

*To what extent would college students  
sacrifice their civil liberties to ensure  
their safety against terrorism?*

A Study by Byers and Haglund

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December 13, 2007  
Soc 601: Research Methods

## **Abstract:**

*The attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> had an enormous impact on all citizens within the United States, bringing to surface the topic of terrorism. Terrorism has always been a serious problem, but this topic was not widely explored upon within our country until the attacks on our home soil. The September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks caused drastic changes within our government and society due to the implementation of new policies and infringements on civil liberties. Most of these policies, like the PATRIOT Act, were rushed through Congress and signed into law. Many feel that because these acts were rushed, not enough time was spent considering a just and proper balance between civil liberties and methods to successfully combat this new threat of terrorism. This is a great problem of today's society that our generation will need to face. The purpose of this study would be to try and gather information on what would be considered an "acceptable" balance of sacrificing civil liberties in order to combat the threat of terrorism.*

## **Introduction**

The main question we wanted to find out was to what extent would college students sacrifice their civil liberties to ensure their safety against terrorism? This topic has sociological relevance because it affects all citizens living in the United States and is relatively new. Terrorism within this country had not been extensively studied pre September 11<sup>th</sup>, which is why it will be one of the major problems facing our generation. We would like to step into uncharted territory and face this question of how many civil liberties will be sacrificed to ensure safety among society, to see if we can find an acceptable balance. This problem will mostly concern our generation because we are going to be the ones that have to construct new policy that strikes an acceptable balance, which is why we want to study college students. Before conducting our research, we had several questions that we wanted to answer. Some of those questions were:

*In what ways will this topic affect the implementation of new public policies?  
How will this affect the day to day lives of a group like college students?  
How does fear play a role in willingness to sacrifice freedoms?  
What is an acceptable balance of weighing civil liberties at a loss of freedom?*

This led us to form several hypotheses like:

1. *We believe that the less confidence one has in our government's ability to combat terrorism, the less civil liberties they would be willing to give up.*
2. *We believe that students thought more about the risk of being attacked directly after 9/11 and now, then before the terrorism attacks.*
3. *We believe that the participants surveyed will find airport security measures excessive, but necessary in order to keep society safe.*
4. *We feel that negotiating with terrorists is not an effective method in achieving peace.*

5. *College Students will only be willing to give up very limited civil liberties to combat the threat of terrorism.*

## **Literature Review:**

### ***Introduction***

“Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety” (Franklin 1775). This view from one of the most idolized men in history has changed incredibly over the past few centuries. With the tragic terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 it seems as though every American has been strongly affected, dramatically changing the lives of an innumerable amount. A sense of terror spread across the country as the reality of America’s defenselessness settled in. Fear spread and the U.S. was desperate to defend itself. Great change was inevitable, and with these great changes came sacrifice. Every American was now forced to make these sacrifices, given the state of emergency the United States was in. The introduction of the PATRIOT ACT was a rushed effort to extend legal boundaries for government agencies with the sole purpose of combating terrorism. However, this new act was considered highly controversial due to its infringement upon many civil liberties of American citizens.

### ***Terrorism***

What is terrorism? There is not one simple definition of terrorism and it can be defined many different ways. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Department of Homeland Security all have their own definitions of the term “Terrorism.” The FBI mentions the use of force, while others only mention the use of “fear,” usually to promote a political agenda. The FBI defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives” (FBI 2007). The topic of terrorism has risen to the spotlight since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the World Trade Center. These attacks had so strong of an impact that heightened defensive measures needed to be taken. The U.S. had suffered from an attack so catastrophic that Americans no longer felt safe. So what was the plan? How could the U.S. protect itself from future attacks? The answer to this question is not simple. The U.S. needed to develop a strategy to combat/prevent future attacks, but in order to do this certain sacrifices needed to be made by American citizens. This brings up the issue of civil liberties and the willingness to give or not give up rights in order to protect the wellbeing of Americans.

### ***Civil Liberties***

As Americans we are all entitled to certain individual rights given to us in the Constitution. This country’s foundation was based on freedom, which to this day plays an enormous role in our culture. As citizens of the United States you can say what you please, practice any religion, and not have to worry about unlawful search and seizures, all of which are guaranteed under law. The Bills Of Rights gives Americans several major freedoms that are not to be infringed upon no matter what, however according to Demmer, “The administration has gone beyond the legitimate needs of national security and is infringing on constitutional freedoms in the name of patriotism and security”

(Demmer 2002). Just as Demmer mentions in her article, Americans should have the right to preserve all their civil liberties not only in times of peace but in war as well. According to a poll taken in 2002 on reactions to the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, since “the day of the attack, public opinion has been assessed on a slew of issues linked to . . . homeland security and its implications for civil liberties, airport security, and the personal impact of the attacks on Americans’ psychology and behavior” (Huddy, Khatib, and Capelos 2002). Huddy, Khatib, and Capelos examined numerous public opinion surveys and discovered several interesting trends in society after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. On the topic of civil liberties, they discovered that opinions were split 59% in favor of supporting the tapping of phone lines and electronic messaging concerning e-mails, chat rooms, and instant messaging, and dropped down to 30% when “ordinary Americans were the target or when surveillance was done without the person’s knowledge” (Huddy, Khatib, and Capelos 2002). It is very important for sociologists to study these public opinion polls to gather how society feels and reacts to the changing policy in America during that particular time. This information is crucial and can be used several ways. One of which would be to hopefully create better policy within the country dealing with the topic of terrorism and the new threats that were presented after September 11<sup>th</sup>.

#### ***PATRIOT Act***

The Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act, also known as the PATRIOT Act, was put into effect on October 26, 2001. This was only a little over a month after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. Kelly Cusick, author of *Thwarting Ideological Terrorism*, poses the questions, “Was the act rushed?” and “Did the government have time to consider every aspect of US citizens’ liberties?” The PATRIOT act is one of the most highly controversial legislative acts dealing with the “War on Terrorism” and it affects every citizen of the United States. Many citizens may not realize what the PATRIOT Act does and how this act could affect them. The PATRIOT Act, “Greatly expands the power of the federal government to investigate, detain, and deport those people who the government suspects are linked to terrorist activity and other crimes” (Cusick 2003). This act has positive aspects as well as negative and the main focus when looking at proper legislature is that it needs to be socially accepted and fair, while providing an appropriate amount of security.

#### ***Conclusion***

To what extent are the civil liberties of US citizens infringed upon when combating the threats of modern day terrorism? Since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, many things have changed including how we look at terrorism and strive to combat this threat. Several civil liberties have been infringed upon, such as the tapping of our phones and electronic messages without our knowledge, random searches, and one of the most serious, the due process of law in some cases. Several anti-terrorism acts have been passed through legislature in a hurried fashion to combat this threat that infringe on everyone’s civil liberties. With the war on terrorism still fuming no one really knows if there is end in sight. “Citizens must be prepared to give up their individual and collective freedoms on a long-term basis” (Paye 2006). The topic of terrorism is always in the mainstream media and it will be a constant problem to face our future generation. It will be interesting to watch and see how society’s views change and the different methods that will be implemented in order to combat the threat of terrorism.

## **Methods:**

Before conducting research, we listed several null and alternative research hypotheses relating to our research topic. Below are some examples separated by topic:

### Civil Liberties and Terrorism:

- *Null Hypothesis: College Students will only be willing to give up very limited civil liberties to combat the threat of terrorism.*
- *Hypothesis: College Students will only be willing to give up the civil liberties that don't affect their day to day lives on a personal level.*

### Public Opinion and Fear:

- *Null Hypothesis: College Students would feel that there has been no change in the state of fear involving terrorism*
- *Hypothesis: College Students will conclude that most people were more frightened after the attacks of 9/11 than today.*

This study consisted of 216 undergraduate students at the University of New Hampshire. Due to the time restraints (1 semester) we felt it would be most effective to conduct a quantitative research project using surveys. The surveys were administered in a classroom setting and consisted of 26 questions taking roughly five minutes to complete. We used a random selection method to find classrooms in which to sample. To find these classrooms we made a list of all majors and randomly selected certain majors using a random number generator found online. From there we randomly chose from all the courses listed in that major and sampled a classroom from the list. We sent approximately 20 emails to professors asking for permission to administer our survey in their class and heard back from seven professors with varied responses. Three of the seven professors were willing to give us some of their time at the beginning of their class; however the remaining four could not spare any time due to the time restraints at the end of the semester. The three courses we were able to survey were EREC 409 – Catastrophe and Terrorism; SOC 535 – Homicide; and JUST 401 – Introduction to Justice Studies. Due to the nature of our study, the professors of these three courses seemed very interested in our topic since it semi-relates to their courses, and may have been the reason for their immediate positive responses. Some of the other classes we wished to sample were MATH 420 – Finite Math; CIE 525 – Statistics; PSYC 552 – Psychology; HIST 406 – History in Modern US; and several other courses. Also, before sampling these classes, we administered our survey in our classroom for peer review and revisions.

We were able to collect 216 surveys and only two of the surveys had questions that were left blank. After creating a codebook for the survey, we entered our data into the statistical program called STATA where we analyzed our data quantitatively. Each question in our survey was assigned a variable, which we could compare and contrast

with other variables to find correlations between them and hopefully relate them back to our main thesis question. One example of this is the three questions on our survey regarding how the participants feel towards the risk of being attacked by terrorists. These questions deal with how often they thought about being attacked before the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack, directly after the attack, and now. Through asking questions like these, we can see if there are any significant correlations that could help support our main thesis question.

There were many strengths and weaknesses regarding our methods throughout the course of our project. A major strength would be the sociological relevance and how this topic can relate to every American. This topic of sacrificing civil liberties to combat terrorism is one of the pressing issues facing our generation. Sampling college students is relevant since their generation is charged with generating new legislation in order to strike an acceptable balance in society. However, this topic does apply to every American and in order to gather true public opinion we feel that sampling other age groups would strengthen our project. Since the majority of our sample consists of 18-22 year olds, having a wider age spectrum could only strengthen the results.

### **Results:**

After collecting all 216 of our surveys, we entered all of this data into the statistical computer program STATA. From here, we were able to create variables for each one of our research questions to eventually relate them back to our main thesis question by showing correlations between them. By using STATA, we can compare different variable and show their statistical significance, or lack thereof. We were also able to create chi-squared tables and percentage tables. Below are some of our findings and correlations between our variables as they relate to our main research question.

Before we deal with the correlations between our variables, here is a simple breakdown of some of our participants by year in school:

FIGURE 1

Year	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Freshman	56	25.93	25.93
Sophomore	76	35.19	61.11
Junior	37	17.13	78.24
Senior	47	21.76	100.00
Total	216	100.00	

As you can see in the table above, we have gathered results from each undergraduate year here at UNH. While sophomores were the majority (35%), the other classes were not too far behind. We were excited about this because we did not plan this at all. Our topic does affect everyone and by having an equally distributed class range it helps strengthen our results because of the variability of where the participant was on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. Presumably most of the participants were in High School during the time of the attack, and on our survey we ask the participant to think back to these events. One of our hypotheses was to gather public opinion on the amount of fear caused by terrorism. On our survey, there were three questions addressing this hypothesis. The first question

asked the participant to state how frequently He/She thought about the risk of being attacked by terrorists BEFORE the Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. The second question addressed the same as the first, except the reader was asked how frequently He/She thought about the risk of being attacked by terrorists DIRECTLY AFTER the Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. The third and final question was turning the participant's attention to the risk they fear NOW. By looking at these results we hoped to see a correlation that could gauge the amount of fear due to terrorist activity, and we found such correlations.

FIGURE 2

riskafter	riskbefore			Total
	Never tho	Considere	Thought a	
Never thought about i	2 1.38	0 0.00	0 0.00	2 0.93
Considered the possib	93 64.14	22 32.84	1 25.00	116 53.70
Thought about it regul	48 33.10	42 62.69	1 25.00	91 42.13
It was always on my m	2 1.38	3 4.48	2 50.00	7 3.24
Total	145 100.00	67 100.00	4 100.00	216 100.00

Pearson chi2(6) = 48.6220 Pr = 0.000

In FIGURE 2 we are comparing the participant's amount of fear before the Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> attacks to their amount of fear directly after the attacks. As you can see, these two variables are statistically significant and show us a variety of things. This table shows that 64% of the participants who never thought about the risk of being attacked by terrorists before the Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> attacks felt that they would consider the possibility of being attacked directly after. Also, this table shows that 62% of the participants who considered the possibility of a terrorist attack before the Sept. 11 attacks and thought about it regularly directly after. This is very significant because our highest percentages of responses show an increased level in the state of fear confirming our hypotheses.

FIGURE 3

risknow	riskbefore			Total
	Never tho	Considered	Thought a	
Never think about it	12 8.28	1 1.49	1 25.00	14 6.48
Consider the possibil	109 75.17	41 61.19	0 0.00	150 69.44
Think about it regula	24 16.55	24 35.82	1 25.00	49 22.69
It is always on my mi	0 0.00	1 1.49	2 50.00	3 1.39
Total	145 100.00	67 100.00	4 100.00	216 100.00

Pearson chi2(6) = 87.1139 Pr = 0.000

FIGURE 3 compares the risk of being attacked by terrorists before the Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> attacks to the risk they feel now. These variables are statistically significant and show that of the 109 participants (75%) that never thought about being attacked by terrorists, considered the possibility now. This relates to our hypothesis stating that fear has significantly increased since the Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.

Several other variables we wished to examine were how often our participants flew over the course of one year and how that influenced their opinion of airport security measures. FIGURE 4 shows a breakup of how often our participants flew over the course of one year, most flying 1-3 times (67%) and least more than six times a year (12%).

FIGURE 4

fly2	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Never	44	20.37	20.37
1-3 Times	145	67.13	87.50
Freq. 6+	27	12.50	100.00
Total	216	100.00	

In addition to knowing the amount of times our participants flew per year, we can now compare this data to their opinions of security measures in airports. We broke the airport security measures up into five categories: Yes- too excessive, Yes- excessive but necessary, No- not excessive, No- not excessive enough, and Don't Know. With this we were able to compare the amount of times flew per year with how excessive one thought the security measures were. The most significant finding was that of the participants who flew 1-3 times per year, 72 of them (50%) felt that the airport security measures were excessive but necessary, as shown in FIGURE 5.

FIGURE 5

airportexcessive	fly2			Total
	Never	1-3 Times	Freq. 6+	
Yes - Too excessive	5 11.36	15 10.34	3 11.11	23 10.65
Yes - Excessive, but	12 27.27	72 49.66	16 59.26	100 46.30
No - Not excessive	12 27.27	43 29.66	7 25.93	62 28.70
No - Not excessive en	3 6.82	11 7.59	0 0.00	14 6.48
Don't Know	12 27.27	4 2.76	1 3.70	17 7.87
Total	44 100.00	145 100.00	27 100.00	216 100.00

Pearson chi2(8) = 33.4479 Pr = 0.000

FIGURE 5 is a perfect example of the willingness to sacrifice certain civil liberties in order to ensure their safety against terrorism. Throughout this research project we hoped to gather certain public opinions in order to find an acceptable balance in society to combat terrorism, and although this isn't significant of the entire US population, it is interesting to see the results from our sample of 216 people.

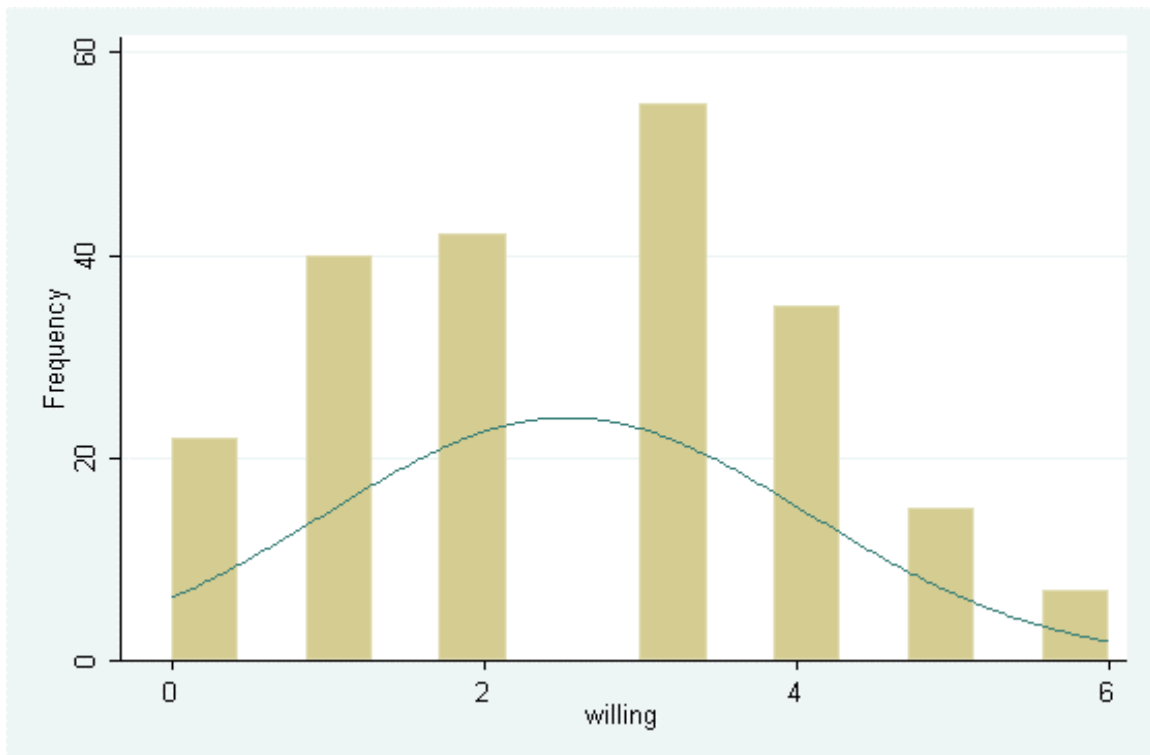
On our survey we asked six questions pertaining to hypothetical situations in which civil liberties and freedoms were infringed upon. The participants answered either Yes, No, or Don't Know to whether or not they were willing to sacrifice certain civil liberties to combat terrorism. The first question asked if the participants felt that the implementation of random backpack searches on campus were necessary, the second question asked if it would be acceptable to install surveillance cameras in classrooms, the third question asked about mandatory national fingerprinting for every American, the fourth asked if random car searches across the US were acceptable, the fifth question dealt with whether or not the government could place travel restrictions on everyone, and the final question asked the participant if having police officers stationed in classrooms (high school and above) was beneficial to their safety. Instead of showing individual tables for each one of these questions, we recoded and created a summative scale that assessed the respondent's overall willingness to have restrictions placed on their day to day activities or to be monitored by the government in some way. In this table, higher scores equal a higher willingness to have restrictions placed on them (0-6) and respondents who indicated that they don't know/don't care were coded as 1 (willing to be restricted).

FIGURE 6

willing	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0	22	10.19	10.19
1	40	18.52	28.70
2	42	19.44	48.15
3	55	25.46	73.61
4	35	16.20	89.81
5	15	6.94	96.76
6	7	3.24	100.00
Total	216	100.00	

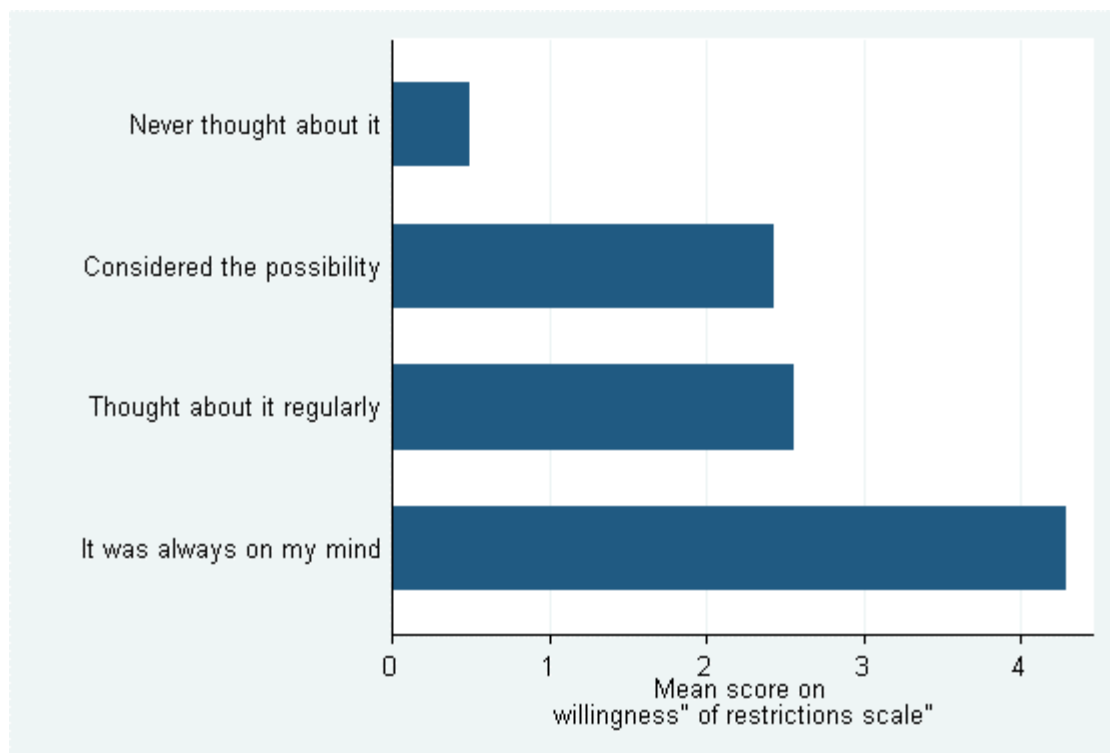
According to FIGURE 6, the majority of our participants are between the 1-3 range indicating that they are not willing to sacrifice more than half of the proposed civil liberties. Only 26% of our participants would be OK sacrificing between 4-6 of their civil liberties in the hypothetical situations we presented. This confirms our hypothesis that student would be willing to sacrifice as little civil liberties as they can, while still feeling a sense of security. Below in Figure 7, is a bar graph relating to the frequency in which the participant is willing to sacrifice their civil liberties.

FIGURE 7 (The X axis relates to number of hypothetical situations that the participant is OK with sacrificing; The Y axis relates to the number of participants)



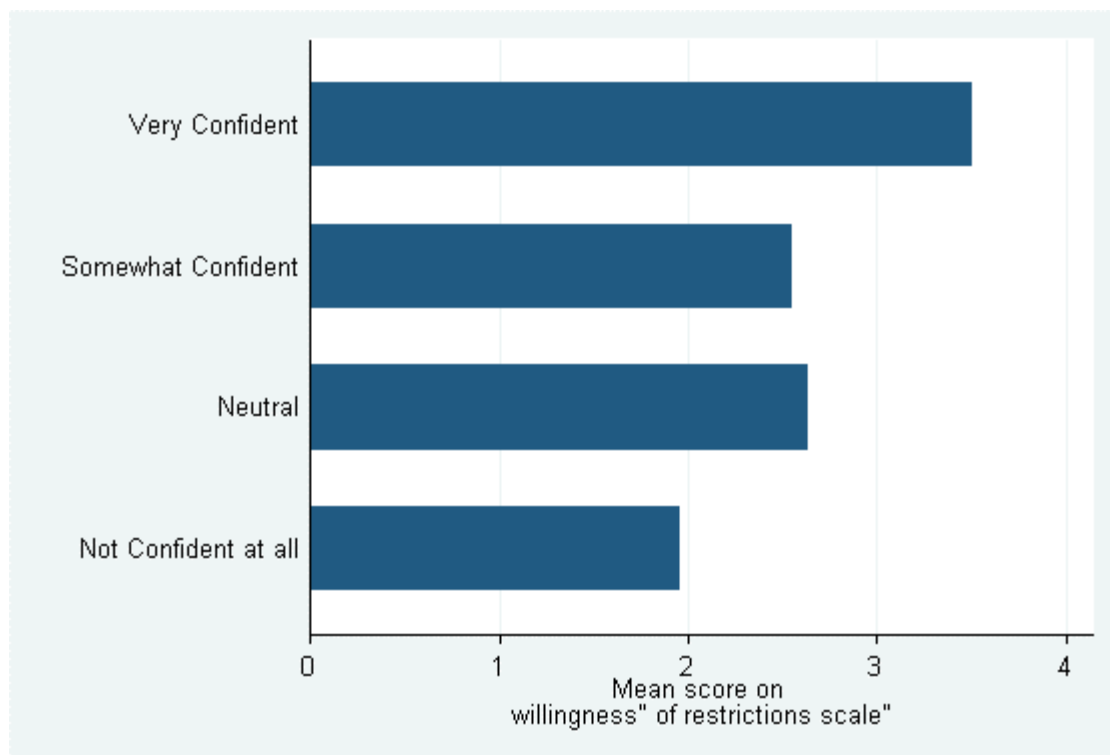
Another interesting correlation between our variables would be the six hypothetical situations that can be associated with the risk directly after the Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. In the next table, FIGURE 8, we found a correlation between the fear of being attacked directly after 9/11 and the willingness to sacrifice civil liberties.

FIGURE 8



Here we can see that the participants who answered being attacked was always on their mind chose to sacrifice more civil liberties. This is directly relating back to our hypothesis that deals with fear being an influential factor in the willingness to sacrifice civil liberties. This table steadily shows that as fear decreases, so does the participant's willingness to give up certain freedoms. Also, another variable in our survey dealt with the participant's opinion on the government's ability to combat the threat of terrorism. We asked if they were Very Confident, Somewhat Confident, Neutral, and Not Confident at all. We compared the participant's opinions on the government's ability to combat terrorism and the number of situations they were willing to sacrifice to combat terrorism and found results relating back to our hypothesis.

FIGURE 9 (X Axis- # of civil liberties willing to be sacrificed; Y Axis- Confidence in the Government's ability to combat the threat of terrorism)



Here in FIGURE 9, we see a direct correlation between a high confidence level in the government's ability to combat terrorism and the greater willingness to sacrifice individual civil liberties. Of the participants that answered very confident in the government's ability to combat terrorism, most were willing to give up 4 civil liberties (66%), while those that were not confident in the government's ability were willing to give up half of that (33%).

One of the final questions on our survey was opinion based, and asked the participant whether or not He/She felt that negotiating with terrorists is an effective method in trying to achieve peace. This question is sociologically relevant because of the fact that we are fighting a war over this question right now. Some feel that you cannot negotiate with terrorists and they cannot be reasoned with, while others disagree entirely. Below in FIGURE 10 you will see that there is a strong support for NO (51%) you cannot negotiate with terrorists to achieve peace, while the remainder being split fairly evenly between Yes (26%) and Don't Know (22%). This is important to gather public opinion to learn about how society feels on the matter, as it relates back to our main thesis question.

FIGURE 10

terroristne gotiate	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Yes	57	26.39	26.39
No	111	51.39	77.78
Don't Know	48	22.22	100.00
Total	216	100.00	

### **Discussion:**

Throughout this research process, our five main hypotheses stated in the introduction were supported by the data we collected. Our data showed that the less confidence one has in their government's ability to combat terrorism, the fewer civil liberties were willing to be sacrificed. We also found that the fear of being attacked by terrorists increased the willingness to sacrifice civil liberties. The data we collected on airport security measures confirmed our hypothesis that participants believed they were excessive, but necessary in order to keep society safe. Another important finding is that a large majority of respondents believe that negotiating with terrorists is not an effective method in trying to achieve peace. Finally, we discovered that college students would only be willing to give up their freedoms to combat the threat of terrorism and to ensure their safety in times of high fear. This information is valuable because it adds insight into one of the pressing issues facing our generation. As we mentioned before, it is our goal to find an acceptable balance between the loss of civil liberties and the ability to successfully combat the threat of terrorism.

Our findings are highly significant; however they can be improved in many ways. Due to the time restraints our survey size was affected in that it limited the number of our participants to 216, when we could have had many more. Another limitation would be the lack of diversity here at the University of New Hampshire, which is predominantly white. Because this topic represents every American, our survey was only limited to college students whose ages ranged from late teens to early twenties. A major strength to studying this topic is the very fact that we are studying this topic. Terrorism had only become popular and started rising to the surface after 9/11. Before 9/11, this topic was not widely studied and not much information was out there. This project was interesting for us because we paved our own way, gathering the opinions of today. This is important because this topic can change so rapidly and could easily be made into a longitudinal study. To further our research we would eventually like to survey our society outside of the university and among different races and ages. The longitudinal study could include the methods previously mentioned to further our research. As previously mentioned by our good friend Benjamin Franklin, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety" (Franklin 1775).

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