to four issues that, first, "are the most important facing this country?" and, second, "matter most to you and your family?"

Last October, terrorism was regarded as the fifth most important issue facing Britain, mentioned by 40%. It has now climbed to third, but the number mentioning it is up only seven points to 47%. In fact, global warming has climbed rather more, by nine points to 27%.

As for what matters "to you and your family", terrorism is up only four points, from 19% to 23%. It still lags behind health, crime, pensions/poverty, tax, inflation and housing.

In short, the attacks on London were a terrible spectacle; but for most people they were no more than that. Well over 90% of the public were either already concerned about the impact of terrorism on Britain and/or their family - or were, and remain, of the view that other things matter more.

This conclusion is underpinned by other findings:

- * The attacks might have been expected to prompt a large jump in the numbers of people supporting the introduction of identity cards. They did not. Support for ID cards had dropped from a peak of 78% to just 45% the week before the London bombings. Afterwards, support was up, but only to 50%.

- * There has been no increase in the numbers who think that Britain's role in Iraq has made this country more vulnerable to attack by Islamic terrorists. In March 2004, following the Madrid bombings, the figure stood at 75%. In the latest survey, the number is actually down fractionally, to 72%.

- * There is no great disposition to criticise the Government for dealing with the danger of terrorist attacks, even though the intelligence services picked up no advance warnings of any kind. Post-Madrid, 55% thought the government was doing a "very" or "fairly" good job "in dealing with the danger of terrorist attacks in Britain". Post-London the figure is up to 68%, and 70% in London.

The poll demolishes one myth - that Londoners have a special spirit, having survived the Blitz and the IRA bomb attacks on the Seventies. Just 33% of the public this is true; a clear majority, 56%, think that people in other large cities in Europe and North America would have had much the same spirit as Londoners had they faced a similar terrorist attack.

More information can be found at: <http://www.yougov.com/>